

FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE
CARIBBEAN: PROBLEMS OF ANALYSIS AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

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It is fitting that in a tribute to Katia Mattoso one should write of the family, not only because so much of her contribution has been on that subject, but also because in her dispassionate and meticulous archival research she has provided material which helps to dispel some common misapprehensions in an area clouded by ideology and dubious preconceptions. For me, as a sociologist of anthropological inclination, her work on Bahia has shown that one must not treat the family as a unit with clear-cut boundaries, let alone as an isolated unit: rather we have to think in terms of a range of relationships which vary in intensity over time and space even over short periods and distances, tying people to one another through kinship bonds. A good example, which most suitably introduces the subject of this paper, is the boundary between illegitimacy and legitimacy which Katia Mattoso shows, at least for Bahia, to be far from clear-cut, but rather a grey area in which the rights and claims of legitimacy shade into those of the 'illegitimate' - since 'illegitimate' children had 'legitimate' claims¹. In understanding the subject matter commonly known as 'the family' or 'the household' - both terms which we shall have reason to contextualize analytically - it is necessary to unpack the empirical or concrete unit, so as to reveal the claims and rights and

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bonds which move its constituent parts, and whose changing patterns produce shifts in the overall structure. If, as Jack Goody the social anthropologist, has said: the ‘division between kinship and family’ inhibits the study of the changing systems of the modern world², then this is particularly relevant for (modern urban) Latin America.

In the light of Goody’s statement this paper develops a framework of analysis to accommodate the substantial corpus of research published in recent years on the subject of ‘female-headed households’ in the Americas. The argument, summarized, is that these households are the manifestation of an underlying kinship system which, under the influence of a historical inheritance and contemporary social and economic transformation, has more in common with the Caribbean kinship system than is usually assumed, in particular because it seems to rely on networks of female consanguineal kin in the education and care of children and in the provision of a livelihood for them and for their mothers. We find two patterns of continuity or convergence: one through time, showing that in some, *but by no means all*, respects, female-headedness or the kinship forms which go by that name, so follow certain historically rooted habits of Brazilian and Spanish-American kinship, and the other synchronic, whereby we find convergences with twentieth-century Caribbean patterns. The paper therefore draws on evidence of the importance of extra-nuclear bonds and obligations, and casts doubt on the concept of ‘headedness’ itself. The latter sections focus on the fluidity of families and households as units of cohabitation and co-responsibility, This fluidity and change render all the more important a

concentration on the underlying kinship patterns and obligations which shape the concrete responses visible in the family and the household.

For the Caribbean, unlike Latin America, we do have access to a solid tradition of kinship studies in the anthropological tradition, largely thanks to R.T. Smith's account of the matrifocal family and of 'dual marriage'. This has three distinctive features: it rejects the use of the nuclear family as a model against which other structural forms appear deviant; it takes matrifocality as a relationship which can appear in many different kinship systems, and it explains 'dual marriage' (which *is* a type of kinship system) with reference to a historical pattern in which the role of the colonial presence is out of tune, discordant with its own keynote. Thus in the process of thinking through kinship patterns underlying the phenomenon of 'female-headedness' we also find unexpected convergences between Latin America and the Caribbean both in some paradoxical historical effects of the examples of colonial rulers and masters, and in contemporary similarities. To begin with we turn to continuities in time which may lead us to conceptualize female-headedness and associated patterns in the household cycle and kinship bonds.

Let us start with this feature combining which shows continuity over time with a common pattern arising from past forms of domination. Smith explains that by their habit of taking slave women or their offspring as mistresses and having them as second families, the colonial ruling class, in this case the plantation owners, departed from the monogamic Anglican model which we might have expected them to impose.³ Just as

the planters introduced 'anachronistic forms', namely slavery, into the modern capitalist system, so they introduced the practice of dual marriage, one official and respectable, the other less so but not for that any less recognized. A similar irony is found in Spanish America too: the Church in the Spanish colonial territories undertook elaborate and intense efforts to Christianize indigenous marriage practices, yet both the Conquistadores and their descendants, and their counterparts in the indigenous aristocracy, developed marriage practices which deviated from the requirements of the Church. Furthermore, they also differed from the monogamy which was firmly entrenched and enforced in Europe, and from the nuclearity which the Church, through its insistence on the free choice of marriage partners, was trying to impose as against the pre-colonial Mexican system (for example) in which marriage (among the aristocracy) was a dynastic and political matter.⁴ Indeed, according to Carmen Bernand and Serge Gruzinski, the introduction of new rules enabled (presumably high-status) Indians to insert multiple marital relationships into the institutional apparatus of the Church, through the manipulation of rules about dissolution and through feigning incomprehension and practising deception - all this presumably in order to comply with the new order rather than evade it! This is an excellent example of how institutional and popular cultural practices could interact through adaptations and manipulations on both - or all - sides; the eventual outcome is that, little by little, their character of coherent opposing systems is lost, even though many elements in their practices and beliefs carry the mark of one or another originating identity, and thus prevent the emergence of a 'single' system without ambiguities or contradictions.

The distinctively Spanish-American institution of *compadrazgo* or co-god-parenthood evolved, especially during the 18th and 19th century in Mexico and the Andes, from the practise of sponsorship, in which the relationship between a pair of god-parents and the god-child predominated, into a mechanism of extension of kinship-like, or para-kinship ties . This mechanism reaches out beyond the nuclear group to a network of individuals conventionally expected not to be close kin and to be able to provide the parents of their godchildren (i.e. their *compadres*) with all manner of support, patronage, mutual aid and so on. This relationship of *compadrazgo* thus became as important as that between god-parents and the god-children themselves, if not more so, and in that respect probably constitutes a shift from the European pattern and certainly from the ‘original’ purpose of spiritual parenthood as developed in the early Church, when it was focussed very clearly on the relationship with the god-children even at the expense of the relationship between children and their parents.⁵ Note for example that whereas ‘god-parent’ and ‘god-child’ have straightforward translations in Spanish and Portuguese (*padrino/padrinho - ahijado/afilhado*). Both languages have developed this concept of *compadre*, which in English has only the clumsy equivalent in a term of anthropological jargon - ‘co-godparent’. These relationships again represent a nuancing or greying of the boundaries of the family nucleus, an extension of kin-like obligations through an expanding network. Only in Spanish America has god-parenthood acquired this character of providing a para-kinship network through which people can arrange fostering of children, labour exchange, sharecropping contracts, or, where the status of the *compadres* is unequal, patronage in economic relationships and access to benefits from the state machine. To further emphasize the

para-kinship character of this network, it must also be recalled that it is not permissible to marry one's children's god-parents, in the event of widowhood, say. (though one person's compadres can obviously marry each other, and indeed usually become compadres together as married couples.⁶)

