

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL
ACTIVISM IN GUATEMALA

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2010

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To all the courageous women and men in Guatemala who are fighting to protect their
land and communities

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support, guidance, advice, and patience of several remarkable individuals. To each and every person who has helped me throughout the envisioning, researching, and writing of this dissertation, I am profoundly grateful.

I must first thank all of my committee members—the professors who encouraged and guided my intellectual development throughout graduate school, and who helped to shape the ideas presented in the following pages. My chair, Dr. Milagros Peña, has been instrumental in fostering my intellectual growth as a sociologist. It was through numerous conversations with her—both inside and outside the classroom—that I learned about the interconnectedness of various social oppressions and how people are mobilizing against them in local and global struggles for social justice. She has helped me to locate my own activist and academic work within the broader social justice movement, and for this I cannot thank her enough. I could not have asked for a better mentor. The support of Dr. Constance Shehan was also invaluable to me during my years in graduate school. From our first meeting and conversation, she has showed unwavering enthusiasm for both my academic and activist work. Like all great professors, she clearly cares for students, and has always been willing to talk, listen and offer (much appreciated) advice. To her, I am also indebted. Dr. Charles Gattone has been another great mentor to me, and I thank him for his willingness to talk and exchange ideas on everything from classical and contemporary theory to finding apartments in New York. His support and enthusiasm for my work helped me a great deal (probably more than he realizes). I am also grateful to Dr. Stephen Perz, who has offered a wealth of knowledge on topics ranging from environmental sustainability to

indigenous movements to action research. It was also very nice to have him as a fellow cyclist on the committee! Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Sandra Russo, who as a scholar and activist has inspired me and helped to foster my intellectual development. It was in her Ecofeminism class that I began to recognize and appreciate the links between gender, race, class, and environmental issues, and to connect these issues to my own work with AIR and indigenous women in Guatemala. Her class served as the genesis for many of the ideas presented in the chapters of this dissertation.

My friends and colleagues at the University of Florida and other institutions have also been tremendous sources of support, guidance, and inspiration. I thank Gina Alvarado and Flavia Leite for the gift of true friendship—for all of our conversations (some serious and intellectual, many personal, all important and valued); for our shared stories and laughs; and for their trust and confidence. I thank Mike Anastario for the friendship we have maintained since high school (as the only two sociologists to graduate from DeLand High School); for his ability to see and share the humor in academia in general and sociology in particular; and for his confidence in my abilities as a professional sociologist. I look forward to working with him on many projects in the future. I am also grateful to the numerous other graduate students with whom I shared classes, conversations, and ideas, and who also challenged and encouraged me to grow as a sociologist. These outstanding individuals include Maura Ryan, Namita Manohar, Louisa Chang, Jeanne Collins, Petta-Gay Hannah Ybarra, Daniel Fernandez-Baca, Geovanny Perez, Lawrence Eppard, and others, and I am honored to know each and every one.

To my family I owe the most profound gratitude for their years of love and support. I am grateful for my little sister, Rebecca, who, like all great sisters, has also been a best friend and close confidant throughout the years. In trying to thank my parents for all they have done for me, mere words cannot suffice, but I owe any and all of my accomplishments to them. I thank my father for his kindness and generosity, for always encouraging me to push boundaries, and for supporting all my endeavors—whether athletic or academic. He has always modeled and encouraged a strong work ethic, and it is this ethic that has helped me throughout graduate school and the process of writing this dissertation. I thank my mother, the amazing woman who founded the Alliance for International Reforestation, and who inspires me every day with her strength, intelligence, and compassion. She has shown me that it is possible to be both a respected academic and a passionate activist, and it is my great desire to follow in her footsteps. This dissertation is because of her, about her, and for her. Finally, I am endlessly grateful to my husband, Roger, who never ceases to amaze me. He has unflinchingly supported me throughout graduate school, and his unwavering faith and confidence in me helped me to get through those occasional, debilitating periods of self-doubt. I thank him for all the sacrifices, and every drive made between Jacksonville and Gainesville that he made in order to support us for the past several years. He is my best friend and inspiration, and it is an honor to share my life with him.

