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2007

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The International
JOURNAL
of TECHNOLOGY
KNOWLEDGE
& SOCIETY

Migration Politics and Human Rights

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VOLUME 2

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY, KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIETY
<http://www.Technology-Journal.com>

First published in 2007 in Melbourne, Australia by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd
www.CommonGroundPublishing.com.

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ISSN: 1832-3669
Publisher Site: <http://www.Technology-Journal.com>

The INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY, KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIETY is a peer refereed journal. Full papers submitted for publication are refereed by Associate Editors through anonymous referee processes.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system
<http://www.CommonGroundSoftware.com>.

Migration Politics and Human Rights

Redefining the Camera as Collaborative Technology in Transnational Communities

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Abstract: Forced migration of Guatemalans and their participation in the labor markets of Mexico and the US has led to their categorization as economic migrants. This identification loses sight of the contextual experience of forced migration for more than economic reasons. My research methods apply a cultural analysis that blends feminist ethnography with photography. By distributing single-use color cameras, participants' have been able to use a visual technological tool in the field and record aspects of their lives of greatest concern. My use of a feminist ethnographic approach aims to challenge the dominant representation of migrants, based on a heteropatriarchal gendered script, which defines women as domestics and nurturer's of children, while men are viewed as mobile wage earners. This gendered construction of women-as- domestic has become a dominant photographic method in recording forced migrants by International Humanitarian Organizations such as the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees that reinforce their visual cultural representation as technologically backward that has direct material consequences in the global feminization of the labor force. The photographs in my study, and participants' interpretations of them, enhance globalization/gender theories by capturing the cultural practices and technological forms that enable or prevent women or men from participating in particular forms of production and exchange.

Keywords: Research Focus, Feminist Ethnography, Theory Focus, Gender, Migration, Globalization

THIS PAPER PROVIDES an account of an ongoing ethnographic photographic research study of a long-term Guatemalan forced migrant¹ community located in La Gloria refugee camp in the state of Chiapas, Mexico and their kin living in the United States (U.S.). The study examines how gender is framed in dominant textual and visual representations of forced migrants, women and refugees² in particular, and challenges these frameworks through the application of feminist ethnography and distribution of single-use color cameras. The use of cameras allows forced migrants to record and interpret to the researcher/s aspects of their lives they consider of greatest concern through the use of visual technology. My interdisciplinary feminist methodology aims to answer how the representation of forced migrants, and their subsequent entry

to a foreign host nation, furthers the feminization³ of the labor market across nation-states that compound gender inequalities. My findings show that dominant “masculine” scripts are challenged by men and women in particular under tense political and social conditions by presenting a “united cultural identity” in the face of the state and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), an International Humanitarian Organization (IHO), enabling mobilization strategies across gender and granting a degree of cultural autonomy in exile.

Forced migrants create opportunities that weaken the hegemonic heteropatriarchal script found in their host societies. Forced migrant women author a racialized sexual nonconformity to what Roderick A. Ferguson calls the “illusory universality particularized in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and class.”⁴

¹ For the purposes of this paper, forced migration involves the “permanent or semi-permanent change of residence, usually across some type of [intra-state or international] administrative boundary” (Wood 1994: 607) and is the product of vast social, economic and political gendered inequalities that create an ‘asylum-migration nexus’: many migrants and asylum seekers have multiple reasons for mobility and it is impossible to completely separate economic and human rights motivations (Castles 2003), but does not preclude their agency for individual decision making (Turton 2003).

² The term “refugee” is a legal construct (see, UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees) that centers on the prima-facie requirement of membership (nationality) or residence in a nation-state to allow for asylum claims to be adjudicated. These international legal frameworks should not be conflated to envelope a universal “refugee experience” (Stein 1981), as “concepts of ‘immigrant’ and ‘refugee’ ... are pure categories that do not capture the contradictions of historical and geographical experience nor the politics of the borders that define them” (Hyndman 2000:163).

³ Acker (1992) writes, “Feminization means that a declining proportion of jobs are ‘good’ male jobs that carry the guarantee of lifetime employment with adequate wages and pension guarantees.” (P. 54) Acker adds that the “conditions of work are becoming “feminized” for men as well.” (Ibid.)

⁴ Ferguson 2004: 17



UNHCR, in the beginning stages of organizing a repatriation strategy, negotiated only with male leaders that furthered the universal “woman-as-domestic” script, but backfired as women strengthened their claims for autonomy.⁵ Today gendered inequalities in La Gloria take on different forms as individual men and women migrate and participate in the U.S. labor market. The mobility of refugees and participation in informal labor sector can be viewed as empirical site(s) for a critique of citizenship as devised by the state and capital.⁶

This paper is divided in three sections. The first section provides an overview of the dominant representation of migrants based on a heteropatriarchal gendered script, which defines women as domestics and nurturers of children, while men are viewed as mobile wage earners. To illustrate this, I will review the photo-documentary work financed by the U.S. government under the Farm Security Administration (FSA) during the Great Depression, with a focus on the Dustbowl migration toward California in the 1930s and the formation of migrant camps that aimed to regulate migrant labor in a largely informal agricultural labor market. The FSAs photographs were used to construct New Deal governmental aid in a benevolent light that veiled its political intervention in controlling internal migration, family planning and fertility behavior.

The second section compares these photo-documentary practices to those furthered by UNHCR, which has adopted the framing techniques applied by the FSA to construct the refugee as “apolitical”. Such techniques diminish migrants’ access to free-

dom of movement and residence within and across the borders of the state and to a secure existence and social protection. Feminist methods in ethnographic fieldwork, however, provide opportunities to weaken the dominant “apolitical” gendered framework.