The institution of *compadrazgo* describes in a language of kinship, obligations between members of a network. The formal legal system, as shaped by Catholic indoctrination and rites of passage, plus republican property laws may be based on the nuclear family, but in the Andean and Mexican countryside, among the mass of workers and smallholders, it is nuclear only in a purely mechanistic or formal sense without the same emotional and financial implications nuclearity has had in nineteenth and early twentieth century North America or Western Europe. (Even there and in this period, the dominance and durability of nuclearity are in debate.) That is to say, father and mother live together under the same roof, as a norm, give their names to their offspring, and are bound by national laws to pass on their property (such as it is) or their entitlement to communal land, to their offspring. But they are embedded in a network which has two features typical of a 'family': it takes on parental functions, and its members cannot marry the parents of their god-children (if or when widowed), or of course the god-children themselves. It is thus an extended system in a rather particular sense, because its members are related not by marriage nor by lineage, but by a combination of consanguineal and ritual obligations to join in relationships of exchange or of patron-clientage.

Katia Mattoso herself has described the strong attachment of the slave population of nineteenth century Bahia to the institution of godparenthood (*compadrio* in Portuguese): in a situation where the family was constantly threatened with division by separate sales of slave mothers and fathers it is hardly surprising the slave-owners hardly ever acted as godparents. Other slaves, acting as godparents, must have been seen as 'back-up' parents in case children were left on their own, and in any case Katia Mattoso refers to innumerable cases of legacies by godparents to their godchildren, especially of money which could go towards the purchase of their freedom. In circumstances where - in contrast to the peasant communities of the Andes and Mexico - illegitimacy was the rule rather than the exception among slaves, the relationship between godparent and godchild weighed far more strongly than that between godparents and natural parents, which is so important in those regions.⁷

In an urban setting the strategy of extension takes a different form, as illustrated by Larissa Lomnitz' account of 'grand families', both elite and low-income: among the elite the preservation of capital and landed property seem to lie behind a dynastic 'uxorilocal' strategy of retaining women within a residential nucleus and bringing men in from the outside, while among low-income households intense exchange relationships prevail and clustered residence of consanguineal and affinal kin⁸. Among the low income groups both residential location and marital or consensual unions are more unstable. Also, the chances of accumulating property or capital are very small, so that the strategy is harder to sustain, but reliance on a network of non-nuclear kin remains.

If we turn now to the modern phenomenon known commonly but unavoidably as the female-headed household or family, we can see continuity as, once again, the household or family is embedded in a network of relationships heavily dominated by women and which shares with the *compadrazgo* network the prohibition on marriage (because such networks are heavily female and therefore monosexual), the sharing of parental functions, and of course the endless round of dyadic exchanges. It could also be thought of as a 'grand family' (à la Lomnitz) but without men, or with fewer and less stable male members. In contemporary urban contexts the rituals attached to *compadrazgo* may be attenuated when compared to their importance in village life, but the networks are there in profusion⁹, though their role and their composition is changing noticeably as the pattern of marriage, fertility, and employment changes with differential effects on men and women. We shall have to return in particular to the new forms taken by the domestic cycle as a result of these and other changes.

Smith also tells us that the nuclear family is not at all to be taken even as an ideal, let alone a model, in the Caribbean. In Latin America this issue arises in very different ways in rural and urban contexts. In the rural context divorce, separation and adultery are far less common and, in the Andean countryside adultery is severely sanctioned. In the city, in contrast, these phenomena have become almost routine. But the rural pattern does exhibit other features - in addition to *compadrazgo* - which show a degree of autonomy as between spouses. In the light of this autonomy the urban 'female-headed' household can be seen as heir to, and doubtless a modification of, a deeply-

rooted historical pattern - rather than a deviation from or disintegration of a modern nuclear model or ideal.

Apart from *compadrazgo*, a practice common to Meso-America and the Andes, we also have plentiful evidence in Andean rural society of other mechanisms of kinship extension. The relevance of these mechanisms here is that they reduce the exclusiveness of the marriage bond by enabling or encouraging the partners to rely on other natural and spiritual kin and exchange networks for their livelihoods and for the upbringing of their children. Spouses operate far more independently of each other than would normally be expected: women and men have independent sources of income and also spend that income in separate ways. In my Ecuadorian research on what in the early 1980s were still called 'peasant economies'¹⁰ I found a pattern which seemed to vary with economic success: in some families, who managed to graduate to specializing in milk production or to commercial activities, thus joining the provincial middle classes, wives did gravitate to more domestic roles, but among the majority, who remained in the highly risky and labour-intensive business of potato production, women had an independent sphere of milk, pig, chicken and guinea-pig production, not infrequently undertaken in partnerships with other women. In these highly mercurial but less prosperous families the women explained that while their husbands were trapped in an almost endless cycle of producing potatoes, paying the costs, and reinvesting the proceeds, directed towards the purchase of land, they themselves paid for the children's education and often for domestic consumption. Kristi-Anne Stolen, in an ethnographic study undertaken in a much less developed

part of Ecuador, describes a clear division of labour in which women control animal production and sales, as in my study, although she did not find a systematic pattern of division of control between spouses over the proceeds.¹¹ Despite marked differences in land tenure, income levels and systems of kinship and ritual, this is not dissimilar from Olivia Harris' account of the Laymi people in the Norte de Potosí region of Bolivia, where in the 1970s communal forms of land tenure persisted and there was not a land market such as existed in the Carchi province of Ecuador where I worked. In the Norte de Potosí there prevailed even more segregated arrangements than in Carchi whereby the women kept their activities completely separate from those of their men and in addition found ways to lay their hands on their men's earnings before these could be squandered or simply spent on other things.¹² However, this economic 'infidelity' is not translated into marital infidelity - as has already been noted, adultery is severely disapproved of and can be even violently sanctioned.