A final important note of recognition and gratitude must of course be made to all members of the Alliance for International Reforestation and the indigenous women who participated in this project. I thank all of them for their willingness to take the time to share their stories with me, and for their kindness, trust, and confidence. I also thank

participants for the vital, life-saving work they do on a daily basis to care for the environment and protect it for future generations. May we all be inspired by their work and passion for protecting the land and resources that sustain us all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	11
LIST OF FIGURES.....	12
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	13
ABSTRACT.....	14
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	16
Mujeres Unidas Por Amor a La Vida and the Alliance for International Reforestation.....	17
Purpose of Dissertation.....	20
Transnational Feminism.....	25
Anticapitalist Critique.....	27
Cultural and Material Analyses.....	29
Transnational Organizing.....	31
Ecofeminism.....	34
The Ecofeminist Critique of Capitalism.....	35
Intersectional Analysis.....	38
Critiques of Ecofeminism.....	40
Lack of empirical evidence.....	40
Homogenizing and romanticizing women.....	42
Towards a Sociological Ecofeminism.....	44
Organization of the Dissertation.....	47
2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE “THREE CYCLES OF CONQUEST” AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN THE GUATEMALAN HIGHLANDS.....	49
Environmental Degradation in the Western Highlands: Material and Cultural Consequences.....	50
Conquest by Spain.....	58
Conquest by Capitalism: the Rise of Big Agriculture.....	60
Conquest by State Terror: the Continued Destruction of Land and People.....	65
A Fourth Cycle? Neoliberal Development and the Continued Degradation of the Environment.....	70
Discussion.....	77

3	METHODOLOGY AND METHODS	79
	Feminist Research and Action Research: Making the Connections	80
	Giving Voice	82
	Conscientization	84
	Reflexivity	85
	The Research Project	89
	Oral Histories.....	91
	A theoretical sample, or why Mujeres Unidas	93
	Recruitment and interview process	97
	Interviews	100
	El equipo AIRE.....	101
	Interviews with government officials.....	103
	Triangulation: Archival Research and Observations.....	106
	Analysis: Developing Grounded Theory Through Atlas.ti.....	108
	Discussion	112
4	THE GENDER DIVISION OF LABOR AND SITUATED KNOWLEDGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS	114
	<i>Costumbre, Conflicto, y Capitalismo: How Tradition, War, and Capitalist Development Shape Women’s Environmental Awareness.....</i>	117
	<i>La Responsabilidad de la Mujer: Tradition and the Development of Women’s Environmental Awareness.....</i>	117
	War and its Aftermath.....	130
	Export Agriculture and Gendered Migration	133
	Environmental Problems as Community Problems.....	138
	Soil Erosion and Mudslides	141
	Agrochemicals.....	145
	Discussion	147
5	THE WILL TO ACT: GENDER SOCIALIZATION AND THE CAREWORK OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM	150
	Learning to Care: Gender Socialization and the Development of a “Consciousness of Care”	153
	Safe Spaces and the Development of Critical Consciousness	160
	Revisiting the Motherhood Question.....	172
	Situating the Environmental Activism of Indigenous Women Within Larger Social Movements	175
	Discussion	178
6	OF THE NECESSITY AND DIFFICULTY IN WORKING ACROSS BORDERS ...	181
	Building Bridges and Forming Alliances	183
	Power, Privilege, and Conflict.....	187
	Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender in a Transnational Organization	188

Emotional Labor and the Importance of Mediators in Transnational Mobilization	196
The Never-Ending Search for Funding	199
Building Solidarity: the Importance of Unifiers in Cross-Border Activist Work.....	201
Religion	202
Dialogue and Listening	204
<i>Hemos Aprendido Muchas Cosas Tambien: the Development of an Organizational Gender Consciousness</i>	206
Discussion	210
 7 CHALLENGING OFFICIAL DISCOURSES: USING THE STORIES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND AIR TO INFORM POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION	212
Background: Guatemala’s National Forestry Law, PINFOR, and PINPEP	214
“Top-Down” vs. Community-Based Approaches	220
Indigenous Communities as Problems vs. Indigenous Women and Men as Allies	224
Deforestation as a New Problem vs. Deforestation as the Result of Historical Appropriation of Land and Resources	227
Development as a Beneficial Process vs. Development as Neocolonialism	230
Discussion	233
 8 CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?	235
 APPENDIX	
A ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH)	247
B ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE (SPANISH)	249
C AIR STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH)	251
D AIR STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE (SPANISH)	252
E GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH)	253
F GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE (SPANISH)	254
G SIMPLIFIED NETWORK VIEW SHOWING LINKS BETWEEN CODE FAMILIES AND THEORETICAL CODES	255
H RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY GROUPS, AIR, AND AIR’S DONORS	256
 LIST OF REFERENCES	257
 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	268