The third section concludes with a brief review of the feminist methods I used in furthering an ethnographic collaborative study among Guatemalan forced migrants in La Gloria refugee camp in Chiapas, Mexico and their kin in Los Angeles, California. Through the distribution of single-use color cameras forced migrants not only learn to utilize visual technology, but also destabilize dominant textual and visual representations of forced migration, women and refugees in particular. By utilizing a critical feminist self-reflexive analysis of the interviews and pictures taken by forced migrants, framing them as dependent apolitical subjects is avoided. I argue that such images and narratives identify them as active members of society who challenge the gender power inequalities found in their local communities that have a concomitant impact in reshaping the political contours of citizenship in their host nation-states.

The Forced Migrant as Gendered Artifact

Photodocumentary Practices at the Turn of the 20th Century

“One should really use the camera as though tomorrow you'd be stricken blind. To live a visual life is an enormous undertaking, practically unattainable. I have only touched it, just touched it.” --Dorothea Lange⁷

⁵ From its inception in 1987, UNHCR’s presence in Guatemala furthered repatriation talks with the predominantly Guatemalan male leadership in the Permanent Commissions (CCP) (Manz, B. 1988; Baines 2004). In 1990, a group of 47 women gathered in Palenque to form Mamá Maquín, the first refugee women’s organization that linked women in Chiapas, Quintana Roo and Campeche to negotiate adequate conditions for them and their families (Olivera 1999; Worby 1999).

⁶ Ibid: 15.

⁷ The J. Paul Getty Museum: <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artMakerDetails?maker=1692&page=1>

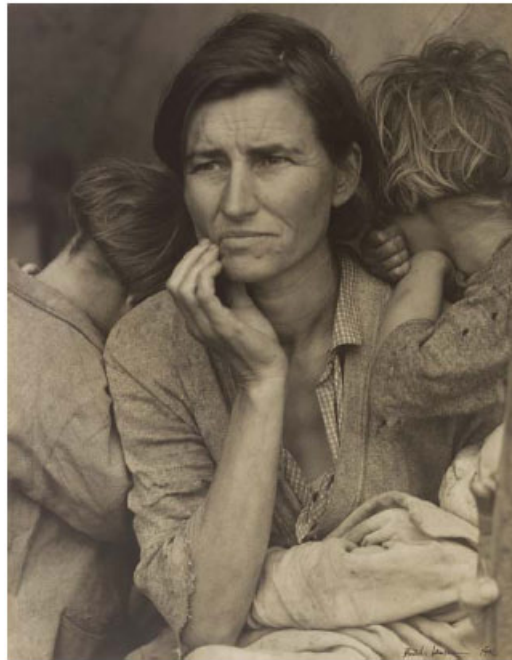


Figure 1: Migrant Mother, by Dorothea Lange. Nipomo, California (1936), Source: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California.

Dorothea Lange (1895-1965), one of the most recognized photographers of the depression era, provides testimony to the discursive limits of providing a complete contextual account of lived experience through photography.⁸ Lange's most famous image, *Human Erosion in California (Migrant Mother)* (hereafter, *MM*) has been described as a "...poignant image of a mother and her children on the brink of starvation."⁹ The portrait of a thirty-two-year-old woman, Florence Thompson, and her children sheltered under a tent in a camp of migrant pea pickers was taken in March 1936, in Nipomo, California (see figure 1).

Lange made this photograph while working for the FSA, a government agency dedicated to documenting the devastating effects of the Depression during the 1930s. The FSA hired photographers to create pictures that supported government assistance for the unemployed farm workers, but also gave enormous latitude to this corps of photographers.¹⁰

While Lange was given artistic freedom to photograph migrant families who were largely victims of the dust bowl, the FSA as a state financed agency, sought sex/gender constructions of appropriate masculinity and femininity to uphold a heteropatriarchal narrative of citizenship. Curtis identifies Lange's *MM*, as the photographic archetype of a

middle-class cultural bias toward the family,¹¹ where the absence of a male bread-winner and children surrounding a woman is used as sex/gendered construction reflective of promiscuous activity and high fertility rates. The state utilized the discourse of high fertility rates by defining it as a social problem among poor whites and helped shape their visual representation through the FSA photographs.

Curtis argues that Lange's *MM* had been carefully constructed in order to achieve a result that would comply with the FSA Project ideology. According to Curtis, "Lange did not arrive at this final composition by accident [...] but by patient experimentation with various poses [29]." To bolster his claim, Curtis exposes the five other shots taken by Lange the same day and finds that the most well-known of them is actually the last of the series. Curtis writes,

Lange never recorded Migrant Mother's name, eliminated her older daughter from all but the first posed photograph in the series, moved the young children in and out of the scene, [excluded the husband from the last series] and directed her subject's every gesture. Then in the darkroom she removed the last traces of the one instinctual motion that Migrant Mother made [with her left hand to grasp the tent post out of fear that she would lose support for her sleeping infant]. Esthetic liability though it

⁸ Early proponents of photography framed the medium as a "neutral technology" capable of attaining a true representation of the "real" met some of the methodological criteria in the field of anthropology (Pinney, C. 1992; Edwards, E. 1992; see also Banta, M. et al. 1986).

⁹ The J. Paul Getty Museum: <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=133737>

¹⁰ Getty Museum of Art, biography of Dorothea Lange: http://www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/curricula/dorothea_lange/background1.html

¹¹ Curtis, 1989: 52.

proved to be, this gesture gave clear evidence that Migrant Mother's highest priority remained the support of her family and that posing for a government photographer was a secondary concern.¹²

While Curtis notes the prevailing cultural bias at the time as one of "increased acceptance of family planning [that] brought an offsetting delay in the arrival of the firstborn" (ibid: 12), an analysis of how this bias came to be ends here.¹³

Lange collaborated with Steinbeck (1902-1968) in the publication of *Their Blood is Strong* (1938), which later inspired Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The publication, also printed as a series of articles titled "The Harvest Gypsies" in the San Francisco News (October 5-12, 1938), reveals the dire poverty of migratory agricultural workers who arrived to California from the Midwest following the destruction of their lands, and the largely inept government response. Steinbeck described the development of two camps by the Federal Government through the Resettlement Administration "for the moving workers"¹⁴ that initially "started as experiments"¹⁵ aimed to regulate migrant labor in a largely unregulated informal labor market. They were also sites that served as a precursor to the current use of still photography in documenting *the migrant* in a camp environment. My analysis resituates Steinbeck and Lange's work into a transnational framework using photography *by* forced migrants and *of* forced migrants by a professional "other" to triangulate an analysis of gendered agency in creating community.¹⁶