In addition, both Harris and Harvey¹³ describe a marked delineation or delimitation of loyalties between husbands' and wives' consanguineal kin: in Harvey's Peruvian highland village study a bride's brothers are shown at the wedding dealing out pre-emptive punishment to the new husband for the beatings he will in due course regularly inflict on his wife. Harris describes how a woman's brothers are called upon to tame the wild powers of the wife-taker, likened to a condor carrying her off. In her interpretation, marriage for the inhabitants of this remote area of the Bolivian highlands is thought of both as a balanced joint undertaking by the couple and also as a

battlefield with this abduction constantly present and re-enacted.¹⁴

This brief and sketchy introduction of background elements leads us to ask to what extent there is a complete solution of continuity between arrangements such as those described for Norte de Potosí, or such as *compadrazgo*, and those prevalent in modern urban conditions, which in their turn approximate the Caribbean matrifocal pattern. In one view this could produce a truism: where there is change there is also continuity. But in another sense it might help us to think analytically, i.e. in kinship terms, about contemporary family patterns,¹⁵ setting aside the reification of single-parenthood or female-headedness and its particular circumstances and placing them in the context of variations in kinship relations, such as the network of kin and the autonomy and prerogatives of spouses, and of other kin. (By reification is meant here the wrenching of the conceptualization of a set of relationships out of their structural context and freezing them in a concrete set of roles tied to one another in a named category - 'family' - which then loses fluidity by tying the relationships to a specified set of roles.) If we want to provide a succinct yet wide-ranging account of the experience and consequences of single motherhood, the focus must shift from sociology to anthropology, from 'family' to 'kinship', and from a clear-cut categorization to the formulation of axes along which variables move, and along which the relevant variables do not necessarily move together.

Thus the obligations of kinship stretch out into the *compadre* network in the countryside, while in the city they stretch out either into the *gran familia* or into the

network of women who seem nowadays to be the prime carers, educators, and even household income-earners among the urban popular classes. On the other hand, of course, we cannot fail to notice that single parenthood in its contemporary form inevitably exhibits features which could not have been present on any significant scale even a few generations ago: the urban location, the link to patterns of temporary or cyclical migration and labour; the (historically) high probability of child survival, and low infant mortality; the (historically) high level of female labour force participation. Elements of continuity through time alluded to above tell us that the question for research is how are these evidently pervasive phenomena encompassed by normal variations in kinship relations? The issue of deviance from a norm, or conversely of 'mainstreamness', is a distraction, to take the second of Smith's three main points. Few writers today explicitly use terms such as 'normal' or 'mainstream'. Although those concepts appear subtly and implicitly in ways of shaping a research problem which are based on a 'smuggled' notion of mainstreamness, because they label, classify or single out particular concrete phenomena or stylized versions thereof, inspired by the isolation of a social problem, what is needed is an unpacking of those 'problem areas' into their component social processes.

I can illustrate what is meant simply with reference to the question of 'how many?' How many single-parent, female-headed households/families are there in any particular place? A few years ago, in an influential programmatic article on 'Gender Planning', Caroline Moser remarked *en passant* that 'it is estimated today that one-third of the world's households are headed by women. In urban areas, especially in

Latin America and parts of Africa, the figure reaches 50% or more'.¹⁶ It was an innocent remark, hedged about with all sorts of caveats and intended merely to draw attention to the scale of the phenomenon and to the very important role which women have played in the last two or three decades in community self-management and social movements in low-income urban neighbourhoods. And indeed in recent years the policy-making community has become increasingly exercised, in both North and South America and in Western Europe, about the subject. The figure of 50%, however, is meaningless: indeed any figure attached to the term 'female-headed households', or 'single-parent families' (which usually is taken to mean that the single parent is a woman) is meaningless because it is an utterly arbitrary and ideological, even moralistic, category - moralistic whether used by those who disapprove or by those who do not disapprove. It needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed in terms of kinship, and to do so means returning to the word 'head' itself.

To speak of 'headship' implies some degree of authority, and presupposes a unit over which that authority is exercised. The unit, in this discussion is generally assumed to be a household, a residential unit in which a group of people sleep and eat together. The group is assumed to be bound together by kinship ties, affinal or consanguineal, by marriage or by descent. The usage is unfortunately, in debates on female headship, referred back to a stereotype (not really even an ideal type in the classic sense) of the nuclear family and thus is defined by an absence, namely that of the father/husband, and also by an assumption that the unit is detached from wider collateral and lineal relationships. Yet no one who has spent much time in Latin

America can have failed to note that even in middle class households a third generation is often represented, while among the lower middle class and the popular classes the presence of a third generation is almost standard. If we think of a household/family as consisting of parents plus dependent children then we have an 'ego' (usually a dependent child) in terms of whose kinship relationships we can describe the role and position of the other members - we call them aunts or uncles, cousins or grandparents. But that terminology becomes questionable if we discard the nuclear assumption because there is not an easily identifiable 'ego' or centre of the kinship network, in relation to whom those individuals are 'aunts', or 'uncles', cousins or grandparents. We cannot assume that ownership or (in case of rental or the ubiquitous informal types of property) control, is vested in any particular member of the group living under a single roof. Nor can we assume that any particular member is producing or controlling income to sustain the group, or that if he or she is earning the proceeds will go primarily to that end. Among the Ecuadorian potato farmers mentioned above it was not uncommon, for example, for a man to farm land owned by a parent on a sharecropping basis. The sharecropping was a complex contract for the sharing of costs, risks, output and profits; contracts among close kin, even a parent and a son or daughter, seemed quite similar to those agreed by non-kin - neither more, nor less biased in favour of one or another party or generation. If the two generations lived together, or even if they did not, who was the 'head'? (It was rare for a woman to be a principal in sharecropping arrangement.)¹⁷ Did it depend on whether the owner of the land or the sharecropper took the lead in decisions about the use of this asset? There were many cases where people withdrew from active farming and left their land to be

sharecropped by their sons or sons-in-law, without renouncing ownership: who here is the 'head'? The inheritance system, strictly governed by Ecuadorian law (not by custom or community) gave equal rights to man and wife and obliged each to divide their wealth between the spouse and the children, so women had a say over their property, and could be observed having that say - which is standard in the Roman law tradition.

Here again reification as defined above creates an obstacle to appropriately contextualized understanding. The reality of power and authority and all too often mental and physical violence in marriage, in parenthood and in sexual relations is not in question. The claim is that the conceptualization of these three types of power cannot be 'frozen' in association with one or another family structure: a departed or absent, lover, husband or mate may exercise great power in a 'female-headed household';¹⁸ the concept of 'headedness' itself does scant justice, for example, to the joustings implicit in the Andean model of marriage as abduction or worse.

Assumptions in matters of family and household run deep. It is well known that men may have a 'casa chica': a parallel, open or covert, relationship and children from that relationship with a claim on their earnings. But who is to say that women do not also have competing loyalties and obligations? And who is to say which is, so to speak, the 'casa grande' and which the 'casa chica'? The fact that one relationship is legally constituted and the other not has a bearing, but many relationships are not so constituted yet the social dynamics can hardly therefore be said to be different. In any

case, bigamy is not unknown. The assumption that these are deviant cases of infidelity does not do justice to the systematic character of the phenomenon. It is not even clear that they are morally deviant, let alone statistically so. Who is the head of the 'casa chica'? The lover who comes for lunch on Sundays and pays the bills? The woman who gives him lunch and has children by him - and perhaps by others? Her mother, her older sister...?

The phenomenon is by no means a new one in Spanish America or Brazil, nor is the conceptual problem it brings. The historical record has thrown up surprisingly high rates of illegitimacy and of female-headed households in times and places as diverse as 17th century Mexico, early 19th century Paraguay¹⁹ and Mexico, as well as in various regions of 18th and 19th century Brazil, although the interpretation of these data remains complicated. Asunción Lavrín has explained how already in the colonial period, illegitimacy was 'so pervasive that it cannot have been a social stigma'.²⁰ In the late 17th century, the Cathedral records of Guadalajara describe a city with a marked excess of women and extensive polygamy, an illegitimacy rate which never fell below 40% of births recorded and was 45% among 'non-white free' baptisms.²¹ The Church did not take a severe attitude to illegitimacy - unlike civil authorities - and inheritance by illegitimate children was a right - albeit one which could in practice be hard to defend against legitimate offspring. Given the excess of women, the high rate of female-headed households was not surprising, but since those households tended to be older and smaller than the average, they may have been linked with widowhood or enforced separation - by migration especially - rather than female headedness in a

strong sense.

This link to migration reminds us that during the colonial period and for long afterwards many - perhaps most - regions of Spanish America and Brazil have been regions of migration and frontier colonization, conditions hardly conducive to the establishment of stable patterns of marital cohabitation. Even where the *encomienda* system and the delimitation of indigenous lands might appear to have ‘fixed’ a population in the 16th century, these were often linked to a system of tribute or *mita* which imposed lengthy migrations on the indigenous population, as in the Andean highlands, with their consequent disruptions. And although slavery may have been thought of as in some sense stable, we have already seen that the trade in slaves made their lives extremely insecure, while the severe shortage of women among slaves until the mid-late 19th century created further impediments.²² More usually, though, as in Guadalajara, women seem to have heavily outnumbered men in cities: in Mexico City between 1790 and 1848 they were more than 55% - which is above the standard expectation of female surplus in all populations - though the threat of military conscription, which went together with the Census, may have led to concealment and undercounting.²³ Weaknesses of the data notwithstanding, there were underlying structural factors at work, such as the high rate of female migration to cities in search of work in domestic service and activities such as petty trade, textile manufacture and dressmaking. These serviced the needs of the urban population, while the preponderant opportunities for male employment was for example in transport activities and of course in mining, which took men away from the cities. This pattern

also appears in Brazil: Ramos' study of the gold-mining centre of Vila Rica in the late 18th and early 19th century shows a persistently high incidence of female-headed households, apparently unaffected by racial category, accentuated perhaps both by periods of boom - when large numbers were attracted to urban centres - and bust, when the men apparently migrated away disproportionately.²⁴ Kusnesof has studied different circumstances in São Paulo in the same period, an area of frontier expansion, and therefore with a preponderance of males in mines, herding and the like, and a preponderance of females in the more settled farming areas. As time passed, and São Paulo raced ahead from village to boom town at the centre of a dynamic region, the sex ratio in the city 'normalized' but still female-headedness continued to be 'the mode' in 1836 in the city. As usual, it is an urban phenomenon, and in addition to female-headedness we find, in early 19th century São Paulo, the phenomenon of household extension which still today is associated with it: between 1765 and 1836 the proportion of household members not related to the head of the household in urban São Paulo went from 4.7% to 26.9%, while the proportion of single (never-married) mothers rose from 6% of all mothers to 34.3%. Kusnesof point out that whereas most female-heads of household in the rural areas were widows, in urban areas they were 'usually never-married women under forty years of age'.²⁵

The interest of these data is not primarily in the numbers. A proper interpretation of the numbers would involve meticulous analysis and raise serious difficulties of comparison and interpretation. They are recalled here only because of the questions they raise and the serious conceptual problems they reflect. These can be summarized

as follows:

how can any account of kinship in these societies and cultures ignore the weight of extra-familial ties which may balance or even outweigh the ties of marriage and co-parenthood, either through godparenthood or, in urban society, through extended, but selective, networks of consanguinity and affinity?

how can any account of kinship ignore a long and deep history of economic autonomy on the part of both women and men, linked historically to rates of migration by members of both sexes probably far in excess of that which has characterized the history of Western Europe and perhaps even North America?

and, putting the above two questions together, how can one reconcile the concept of a kinship system with the importance of selective, network-based ties of obligation and exchange which seem to persist right through massive demographic, social and economic changes?

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After the diachronic questions, come the synchronic ones of comparison. The emerging contemporary pattern of household extension especially as described in the literature on female-headed households, and as evidenced in the multi-generational inter-dependence or mutual reliance in urban Latin American low-income

neighbourhoods, has many features in common with the (apparently) more established Caribbean pattern. Is the term ‘matrifocal’ therefore not just as appropriate in Latin America as it is in the Caribbean – not to speak of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean – itself. This holds so long as we keep to Smith’s formulation, in which it is ‘women *in their role as mothers* who become the *focus* of relationships and in which a matrifocal structure is to be found in many different societies and cultures.’²⁶ It is striking, for example, that in her pioneering account of networks and kinship in a Mexican ‘shantytown’, Larissa Lomnitz insisted on the pre-eminence of the nuclear family, but in the actual description of the networks the predominantly female participation is strikingly apparent, as is the observation that reciprocity is more intense and trust more reliable among consanguineal kin than among affines.²⁷ Between the networks of women and extensive *compadrazgo* links the nuclear family fades into the background as a resource, giving way to something like a feminized (or matrifocal) ‘grand family’ - a term she came to adopt later.

The Latin pattern is perhaps better described in terms of a network of women than of subordination to a matriarch, thus following Smith’s advice to relegate the issue of headship to the background. After all, the two are very similar on paper, but simply come dressed up in different metaphors: the contrast between an image of implicitly African motherhood and another of sisterly solidarity can easily lend itself to interpretation in terms of ideology, of changing fashions and tastes, contrasting stereotypical acceptabilities in different cultures. It is also possible that the contrast owes something to changing conceptions of ‘the popular’ among North American

intellectuals and academics - whose number of course now includes many more people of Caribbean and Latin origin than, say, twenty years ago, and who seem much more concerned to promote their own and their peoples' distinctiveness than they were. It is therefore not entirely unreasonable to doubt whether the Caribbean matrifocality has different causes and manifestations from Latin 'female headedness', described here as a kinship system based on a network of women bound by relationships of dyadic exchange and by selective consanguineal obligations. In this perspective the practice of 'casa chica' could play a role similar to that of Raymond Smith's errant planters and their imitators, since it is a phenomenon which has percolated down from the urban middle classes. The frequent association of household extension with female-headedness in both Latin America and the Caribbean (and Africa) and also the greater likelihood that 'additional' adult kin are more often female than male provide further support to the argument.²⁸

This formulation, then, involves two departures: firstly it proposes that (urban) Latin American and Caribbean patterns of kinship are less divergent than their separate literatures might suggest. Secondly it proposes to use matrifocality in the place of female-headedness or more precisely to use it as a more general and analytic concept which, together with the idea of a female kinship network, can encompass those phenomena which female-headedness freezes in a single photographic image.