Steinbeck's definition of these migrant worker camps as "experiments" fails to recognize how panoptic forms of surveillance, where individuals and populations are set in a grid where they can be made productive and observable,¹⁷ have been used throughout U.S. history. Historian Laura Briggs (2002) highlights how U.S. imperial and colonial practices applied panoptic technology in Puerto Rico and in the mainland by managing the sexual regulation of bodies through scientific medicalization and social eugenics. Briggs' recognition of panoptic U.S.

state practices that exacerbate gender power inequalities by constructing women in need of "care" complements Curtis by highlighting how the cultural logics of "family planning" are rooted in a racialized sex/gender dualism that naturalized femininity as a heterosexual complementary and inferior essence to white masculinity¹⁸ that served to create "concentric circles of family and employer control".¹⁹

A heterosexual sex/gender dualist framework underpinned the creation of the "citizen consumer" ideal under advanced capitalism²⁰ that simultaneously required the "disciplining of producers/workers on whose backs the citizen-consumer gains legitimacy"²¹ and continues to underpin western conceptions of citizenship.²² To quote Mohanty, "[w]hat role do sexual politics play in the ideological creation of this worker?"²³ Specifically, how do IHOs, such as UNHCR, shape sexual politics to influence the ideological creation of the forced migrant worker? The visual/textual discourse utilized by UNHCR to frame refugees as apolitical subjects is the topic to which I now turn.

From Gendered Artifacts to Racialized Apolitical Subjects

UNHCR & Photodocumentary Practices of Forced Migrants

"[Photographs] become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them" (Benjamin, 1969:226).

Following Benjamin's recommendation, we can identify the hidden political significance behind the photo of an elder woman holding a child (see figure 2) which appeared in UNHCR's 1991 special 50 year anniversary text, which doubles as a fundraising tool and as a report of its global aid projects. The picture, taken by Masonori Kobayashi, is reminiscent of Lange's *MM*, but in this case²⁴ it is the text accom-

¹² Ibid: 67.

¹³ For a review of popular writing on overpopulation and "relief babies" as a burden and drain to New Deal programs see, Crowell, 1935.

¹⁴ Steinbeck: *Their Blood is Strong*, 15.

¹⁵ Ibid: 17

¹⁶ For an expansive definition of community that recognizes its potential for transnational networks, please see Goldring 1996.

¹⁷ Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982.

¹⁸ Markowitz 2001: 394.

¹⁹ Briggs 2002: 54.

²⁰ Cohen 2004.

²¹ Mohanty 2003: 141.

²² Agamben 1998; Narayan 1997.

²³ Mohanty 2003: 141.

²⁴ The Salvadoran woman and child were not requested to pose for Kobayashi's picture (personal communication). This differs from Lange's *MM* in that those framed in the photograph are not subjected to institutional imperatives that aim to replicate the sex/gender dualism of naturalized domestic femininity. The use of the photograph in UNHCR's 1991 text, however, raises ethical questions of the screening methods used by social documentarians, and their agencies, in determining the social impact of their pictures when used by IHOs.

panying Kobayashi's picture that limits the agency of the pictured woman. She has two choices, "flee or die," and survival only results in "a lonely wait" with no definable end.²⁵ A second caption highlights the different nationalities that fled from Central American countries and sought refuge elsewhere: "Guatemalans in Mexico, Salvadorians and Nicaraguans in Honduras and Costa Rica".²⁶ None of the captions, however, make a clear indication of who this elder woman is, if the child is related to her, or

if she is actively mobilizing along with others to prevent a prolonged "waiting" in either exile or internal displacement. Instead the reader is informed that UNHCR has assisted thousands of refugees, returnees and displaced people since 1987. It is only in the index that the reader is informed that Kobayashi's picture is of a Salvadoran woman holding a child in Santa Tecla, El Salvador, a practice that is consistent in other pictures throughout the book.



Figure 2: Salvadoran Woman holding child, by Masonori Kobayashi. Santa Tecla, El Salvador (1983)

The lack of a contextual account of Kobayashi's picture leaves the reader to infer that the image represents all forms of migration taking place in the region. The result is an essentialized gendered figure of apolitical domesticity consigned to the care of UNHCR. The Salvadoran woman carrying an infant, commonly referred as a *womanandchild* in humanitarian literature, strengthens the apolitical domestic framework furthered by UNHCR's naturalized grand/motherhood image.²⁷

The methods used to depict forced migrants aim to decontextualize and devalue their political agency to legitimate UNHCR's humanitarian mission to "represent" them. UNHCR, and other IHOs that ap-

ply this panoptic technique, diminish the agency of migrants as they do not express their perspectives concerning the conditions of exile. This ensures the continued financial security of humanitarian professionals at the cost of overlooking the knowledge of local forced migrant women. The persistence of IHOs in using visual technology as a means to frame forced migrants as dependent and in need of care simultaneously defines them as technologically illiterate. Wajcman (2006) highlights how a disregard for women's local knowledge is linked to the technological gendered apartheid that constitutes the gender division of labor. Wajcman writes,

²⁵ Ibid: 78.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Clark (1996) provides a cogent analysis of how processes of decontextualization devalorization underpin the *womenandchildren* construction, and proposes "women-minorities-and-immigrants" as an alternative to this essentialized gendered figure (46). Saskia Sassen notes how this approach provides "a new topos which replaces the Fordist-family wage topos of women and children" (1998: 86, note 16).