Female-headedness combines several variables which cannot be assumed to vary together consistently: the extension of the household; the presence of several

generations; the influence and/or physical presence of past, present and future lovers, husbands, wives; the distribution of earnings, savings, consumption and expenditure among co-habitants and between them and others; the sharing of child care responsibilities within and between generations, kin, and friends. If some couples share a bed but not a pot or a roof, kin groups may share a roof but not a pot, let alone their earnings. The permutations and combinations are innumerable. The roof may - as in the old-style 'working-class' neighbourhood of Albuystown in Georgetown, Guyana, located near the harbour area,²⁹ - cover many rooms, with different groups eating together even within the same room, and varying modes of sharing. It is almost impossible in circumstances such as these, or as those described by Fonseca in Porto Alegre, to extract any regular or modal pattern of relationships, or any consistent pattern of variation either, if by that is meant a set of co-varying arrangements. For example, one would have great difficulty in 'finding' that unmarried or 'unpartnered' adult or adolescent sons contribute to the feeding or upkeep of their mothers or their mothers' other children in one way whereas married or partnered sons do so in other ways - and likewise for daughters. The combination of variation across space and instability over time renders such structural models unfeasible. The case of a 'single-parent, female-headed household' does not fit any one combination of these variables and thus, if only for practical purposes, needs to be unbundled in this broader framework.

Couples, whether or not they share the same bed or roof, appear to have children together, but the identity of the fathers of those children may be a matter of secrecy,

dissimulation, or doubt. This leads to endemic conflict, or feeds conflicts arising from other areas of dispute; indeed, the undertone of transience seems to permeate relationships, as illustrated by Claudia Fonseca in her much-quoted study among low-income women in Porto Alegre.³⁰ The effects on children brought up by a ‘confraternity of female kin’³¹ must surely be different from those deriving from the tensions of the nuclear family, and thus must affect the psychological make-up of those children when they themselves become adults. The home is the location of more or less the entirety of a person’s social universe: in low-income neighbourhoods people do not rendezvous suitors and lovers outside the homes - the fields and hills of countryside ‘abduction’ are not available: they cannot afford or cannot abide *casas de citas* (which are either too expensive or carry the stigma of prostitution) while the culture of meeting persons of the opposite sex in bars, let alone cafés or restaurants, is unknown. Public meeting places are not places to sit and chat; only *fiestas* are occasions for flirtation and sexual competition. It is then not surprising that the home becomes the scene of flirtations and seductions, leading to a superimposition of a woman’s social life, her sex life and her maternal role, and possibly her filial role. Children become accustomed to their mothers’ short-lived relationships with adult male figures, with whom they themselves doubtless have varying types of relationships, some pleasant, some unfortunately unpleasant and even cruel, many perhaps neutral. This is not intended to express a judgment, or to convey an image of promiscuity, for the ‘turnover’ might be no different from that observed among the urban middle class; the difference is that it happens in the home because *everything* happens in the home. (One explanation for the enormous female attendance in

Pentecostal churches is that those churches, as public, but enclosed, spaces, offer women quite literally the one single place where they can go alone outside the home and not only feel safe but also occupy a role in a public institution. Predominantly Catholic Christian Base Communities are few and far between; Catholic parish churches offer something similar, but to fewer people - because there are fewer roles - whereas the doors of Pentecostal churches are frequently open, sometimes throughout the day.) Observers, seeing men in a woman's home, may therefore gain the impression that the relationship is more institutionalized than it really is, but of course having access to a woman's home confers upon a suitor or lover a more intrusive role than might otherwise be the case.

In addition to variations in kinship structure, the analysis of women's power and autonomy (or lack thereof) must take into account the relentless movement of individual domestic cycles and of the life cycles of the members of a kinship network, which criss-cross and have an effect on one another. The age difference and, more significantly, the role distinctions, between generations are far less clear-cut than we assume. Demographic patterns are not what they were: infant mortality has declined throughout the region, albeit at widely varying rates; life expectancy is, obviously, longer than it was, and women remain fertile for longer. Girls who become pregnant at a very young age are more likely to have surviving children than previously, while their mothers are more likely than before to have children long after their daughters have begun to have children of their own. Girls are therefore having children, and surviving children, at very young ages, but also they are continuing to live with their

mothers. The result is apparently something quite new and further complicates any attempt to define or delimit the 'family'. A study undertaken in a Caracas 'barrio' in the 1980s shows an added dimension of the transition to adulthood: an educational system 'academicist' in the extreme which operates as if designed to undermine and defeat the educational and employment ambitions of low-income youngsters: the Venezuelan educational system as described in this study requires pupils to possess an intuitive grasp of a literate, high lettered culture, a world to which the inhabitants of the barrios have no access at all. The rate of failure and thus of repetition was very high and the few who got through to secondary schooling found it impossible to sustain for several reasons - the burden of homework, the distances to be travelled to reach school among them. The burden of homework was difficult for girls because they had few facilities to do it in the home and also because they were under pressure to help their often working mothers with child care and household chores. Their solution, or perhaps their escape, consisted in romantic involvement followed by rapid parenthood and abandonment by the father of their first child. The interpretation offered by the author of the study is that this was their way of growing up, of making a transition to adulthood.³² Not in the sense that they planned it so, but in the sense that, having left school - or rather having been 'dumped' by the schooling system - they were no longer children, yet had few employment opportunities and sought an (illusory) escape from home where they were subject to their mothers' requests for help with chores and child care. In these circumstances, children of different generations will be likely to see each other as brothers and sisters and one of the older women will become known as mother while the other goes out to

work. In Trotz's Georgetown Guyana study every single Afro-Guyanese woman interviewed had had her first child while living with her mother.³³ In Brazil, in Spanish America and in the Caribbean children may in these circumstances address their biological grandmothers as 'mãe' or 'mamãe' ('mother', or 'mummy' in Portuguese), or even say 'mother' to both mother and grandmother; unsurprisingly, after the coining of the phrase 'mãe jovem' (young mother) to describe a social problem, another has now come into common use in the social policy confraternity, namely 'avô jovem' (young grandmother). If one takes care of the children while the other earns, for example, who is the 'head'? Who has the power to be the 'head'? In the final analysis, we ask once again: what is a 'head'?

Kinship is thus being reshaped and restructured fast and in ways which defy established terminology, and this is occurring because of a number of well documented structural changes in labour markets, in education, and in the political economy generally. Despite discouraging accounts such as that of the Caracas barrio, women are moving ahead, slowly but surely, in the education system - following the long-standing Caribbean pattern where women have been ahead of their male counterparts for generations at all levels of education: when combined with changes in the labour market which create opportunities for women, especially at low levels of remuneration, while traditional more stable male occupations are in drastic decline, and with other factors such as the increasing practice of birth limitation and declining fertility, this improvement in women's educational attainment has evidently made it less attractive for them to stay at home even after they have had children, and thus

pressures for shared or offloaded parenting responsibilities build up. The word ‘afilhado’ in Portuguese, can, significantly, refer to either an adopted child or a god-child, and the practice of adoption, so long resisted by the Catholic and Anglican churches in Europe³⁴, seems to have been allowed to develop with little hindrance in the Americas. Today, the dissemination of kinship obligations through a network of kin has been followed by a differentiation of parental roles: a person may be brought up, fed, and sheltered by different people, and may eventually inherit from yet another person. Is ‘the family’ thus weakened or strengthened, is it diluted or thickened?

To illustrate some of the structural factors behind these observations - in Chile - a country for which such statistics are available and reliable - in the thirty years between 1957 and 1987, women narrowed the educational gap, in terms at least of the crude indicator of average number of years of education, from 15% to 0.9%: whereas in 1957 the average years in school were 5.7 for women and 6.7 for men, by 1987 it had risen to 10.1 for men, while women reached 10.0.³⁵ Figures from the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) show, crudely, that in Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Ecuador the proportion of women in the labour force with more than three years’ schooling improved more rapidly than the proportion of men between 1960 and 1980. By 1980 a higher proportion of women than men (*in the labour force*) had more than three years’ education in all four countries, and the differences in educational achievement between the proportions of each sex with 10 years’ education or more was extremely, even unbelievably, wide.³⁶

Gonzalez de la Rocha shows very striking differences in unemployment rates between men and women, especially, but not exclusively, below the age of 35, during the 1980s economic crisis in Mexico: in research undertaken in the more artisan-based industrial city of Guadalajara and the more 'modern' industrial centre of Monterey, the rates were 13.1% in Guadalajara and 16.8% in Monterey for men aged 20-24, compared with 4.6% and 3.9% for women of the same age, and in neither place for either of the other two age-groups was the rate for men less than double that for women.³⁷

Although a higher proportion of women do stay out of the labour force altogether, and those who enter it will presumably have a higher educational level on average than those who do not, the conclusion must be that during times of economic crisis women tend to enter jobs abandoned or traditionally occupied by men and, perhaps more significantly, take advantage of new opportunities which men find underpaid or unsuitable.³⁸ Furthermore, there is abundant evidence that where new jobs are created they tend to be in service sectors which have far less resistance to female employment than the sorts of jobs created by the import-substitution policies prevalent, broadly speaking, before the 1980s. Chant repeatedly argues that the resulting opportunities have enabled women to choose to have a family without a living-in partner, rather than having this fate inflicted upon them by circumstances, desertions and infidelities, or for that matter maternal pressure (this last is not mentioned by Chant, but is hinted at in other sources).

There may also be a trend among women to view partners as a burden rather than an asset, for a variety of reasons, and to rely preferentially on their networks of female

kin and meta-kin for support. Research among women factory workers on the island of Chiloe undertaken by Priscilla Delano showed the pattern in a perhaps extreme form: the men had traditionally earned their living from fishing, an erratic profession involving seasonal inactivity during which men consume large quantities of alcohol. But in the 1970s and 1980s a new industry of fish processing for export grew up requiring a more regular work force doing repetitive and disagreeable work in cold conditions, but on a much more stable basis. The women took the jobs, while their men at the same time lost a lot of work and became unemployed. The upshot was the emergence of networks of women co-operating with each other by organizing work schedules and the like so as to look after each others' children and cope with the unavailability of their men - on account not of the men's work but of more 'leisure-time' activities. Eventually the women began to speak a new language of autonomy, often saying that under no circumstances would they go back to a life with a living-in partner, or husband. ³⁹

This image of a network of women managing child care is becoming a pervasive feature of urban life. Although Chiloé, a community with a fishing tradition, may appear atypical, the disruption of inherited patterns of male authority and female domesticity came with the industrialization of fish processing, which offered employment opportunities to the women, so that it is no longer a 'fishing' community, but a sort of industrial enclave, and thus less atypical than it once was. Similar patterns may arise in the Chilean countryside, where seasonal work in harvesting, picking and packing, though it hardly brings in riches, has transformed women's income-earning

opportunities in comparison to those of men.⁴⁰

These patterns emerge from research carried out exclusively among low-income groups. Although there are signs that in certain contexts at least households classified as female-headed may be less concentrated among the poor than they have been in the past or than is generally thought, it is surely above all among the urban poor, or perhaps among the lower middle classes and the poor⁴¹, that the combination of female kin networks with male semi-visibility is beginning to acquire a degree of permanence and institutionalization. Middle class female-headed households, precisely because they are likely to have a more secure link into the formal and relatively more stable employment opportunities, conform more to the pattern of truncated nuclear families distinct from and relatively more independent from kin networks, male or female. The issue therefore is not whether this formally categorized object - the female-headed household - is poorer or not than the average, but whether the dynamics of kinship relationships underlying the formation and domestic cycle of such categories are affected by material circumstances, and they obviously are. The research of Délano in Chile, of de la Rocha in Mexico, and Chant in Mexico and Costa Rica, points towards a degree of autonomy *combined with* the support of kin networks, rather than towards marginality combined with single parenthood. It is, however, in the Guyanese case that the connection between the 'confederation of kin', or, as others call it, the household extension associated so frequently with 'female-headedness', and the labour market, is explicitly made: 'female-headed households are structurally more conducive to women's entrance into the workforce, since the

incorporation of other women into the domestic domain facilitates help with household chores and in particular with young children'.⁴²

The mention of the domestic cycle is very important because households and families are *par excellence* moving targets of social analysis. The very words household and family, usually accompanied by the definite article, convey a sense of immutability - as indeed does the term 'female-headed household', even though much that looks like a female-headed family or household turns out on closer inspection to be a staging post between two relationships for the "single" female head, during which researchers or census-takers would classify those women as being part of a conventional household.⁴³ Like any classification or research based on 'the household' it tends to resemble a still photograph taken from a film. It must surely be the case that the poverty so characteristic of female-headed households - as statistically defined - is related to age, for example, or to a stage in the domestic cycle: a significant proportion will be headed by widows,⁴⁴ who may be at a disadvantage in the labour market (though we by no means know with any certainty at all), and, as in the Caracas pattern outlined above, a significant proportion will be very young, having dropped out of education precisely on account of pregnancy or in order to become adults and therefore pregnant. The widows will be at a stage in the cycle, but by no means in its final stages, especially given the high level of mortality - due to crime - of young and poor urban men. They can envisage new relationships, more children and so on; the young mothers will make arrangements with their mothers, with aunts and cousins, to enable them too to start new relationships, to earn a living, even to go back into

education. These are only possibilities, but they have one thing in common: the positive role of men in turning them into realities is smaller than one would expect in a male-dominated model of gender relations.