The failure to regard women's social and communicative skills as knowledge-based and reward them accordingly has strong echoes with the way in which women have been traditionally defined as technically unskilled, thus excluding them from well-paid work. The association between technology, masculinity, and the very notion of what constitutes skilled work was and is still fundamental to the way in which the gender division of labor is reproduced. P. 85

As long as forced migrants are viewed as technologically illiterate, UNHCR can use visual technology to promote the "durable solutions" framework that has shifted from "resettlement" to "return."²⁸

UNHCR's preference for the "right to return" over the "right to asylum" as a durable solution compounded gender inequities for Guatemalan women repatriates, as their reintegration in post-war Guatemala had limited guarantees in obtaining identity documents.²⁹ The lack of papers "seriously hinders the right to work, to have access to education and health benefits through the social services system, to the justice system, to credit, and to own and/or inherit land and property."³⁰ Without the provision of identity documents, many Guatemalan repatriates, exiles and the internally displaced have been left with "little option but to join the ranks of the criminalized 'illegal aliens,' or les *sans-papiers*."³¹

UNHCR's use of visual technology as a means to promote its "durable solutions" framework reinforces the 'asylum-migration nexus'³² through a heteronormative gendered racial project³³ that feminizes forced migrants as unable to use technology. The feminization of forced migrants has direct consequences in directing their participation in the labor market toward the informal labor sector, which in "advanced capitalist countries have seen an enormous growth among 'contingent' workers, the majority of whom are women."³⁴ To counteract the use of visual technology to further the feminization of labor across gender, feminist ethnography provides methodological alternatives in democratizing the representation

of forced migrants. The use of feminist methods in my field work relied on collaboration with forced migrants in both Mexico and the U.S. in a way that destabilizes apolitical domesticity³⁵ commonly found in many pictures depicting refugees by IHOs,³⁶ the topic to which I now turn.

Feminist Ethnography in La Gloria Refugee Camp

Feminist anthropologists' examination of the ultimate authority the ethnographer retains to write about his/her own experience, guided by a "will to knowledge" that requires exposure and vulnerability from subjects,³⁷ has opened space for research subjects' criticism of research methods and their representation. Feminist Participant Action Research (PAR) and photovoice have furthered this space. PAR provides an understanding of the relationship between gender, geographic space/place by emphasizing the multiple lived experiences of women and examining the gendered power relations between participants and the researcher.³⁸ Photovoice complements PAR by enabling people to record aspects of their lives of greatest concern, and by cataloguing social issues through photography they can also influence social policy.³⁹ My use of PAR and photovoice aims to provide Guatemalan forced migrants the opportunity to document contextual accounts of gender relations in their geographic space/place of exile.

La Gloria was formally founded in 1984⁴⁰ as an autonomous response by refugees who fled in the early 1980s due to repressive military conflict in the region.⁴¹ The community in La Gloria approved my project after having discussed the research design in Spanish during a general assembly in July 2004. I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews and participant observation of residents. I remained in La Gloria until September 2004 accompanied by Manuel Gil, my photography research assistant, we both returned twice for the month of December in the same

²⁸ Baines 2004: 7.

²⁹ Cheng and Chudoba 2003

³⁰ Worby, 2000: 14

³¹ Van Der Ploeg, 2006: 179

³² See note 1 above.

³³ According to Omi and Winant (1994), "a racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines." (P. 56) My study challenges Omi and Winant's functionalist model of the "racial state" as it overlooks the embedded contradictions present in global capitalist relations that not only shape race, but also gendered state structures.

³⁴ Wajcman 2006: 88.

³⁵ Callamard 1999.

³⁶ Malkii 1995.

³⁷ Salazar 1991.

³⁸ McIntyre 2003.

³⁹ See, Ewald 2000; Lykes 2000; McIntyre 2000; and Wang et al. 1998.

⁴⁰ Lagier 2003.

⁴¹ During the span of two years (1982-1984), the Guatemalan military would conduct secret raids in Mexican territory that killed a total of 11 members of the group that would later form La Gloria. For a review of the military conflict in Guatemala, see Schirmer 2000.

year and remained for four months between August–November of 2006. The L.A. component of my field research took place between January and early June of 2006.

In 2004, the total numbers of participants in La Gloria were five women and six men. In 2006, I presented research to both junior and high school directors and teachers and received permission to work with 16 students (8 women & 8 men) at the high school level. In L.A., participants included 3 women, 3 men and four participants in their teens (3 women and 1 male). In an effort to not replicate any social inequalities that I might find in the field of study, I consciously tried to maintain a gender balance in the distribution of cameras in both research sites. This methodological approach reflects a concern for the ethical use of technology and visual based technologies specifically—as Wajcman (2006) writes: Technology and society are bound together inextricably; this means that power, contestation, inequality, and hierarchy inscribe new technologies.” (83) Similarly, Marx (2003) writes: “New technologies rarely enter passive environments of total inequality. Instead, they become enmeshed in complex pre-existing systems. They are as likely to be altered as to alter.” (371) This awareness of how technology is shaped by gender relations embedded in society,⁴²

and the rampant inequities found in forced migrant communities⁴³—compounded in indigenous communities such as the ones found in Chiapas⁴⁴—required that we further Freire’s⁴⁵ approach to critical literacy. Eubanks (2006), paraphrasing Freire, notes how critical literacy “fosters linkages between ‘self-contained areas of expertise’ and the ‘social and political realities’ that frame people’s understandings and their integration of their ideas and artifacts into the world.” (100) This directed us to apply Freire’s critical pedagogy as we provided instructions in the use of cameras, many of whom had never used one, and explained how pictures could include: (1) labor (paid and unpaid) (2) celebrations (3) religious ceremonies (4) family; and for any other purpose. I agreed to cover the cost of film development and provide a copy of the pictures to participants.

Don Franco⁴⁶ is 48 years old, originally from the small village of Chinicham located in the department of Huehuetenango, Guatemala, and fled Guatemala following the military violence there. Don Franco never used a camera before, or his partner—who did not wish to participate as she felt that her not knowing Spanish would limit her contribution. She also refrained from being photographed by my photography assistant, but when given the single-use color camera, something unexpected took place.