If a widow remarries or starts up a new relationship and has children in it, she will be less able to rely on the new partner's full support: he may look askance at children from a previous relationship, even if they have lost a father; he may have undisclosed obligations to previous partners and liaisons; and this in addition to the customary uncertainties of even the most unfettered relationships. If a young woman becomes pregnant she is likely to become so by a much older man, who also may have other obligations, and she herself is not yet ready to leave home, so she develops an arrangement with her mother, possibly also a relationship of a financial kind with her mother's partner, husband or lover (not a sexual one, or at least not necessarily a sexual one). Or instead of a mother it may be an older sister, or possibly both. Material reliance on her own male partners or mates may often be a less secure prospect than these other alternatives.

The women in these sorts of 'extended households' - operate in a particular kind of kinship network: usually related to one another because they share a grandparent, their relationships cannot be said to be prescribed by kinship obligations so much as built up over time through sharing and exchange relationships. As they grow up so people develop relationships within the kin network but they are selective relationships: one does not have obligations or rights of an enduring kind except to

parents or children, but one does develop sets of claims and obligations vis-à-vis members of the kin network.

The domestic cycle is complicated enough to describe in a 'simple' nuclear family system, where even without divorce and remarriage, the financial problems of child care, old age, savings and inheritance make even the estimation of real life-long well-being very difficult. But in a system where relationships of marriage or of what one might, for want of a better word, call 'reproductive partnership', are so often reversed and therefore so unpredictable over the course of a few years, the cycle is impossible to encapsulate in terms of stable or gradually evolving male-female relationships: it is reduced to the ageing of individuals and of those they care for or who care for them, and where care is involved, whether of children or of the aged, this means women, their children and their mothers. Men have a place here more as children than as fathers: they are the objects of affection and care when young but become peripheral in their middle years, too often migrating between relationships and between their mothers and their various spouses and partners, their participation in the upbringing of their own children and the maintenance of their own partners often hampered more than the average observer would imagine by doubt as to the identity of their own fathers and their own children.⁴⁵

Economic trends are broadly similar in Latin America and the Caribbean, and it must be the case that the rapprochement this paper has advocated between conceptualizations of kinship in the two culture configurations arises to some extent

from this economic coincidence. But the resemblances are deeper and older, and they relate to matrifocality - which is not in any sense at all to be equated with or elided with female-headedness - to the confederation of female kin, and to the curious weakness of the marital bond, expressed in Latin countries in the proliferation of *compadrazgo* relationships, and in the continued strength of claims on and obligations to one's consanguineal kin even after marriage.

¹ Katia M. De Queirós Mattoso: *Bahia Século XIX: Uma Província no Império*, Rio, Nova Fronteira, 1992, p.139.

² Jack Goody: 'Introduction' in André Burguière, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Martine Segalen and Françoise Zonabend (eds.): *Histoire de la Famille*, tome II, Paris, Armand Colin, 1986

³ R.T.Smith: 'The matrifocal family', in Jack Goody (ed.): *The character of Kinship*, Cambridge University Press, 1973 (reprinted in R.T.Smith: *The Matrifocal Family: Power, Pluralism and Politics*, New York and London, Routledge, 1996); 'Hierarchy and the dual marriage system in West Indian society', in Jane F. Collier and Sylvia Yanagisako (eds.): *Gender and kinship: essays towards a unified analysis*, Stanford University Press, 1987.

⁴ Carmen Bernand and Serge Gruzinski: 'The Family in Meso-America and the Andes', in Burguière et al. (Eds.), *op.cit.*

⁵ Jack Goody: *The development of the family and marriage in Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 194-204.

⁶ Juan Ossio: "Cultural continuity, structure and context: some peculiarities of Andean *compadrazgo*", in R.T. Smith (ed.): *Kinship ideology and practice in Latin America*, Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

⁷ Katia de Queirós Mattoso: *Etre esclave au Brésil: XVI^e - XIX^e siècles*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994, p.151. see also Stephen Gudeman and Stuart Schwarz: "Cleansing ritual sin: godparenthood and baptism in eighteenth-century Bahia", R.T.Smith (ed.) *op.cit.* 1984.

⁸ Larissa Lomnitz and Marisol Pérez-Lisaur: "Dynastic growth and survival strategies: the solidarity of Mexico's grand families", in R.T. Smith (ed.), *op.cit.* 1984.

⁹ Larissa Lomnitz: *Networks of marginality: life in a Mexican Shantytown*, New York, Academic Press, 1977.

¹⁰ Carried out in 1980-81 in the province of Carchi - an area famous for its rapid growth based on potato production and on the fragmentation of vast estates, in the 1960s and 1970s. David Lehmann: "Two paths of agrarian capitalism: a critique of Chayanovian marxism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, October, 1986; "Sharecropping and the capitalist transition in agriculture: some evidence from highland Ecuador" *Journal of Development Economics*, 1985.

¹¹ Kristi-Anne Stolen: *A media voz: relaciones de genero en la Sierra Ecuatoriana*, Quito, CEPLAES, 1987.

¹² Penelope Harvey: 'Domestic violence in the Peruvian Andes'; Olivia Harris: 'Condor and bull: the ambiguities of masculinity in Northern Potosí', in Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow (eds.): *Sex and violence: issues in representation and experience*, New York and London, Routledge, 1994; in Harvey and Gow (eds.), *op.cit.*

¹³ Harris, *op.cit.*, and Harvey, *op.cit.*

¹⁴ In an earlier paper Harris outlined both areas of interchangeability of roles between husbands and wives, and areas in which it was taboo for them to perform certain tasks - the latter having to do principally with the care of animals, except llamas which were far away on the high plateaux and were in the care of the men. But women and men did not seem to have independent control over the income from the land and animals held by one or the other. Olivia Harris: 'Complementarity and conflict: an

Andean view of women and men', in J.S. La Fontaine (ed.) *Sex and age as principles of social differentiation*, London, Academic Press, 1978.