Figure 3: Don Franco and Partner (holding grandchild, Rafael) standing to extreme right and their daughter (Raquel) dressed in white celebrating her first communion. She is flanked by her godparents. Picture taken by Mari (2004)

⁴² See, for example, Cockburn C. and Ormrod S. 1993; Hopkins Patrick D. 1998; Wajcman, J. 2004

⁴³ Callamard (1999) writes: “Studies have highlighted the forces and mechanisms of domination and exclusion of refugee women in both the reproductive sphere of the household (Callamard, 1993, 1994; Ager et al., 1995; Martin, Susan F. 1992) and the political power structures of the camp” (p. 200–201).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Freyermuth, Graciela Enciso and Cristina, María Manca 2000; Olivera, Mercedes 2000; Hidalgo, O. and Castro, O. 1999.

⁴⁵ Freire 1973, 1997, 1998.

⁴⁶ I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants in both countries.

Don Franco's partner, who originally did not wish to be photographed, appears in a photograph celebrating her daughter's first Catholic communion (see figure 3). The picture was taken by one of their older daughters (Mari, age 20) who also attended the ceremony. The appearance of Don Franco's partner is significant because she did not consent to the visual photographic techniques of an "outsider," but felt comfortable in being framed in a photograph by her daughter in the company of her own family. I would later find out that all of the pictures were taken by Mari and her brother Luis (age 18).

Luis took pictures during the September commemoration of *San Miguel* (Saint Michael), the patron of San Miguel de Acatán, a small municipality in the state of Huehuetenango in Guatemala, and home of the majority of those now living in La Gloria. Luis is both deaf and mute, and has only reached a second grade formal education. Due to his inability to hear or speak, Luis has faced barriers by school administrators who fail to provide educational modifications. His passion for the arts, however, was made evident when Don Franco showed me some of Luis's drawings, which reflected the likeness of various pop artists in Mexico. Luis took a picture of the coronation of "La Reina" (or Queen) of La Gloria (see figure 5), who is one of four candidates selected by the organizers one month prior to the event and is declared the winner through a voting process that involves members living in La Gloria and their kin living abroad in the United States and Guatemala.

In the ceremony, the outgoing Queen approaches the members of the audience and expresses her gratitude for their support, while simultaneously informing the new Queen of her obligations, to which she responds: "I will serve the community, like you, and will follow the regulations that demand them..."⁴⁷ Borrowing from the sociology of ethnomethodology,⁴⁸ the celebration of San Miguel and the selection of the Queen of La Gloria provide a microanalysis of the ways Guatemalan refugees "do" power in face-to-face interactions and "do" gender as well.⁴⁹ The Queen of La Gloria is an exalted woman that bears the burden of constituting the national

community⁵⁰ in exile throughout the diaspora while males do not face such expectations.⁵¹

Luis's photo provides his perspective on the coronation of the Queen by Veronica Lagier, a doctoral student from the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, who has done years of research in Guatemalan refugee camps. Luis frames her in this celebration picture. The large Mexican flag painted on the wall is an indicator of how Guatemalan exiles seek to be formal members of the larger Mexican community while at the same time they celebrate a central part of their ethnic identity.⁵² Both men and women participating in the ceremony wear traditional attire. In an informal conversation, a member of La Gloria mentioned how traditional garb is no longer in use by the large majority of the population due to the continued intimidation on the part of Mexican authorities. Luis is keen in recording a moment where gender scripts are performed, where women are considered the natural bearers of cultural knowledge that identifies a nation in exile. In addition, Lagier's "appearance" in the scene reflects a disjuncture with the normative power-knowledge relationship that continues to dominate social science research.⁵³ Here the researcher is the subject of the participant holding the camera and is no longer the only one maintaining an archive of the field. The potential for bias in the interpretation of photographs, however, requires further analysis.

Baines (2004) highlights how "liberal policies that focus on women's rights, at times, reproduce violence when they are over-generalized and fail to be reflective [11]". Therefore, critical reflexivity is needed to examine the researcher's impact in the field of research, particularly when deconstructing photographs provided by participants. It was a critical feminist reflexive approach that guided me in asking participants to select two or three pictures, taken with their cameras, which they liked the most. This was a conscious effort to diminish my bias in selecting photographs "for" participants and instead have them take an active role in determining the pictures used for publication. Yet this is not enough. Forced migrants must be allowed to critique their own photo-

⁴⁷ The description of the experience of exile is consistent with many informal and formal interviews with Guatemalan refugees in both La Gloria and Los Angeles.

⁴⁸ Goffman 1983; Fishman 1977, 1978; West and Zimmerman 1977, 1983.

⁴⁹ West 1996: 359.

⁵⁰ According to McClintock (1996), gender constitutes national identity, in part, through women's role as "symbolic bearers of the nation" [260-261] and as the "boundary and metaphoric limit" (Ibid) of the national body politic. McClintock highlights the constitutive power of nationalisms as "historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed" (Ibid: 260). The processes by which nationalisms constitute people's identities are "social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered" (Ibid) that promise "popular unity" yet result in "sanctioned institutionalization of gender difference" (Ibid).

⁵¹ A practice that reflects the gendered obligations placed on the Queen of La Gloria is that of the "convivencia" (conviviality) where members of La Gloria are invited to the home of the Queen-elect on the night of her victory for coffee, bread and sometimes tamales. This practice is repeated on the night after the coronation. By doing so, those present can observe the domestic role that even a Queen must adhere to, which serves to remind everyone of the idealized gender power relations that underpin their understanding of community.

⁵² See Lagier 2003.

⁵³ Collins 1991.

graphs and those of the researcher. This will allow readers to recognize better if the political priorities of the researcher and participant lie in maintaining

a heterosexual framework of sex/gender naturalized femininity or in challenging it.



Figure 5: Coronation of “la reina” (the Queen) of La Gloria Refugee Camp during the Celebration of San Miguel. Picture taken by Luis in late September 2004.

Luis’s photographs provide an opportunity to widen the participatory lens that can aid the researcher and other viewers in deconstructing the gender power inequities embedded in the coronation of the Queen of La Gloria. The domestic role performed by the Queen serves to reinforce the migration patterns that have taken place in La Gloria, where males have been the ones to leave in large numbers to seek better economic opportunities in the Mayan tourist resorts

in the state of Yucatan and Quintana Roo, while women remain in La Gloria to take care of children and property. Nevertheless, participants informed me of how female relatives migrated to Cancun and the U.S.⁵⁴ to seek waged employment and leave their children in the care of their parents.⁵⁵ Such is the case of Don Franco’s grandson Rafael, whose mother migrated to the U.S. (see figure 6).

⁵⁴ Some of the states of greatest migration include California, Colorado and Florida.

⁵⁵ Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992.



Figure 6: Don Franco and son, Miguel, sit outside of front porch in La Gloria, Chiapas. Don Franco's daughter migrated to the United States in search of higher waged employment, but left her two children (not pictured) in the company of Don Franco and wife. Picture taken by photography research assistant, Manuel Gil (September, 2004) differs from a Majority of Humanitarian Mother-child Photos in its inclusion of a Male figure and child. After having received permission to take Pictures, both were not requested to pose for the Photograph

Don Franco's willingness to take care of his daughter's son, in the company of his partner and other family members, further destabilizes the incorrigible patriarchal script associated with the Mexican Macho.⁵⁶ Instead, heteropatriarchy is challenged by the migration of a younger generation of women that are willing to sacrifice being apart for the early years of their children's development in the company of their grandparents. In spite of challenging heteropatriarchal norms in a transnational context,⁵⁷ the women of La Gloria face tremendous obstacles when entering the informal labor market in the United States.

La Gloria in Los Angeles

Guatemalan Forced Migrant Participation in the Informal Labor Market

Throughout my trips to La Gloria, participants would mention how many family members had traveled north to other parts of Mexico and the U.S. to find work.⁵⁸ The continued ties maintained by kin were made legible in the abundance of incoming phone calls that were announced by loud speaker from a building that doubles as a long-distance telephone service provider and grocery store. A number of

bodies, predominantly younger women, and elder men and women would sit in front of the store waiting for their migrant kin to return a phone call to provide news from the north. In the case of Don Franco, he would communicate on a weekly basis with his daughter and son-in-law who would call to speak to their two children living in La Gloria and to find out if remittances needed to be sent. In addition to this ongoing transnational dialogue, the distribution of remittances was made visible when families would highlight how new concrete homes were made possible by the money sent from family members working in the U.S. In the case of Don Franco, and many others, the amount sent from remittances has not been sufficient to provide them with a sturdier home. These circumstances informed my decision to find out more information on the gendered dynamics of migrant kin living in L.A.

All five of the adult research participants do sweatshop work in downtown L.A.⁵⁹ There are two married couples (Daniela and Mario, Raquel and Jose) and each conjugal pair work together in different sweatshops. Andrea, a single mother of five children, is the only one to work away from her other two younger male siblings who join their wives in sweatshop work. All five identify their employers as of Korean descent, and on one occasion, Mario

⁵⁶ Guttman 1996.

⁵⁷ See, Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Monica Boyd 1989.

⁵⁸ A small segment of these outmigrants are currently pursuing higher education degrees in La Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo in Mexico City (7 men and 1 woman) and COBACH in Comitán, Chiapas (2 women).

⁵⁹ For a review of the rampant inequalities underpinning sweatshop labor in Los Angeles, please read, Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000.

expressed how “piece-work is a Korean invention”. While they did not express any open antipathy toward their Korean employer, they did emphasize how physically demanding their work is.

With the exception of Andrea, who works 6 days a week, the four conjugal couples work 5 days a week for 10 hour shifts (8am – 6pm). This was a tremendous contrast to my experience in La Gloria, where I could visit participants during any day, which

was largely due to their basing their livelihoods on farm work located near the camp. The two couples and children live in the Westlake area of downtown L.A. (composed of a largely Spanish speaking Latin American population) while Andrea and her five children live in Compton (composed largely of an African American and increasing Central American population) in close proximity to L.A. International Airport.



Figure 7: Sweatshop Factory in downtown L.A. reveals stacks of cloth to the left of a Sewing Machine waiting to be sewn, while Blouses lie on hangers ready to be sent off to Department Stores for sale in LA’s Fashion District. Picture was taken (clandestinely) by Andrea (May, 2004)

Unlike with refugees living in La Gloria camp, I was hesitant in providing single-use color cameras to those in L.A. because only two of the adult males had received formal residency documents. This was discussed openly and all mentioned hesitancy in using cameras due to a possible attempt on the part of immigration officials in deporting those that did not have legal residency. I approached them again and suggested taking pictures without any of them within the frame, but still record the same themes as their kin in La Gloria, this led to an immediate willingness to use the cameras.

The following picture shows a sweatshop factory where Andrea works. The sewing machine centered in the frame is the machine she uses six days of the week and the shirts that she and others at her place of work have tailored. The pennies she makes in each stitch (i.e. 3 cents per sleeve and 7 cents per collar) is an indication of how each shirt produces very little in the form of a living wage for Andrea. As a single

mother of 5 children, maintaining her demanding six day work week is critical for the upkeep of her children. To make ends meet, she receives help from her son Fernando (age 22) who works supervising a large grocery store.⁶⁰ Andrea also receives government assistance through section 8 housing, which is a result of her filing a report against her former husband who would periodically cause physical abuse.⁶¹ After living in L.A. for about 18 years, Andrea and her son Fernando do not have legal residency in the U.S, and as a result, can face possible deportation. Andrea’s younger daughters (ages: 18, 13, 12) are all US citizen nationals and are currently pursuing public education.