¹⁵ Sylvia Chant: *Women-Headed Households: diversity and dynamics in the Developing World*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997; Myra Buvinic et al.: The fortunes of adolescent mothers and their children, *Population and Development Review*, 18,2,1992. For the United States see William Julius Wilson: *The Truly Disadvantaged: the Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, chapter 3.

¹⁶ 'Gender planning in the Third World: meeting practical and strategic needs', *World Development*, 17,11, 1989 pp.1799-1825. The 'alert' about the way the figure subsequently 'caught on' was sounded by Ann Varley: 'Women-headed households: somemore equal than others', *World Development*, 24,3, 1996, pp.505-520.

¹⁷ David Lehmann: "Sharecropping and the capitalist transition in agriculture: some evidence from highland Ecuador", *Journal of Development Economics*, 1985 (published in Spanish in *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos*, 1987).

¹⁸ Claudia Fonseca: 'Spouses, siblings and sex-linked bonding: a look at kinship organization in a Brazilian slum', in Elizabeth Jelín (ed.): *Family, household and gender relations in Latin America*, London, Kegan Paul International, 1991.

¹⁹ Barbara Potthast-Jutkeit: "The Ass of a Mare and other scandals: marriage and extramarital relations in Nineteenth century Paraguay", *Journal of Family History*, 16,3, 1991, pp.215-240.

²⁰ Asunción Lavrín: "Introduction" in Asunción Lavrín (ed.): *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, Omaha, University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p.12.

²¹ Thomas Calvo: "The warmth of the hearth: seventeenth-century Guadalaran families", in Lavrín (ed.) *op.cit.* 1989.

²² Mattoso, *op.cit.*, 1994, p.144.

²³ Silvia Arrom: *The women of Mexico City, 1790-1857*, Stanford University Press, 1985.

²⁴ Donald Ramos: "Single and married women in Vila Rica, Brazil, 1754-1838", *Journal of Family History*, 16,3, 1991.

²⁵ Elizabeth Anne Kusnesof: "Household composition and headship as related to changes in mode of production: São Paulo 1765-1836", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22,1, 1980, pp. 78-108.

²⁶ Smith *op.cit.* 1996, p.43. Emphasis in the original.

²⁷ Lomnitz, *op.cit.* chapter 6 and 7.

²⁸ Chant *op.cit.* p.21. Trotz speaks of a 'confederation of female kin' in writing about Georgetown Guyana. Alissa Trotz: 'Gender, ethnicity and familial ideology in Georgetown Guyana', *European Journal of Development Research*, 8,1, June 1996.

²⁹ Trotz *op.cit.*

³⁰ Fonseca, *op.cit.* It is worth noting that Fonseca is one of the few writers in this area to use the term 'kinship', as opposed to 'family' or 'household'.

³¹ Trotz's expression, *op.cit.* 1996

³² Myra Hunt: *Growing up in Caracas*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993.

³³ Trotz *op.cit.*

³⁴ see Goody *op.cit.*, 1983, p.68ff.

³⁵ David Hojman: *Chile: the Political Economy of Democracy and Development*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993, p.93.

³⁶ Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe: *Transformación Ocupacional y Crisis Social en América Latina*, United Nations, Santiago, 1989, p.70. For example: the proportion of men with more than 10 years was 9.4% in Argentina for men, compared with 13.8% for women; 13.0% for men in Chile compared with 24.5% of women; 31.8% of men in Brazil compared with 44.3% of women, and 14.5% of men in Ecuador compared with 30.3% of women. The higher proportion of women who do stay out of the labour force altogether must remain the case still despite a contrary long-term trend evidenced by the propensity of the poor among women to join the labour force in disproportionately high numbers in times of economic crisis. See Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha: 'Economic crisis, domestic reorganisation and women's work in Guadalajara', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 7,2, 1988; Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha: 'Family well-being, food consumption and survival strategies during Mexico's economic crisis', in Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha and Agustín Escobar (eds.): *Social Responses to Mexico's Economic Crisis in the 1980s*, La Jolla, Center for US-Mexican Studies, San Diego 1991.

³⁷ The details were as follows: Guadalajara, age 25-34, 9.3% for men and 3.1% for women; age 35-44 8.7% for men and 4.7% for women; Monterrey, age 25-34, 12.3% for men and 6.2% for women; age 35-44, 12.7% for me and 4.6% for women. Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha: 'El nuevo perfil de los grupos urbanos en la era del trabajo precario en México'; Paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association Conference, Washington, 28-30 September 1995. The data are from the data bank of

INEGI, the official Mexican statistical agency. The figures require interpretation, since presumably a certain proportion of female unemployment is hidden among those who do not appear in the labour force at all even when they are working, especially in the source used, which is governmental. Nonetheless, the same could apply, and apply increasingly, to men, so that difference may be less than it once was, and also statistical agencies have learnt how to deal with informal employment and its implications.

³⁸ See for example: Nina Laurie: 'From work to welfare: the response of the Peruvian state to the feminization of emergency work', *Political Geography*, Vol.16, No.8, 1997, pp.691-714. Other examples of the now vast evidence for this substitution effect include, for the agricultural sector: Stephanie Barrientos: 'The hidden ingredient: female labour in Chilean fruit exports', and Anna Bee and Isabel Vogel: '*Temporeras* and household relations: seasonal employment in Chile's agro-export sector', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 16,1, January 1997. For the urban sector see, for example, Sylvia Chant: 'Women, work and household survival strategies in Mexico, 1982-1992' *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 13.2. 1994.

³⁹ Priscilla Delano and David Lehmann: 'Women Workers in Labour-Intensive Factories: the case of Chile's Fish Industry', *European Journal of Development Research*, 5,2, 1993.

⁴⁰ Barrientos, *op.cit.*; Bee and Vogel, *op.cit.*

⁴¹ Chant *op.cit.* p.52

⁴² Trotz, *op.cit.*, p.178.

⁴³ Claudia Fonseca *op.cit.*

⁴⁴ As pointed out by Varley *op.cit.*

⁴⁵ John Borneman has recently taken more or less the entire history of anthropological theories of kinship to task for the centrality of marriage in its approach. I think his complaint that it is too heavily focussed on heterosexual relationships is as important as the problem pointed out namely that the assumptions (a) that marriages endure, and (b) that people know who their father is, need qualification, and not just in modern Western society. John Borneman: 'Until Death do us Part - marriage/death in anthropological discourse', *American Ethnologist*, 1996, Vol.23, No.2, pp.215-235.