Andrea’s repetitive use of the sewing machine and her “invisibility” in the picture above in doing piece-work counters the dominant view of the 19th century writers that “envisioned the sewing machine as a means to transform women into more technologically knowledgeable beings.”⁶² During the WWII era, the

⁶⁰ Fernando was born in one of the makeshift camp sites prior to settling in La Gloria.

⁶¹ Due to the sensitivity of the incident, Andrea has refrained from providing much detail regarding the spousal abuse.

⁶² Wosk 2001: 28.

use of the sewing machine was seen by manufacturers as a platform for women to learn how to use other modern technological tools.⁶³ Mythic and erotic images of women, however, framed how new technologies would be integrated in what remained a highly segmented gendered labor market. The popular use of mythic masculinized images of goddesses—"broad shoulders, a square jaw, powerful arms and legs—helped lend stature and strength to emerging technologies."⁶⁴ This was countered by the use of seductive and rendered female bodies in factory machine advertising that borrowed eroticized forms utilized by previous artists in depicting the female nude. These representations, however, maintained a white female as the appropriate woman to use new technologies. This representation of technology, of white woman-as-spectacle with commodity culture,⁶⁵ can help explain why the sewing machine was deemed as a viable platform for women to learn new technologies as this framework was dependent on a racial gendered structure that privileged white women that could become "citizen consumers"⁶⁶ while replacing them with feminized gendered "others" as producers/workers under advanced capitalism.

Guatemalan forced migrants living in the global city of Los Angeles, and participation in informal sweatshop labor, has placed them in a vulnerable economic and political situation. Sassen identifies global cities as "strategic sites for the valorization of leading components of capital and for the coordination of global economic processes...and sites for the incorporation of large numbers of women and immigrants in activities that service the strategic sectors (1998: 86). These processes are inextricably connected to both the regulatory framework of states and international humanitarian organizations in the care of what Agamben (1998) calls "bare life", which provide the necessary bodies that can work in the unregulated informal labor market. The refugee camp of La Gloria—as the gendered space where technologies of humanitarian care are applied—comes in contact with the city of L.A. through transnational migration and are both interconnected in reproducing and sustaining the feminized global labor market.

Transnational Guatemalan forced migrants living in L.A., however, are not limited to a feminized abject status directed toward the production of surplus capital for the corporate businesses that outsource work to, in this case, Korean operators of sweatshop factories. Such an analysis enables us to see the agency that persists despite the logic of global capital

expansion that scholars like William Robinson (2004) rightly stress. Migrant agency should make us suspicious of formulations that reduce cultural identities to the status of commodities without acknowledging the political and social dimensions of the cultural aspects in which transnational communities engage.

The Guatemalan forced migrants are not entirely embedded in the production of commodities in the garment sector, but are actively engaged in cultural practices (i.e. celebration of San Miguel in La Gloria) of self representation that become venues of social change when confronted by oppositional forces. This process has been identified as the social engine that drives claims for cultural citizenship, which "refers to the ways people organize their values, their beliefs about their rights, and their practices based on their sense of cultural belonging rather than on their formal status as citizens of a nation... Cultural citizenship usually has an oppositional character because it 'describes the claims of social, human and cultural rights made by communities which do not hold state power and which are denied basic rights by those who do.'"⁶⁷ Claims for cultural citizenship are currently being mobilized by women as they defy their gendered domestic scripts in the camp to participate in cooperative projects, participate in sports and seek higher educational opportunities in Mexico. Cultural citizenship is also mobilized by males that counter globalization's feminization process through higher education, the preservation of their indigenous tongue and through return migration from the US to La Gloria. In spite of these practices, vast material inequalities persist in La Gloria, and propel many men and women (across generation) to migrate to the U.S. Vast race and gender inequalities in the U.S. leave forced migrants with little employment options other than to join the informal labor market. Participation in the informal labor market, however, does not preclude women and men from understanding the rampant inequalities that underpin sweatshop labor, which is what lead Andrea to photograph (clandestinely) her place of work, but also allow for the creation of cultural products (in the form of still photos) that are not invested in the production of surplus capital.

At a time when claims for cultural citizenship were challenged by the Sensenbrenner-King bill, passed in December 2005 in the U.S. House of Representatives as HR 4437, Guatemalan forced migrants along with tens of thousands, took to the streets on May 1st 2006 to protest the criminalization of migrants

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid: 19-20.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Cohen 2004.

⁶⁷ Flores and Benmayor 1997: 44, citing a concept paper from the Inter-University Program for Latino Cultural Studies Working Group (IUP 1988:3)

entering the U.S. The participation of refugees in the May 1st protests reveals that the lack of legal residency in the United States does not preclude active political participation to address grievances against a host nation-state. This is a practice that is not unfamiliar to these forced migrants, as they had to confront the Mexican Agency for Refugee Aid (COMAR) in gaining formal asylum in Mexico and UNHCR in their plans to repatriate them back to Guatemala.⁶⁸ When I asked Mario why he took the

picture of a police caravan (figure 8) during the May 1st protests, which he attended with his wife and children he answered, “I noticed how the police wanted to prevent the two groups of demonstrators that were going to meet at the intersection of Alvarado and 7th street in MacArthur Park. The demonstrators were peaceful, and in spite of the police tactics of dispersing the two groups, we were able to go around the caravan and form a larger group on MacArthur Park.”



Figure 8: A Caravan of Los Angeles Police Officers disperse two large groups of Demonstrators from Meeting on the Corner of MacArthur Park to protest the Sensenbrenner-King bill, passed in December 2005 in the U.S. House of Representatives as HR 4437. Demonstrators used Alternative Streets to cross the Blockade. Picture taken by Mario in the Company of Andrea and their Son Carlos (age 13) and Daughter Daniela (age 1) (May 1, 2006)

The photographs of Andrea and Mario coincide in their ability to document the material technologies used in sweatshop work and the surveillance technologies used by the police to create a “docile [body] that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.”⁶⁹ Their decision to record these instances were tactical decisions that can be characterized as *sousveillance*⁷⁰ that involves “the use of surveillance technologies and tactics by the lower classes for the purposes of increasing equality through making

public the hidden workings of powerful institutions and groups.”⁷¹ When conducted through the reflexive lens of feminist photovoice, *sousveillance* allows for forced migrants to further a deconstruction of feminized global labor, and in the process destabilizes heterosexual sex/gendered frameworks that underpin the international gendered division of labor.

⁶⁸ For a review of the role of UNHCR in providing humanitarian aid to Guatemalan’s in Mexico and the strengths and weaknesses of their repatriation program, please read Worby 1999.

⁶⁹ Dreyfus, H and Rabinow, P. 1982: 153

⁷⁰ Huey, L. et al. (2006) credit Steve Mann with coining the term “*sousveillance* (roughly French for oversight) is the opposite of surveillance (roughly French for oversight)” (158)

⁷¹ Ibid: 150. For an alternative perspective of *sousveillance* as an antidemocratic method that reproduces hegemonic values, see, Marx, Gary T. 2003.

Conclusion

This paper illustrates how a heterosexual sex/gender dualist framework, of appropriate masculinity and femininity, has shaped the visual and textual representation of forced migrants across time by the U.S. and now UNHCR. The political intervention—by governments and private enterprise⁷²—in population control has been furthered under the guise of benign governmental aid by the U.S. during New Deal policies, and now translated into humanitarian care by UNHCR, but both coincide with the construction of an apolitical gendered subject in need. Western states—the major donors of UNHCR⁷³—that act as multi-nodal centers⁷⁴ in the agglomeration of financial globalized transactions, find parity in the liberal democratic processes furthered by UNHCR's "durable" solutions framework, which limit democratic participation to those suffering displacement, and in the process further the feminization of the labor market.

Similarly, failure by developing countries to embrace the neoliberal economic agenda furthered by capitalist states and intermediaries such as the IMF and World Bank prescriptions to economic adjustment, which would many times require the placement of austerity policies to service the payment of debt, would result in "financial ostracism."⁷⁵ Global neoliberalization is inextricably connected to migration as the austerity policies imposed the IMF and World Bank "generally also mean weak states, predatory ruling cliques and human rights abuse. This leads to the notion of the 'asylum-migration nexus': many migrants and asylum seekers have multiple reasons for mobility and it is impossible to completely separate economic and human rights motivations."⁷⁶ The neoliberal priorities of global capital that result in the "asylum-migration nexus" meet the labor needs in both the formal and informal economy,⁷⁷ and are actively engaged by Guatemalan forced migrants that left the refugee camp of La Gloria, due to lack of economic opportunities and poor infrastructure, to work in the sweatshops in downtown L.A.⁷⁸

The use of PAR and feminist photovoice refracts the gaze of western humanism—riddled with contradictions in the global economy and the regulation of

transnational migration—that furthers a hierarchy of representational discourses that shape oppressive racialized gender forms. This feminist methodology allows forced migrants to record the heterogeneous cultural forms that reveal shifting gendered power relations amongst transnational migrants. The "framing" of forced migrants in photos by UNHCR views them as apolitical and technologically backward that relegates them as a disenfranchised class unable to participate in an increasingly technological "informational order" and therefore provides a compelling illustration of how the camera acts as a technology of citizenship, that is, it bifurcates society by identifying who can be "users" and "nonusers" of technology.⁷⁹ In an attempt to close the gap between those who are defined as "users" and "nonusers" of technology, Eubanks (2006) notes how "it becomes imperative to think about 'high-tech equity' as a question of critical technological citizenship."⁸⁰

This reflexive collaborative methodological approach is a response to Malkii's (1995) call for the study of the "operation of a humanistic, universalizing representational practice [11]" and meets the interdisciplinary and transnational criteria needed to develop a body of empirical work and theory in forced migration studies.⁸¹ I argue that such images and narratives identify them as active members who challenge the gender power inequalities found in their local communities and reflect the right to self-determination and may provide an opportunity to understand local claims to freedom of movement and residence within and across the borders of the state that have a concomitant impact in reshaping the political contours of citizenship⁸² in their host nation-states

Acknowledgement

The research and writing on which this article is based were partially funded by the University of California Institute For Mexico and the United States, the Center for Chicana/o Studies and the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I would like to thank El Centro

⁷² Briggs 2002.

⁷³ UNHCR is "entirely dependant upon Western donor funding to carry out its protection mandate...[and] up to 98 percent of UNHCR funds comes from states (Bains 2004: 5-6).

⁷⁴ Sassen 1991; Castells 1996.

⁷⁵ Hoogvelt, A. 2001.

⁷⁶ Castels 2003: 17.

⁷⁷ Sassen 1994.

⁷⁸ Bonacich, E. and Appelbaum, R. 2000.

⁷⁹ Eubanks 2006

⁸⁰ Ibid: 91. Oblepías-Ramos (1998), provides a framework that helps further equity in developing a just technological citizenship for women that include "(1) Technology control; (2) Access to technology resource support systems; (3) Access to technology decisions and (4) Gender-specific appropriate technology development." (90-91)

⁸¹ Castles 2003.

⁸² Flores, W.V. and Benmayor, R. 1997.

de Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (Unidad Sureste) in San Cristóbal de las Casas for providing a Visiting Fellowship in conducting preliminary research in Chiapas, Mexico. Participation in the Summer Institute on International Migration, Ethnic Diversity and Cities at the University of Amsterdam and the Irmgard Coninx Foundation roundtables on Transnationality provided venues where an international group of scholars provided critical commentary in the development of this study. I am grateful to Dr. Denise Segura, Dr. Laury Oaks,

Dr. George Lipsitz, Dr. Holly Unruh and the anonymous reviewers at the International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society for constructive remarks on earlier versions of this article. I am eternally indebted to the forced migrants that opened up their hearts and homes in La Gloria and Los Angeles to further this transnational collaboration. Direct all correspondence to: Óscar F. Gil-García, Department of Sociology, 2834 Ellison Hall, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9430.

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