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>page</u>
2-1	Indigenous populations in highland departments. Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE Guatemala. 2002.....	53
2-2	Land distribution in Guatemala, 1950-1979. Source: Hough, et al. 1982.	65
2-3	Forest cover change in highland departments of Guatemala, 1993-2001. Source: INAB.....	74
2-4	Summary of CAFTA measures.....	76
3-1	List of oral history participants.	94
3-2	List of AIR interview participants.....	102
3-3	List of government officials interviewed.....	105
3-4	Summary of 2006 interview participants. With the exception of Itzapa, all community names have been changed to protect participants' identities.	107

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>		<u>page</u>
2-1	Relief map of Guatemala, with departments of Chimaltenango and Sololá (where AIR works) highlighted. Source: www.reliefweb.int	52
3-1	Research design. The primary research method is oral history, supplemented by interviews, archival research, and observational research.	91
4-1	Woman in Itzapa carrying firewood and grasses.....	120
4-2	Deforested hillsides on the outskirts of Itzapa. According to the women of Mujeres Unidas, these hills were forested in the early 1990s.....	123
4-3	Deforested hillside on the outskirts of Itzapa.	123
4-4	River near Umul, Sololá, circa 2006. The river was completely covered by a mudslide following Hurricane Stan.	124
4-5	Community pila in Itzapa, supplied with running water from the city.....	125
4-6	The river Xipacay, circa 2009. Note the height of the river banks, which provide some indication of the past width and depth of the river.	128
4-7	Community pila supplied with water from a spring in Masat, Sololá.	129
4-8	Deforested milpa plot in Masat with evidence of severe soil erosion. Trenches opened in the plot following a heavy rainfall in June 2009.....	142
4-9	Inside of one local store that sells agrochemicals in Itzapa. Stores like these are a common sight in communities throughout Chimaltenango and Sololá. ...	146
5-1	A capacitación in Itzapa, led by one of the leaders of Mujeres Unidas.....	166

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIR (AIRE, AIRES)	The Alliance for International Reforestation, or Alianza Internacional de Reforestación
CNOC	National Coordination of Peasant Organizations, or Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas
CODEDE	Council of Departmental Development, or Consejo de Desarrollo Departamental
CONALFA	National Literacy Committee, or Comité Nacional de Alfabetización
CONAVIGUA	National Coordination of Widows of Guatemala, or Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala
CUC	Committee of Peasant Unity, or Comité de Unidad Campesina
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
INAB	National Forestry Institute, or Instituto Nacional de Bosques
INE	National Institute of Statistics, or Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas
MAGA	Ministry of Agriculture, Grains, and Food, or Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería, y Alimentación
OFM	Municipal Forestry Office, or Oficina Forestal Municipal
OIM	International Migration Organization, or Organización Internacional para las Migraciones
SEGEPLAN	Secretary of Planning and Programming for the Presidency, or Secretaría de Planificación y Programación de la Presidencia
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNPFII	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
WEDO	Women, Environment, and Development Organization

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2010

Chair: Milagros Peña
Major: Sociology

This dissertation draws from both transnational feminist and ecofeminist theoretical frameworks to analyze how gender, race, and class shape the motivations and strategies that guide indigenous women's environmental activism in Guatemala. Specifically, the dissertation asks: How do race, class, and gender circumscribe the ways in which indigenous women identify and experience various forms of environmental degradation in their day-to-day lives? Why and how have indigenous women mobilized locally and transnationally in an effort to protect their local environments? How do they articulate their environmental activism through the lenses of gender, race, and class? Finally, how can this knowledge be used to inform and transform academic knowledge, environmental activist work, and public policy? To address these questions, the dissertation employs a mixed-methods approach that utilizes oral histories, interviews, and archival and observational research. Results reveal that indigenous women's awareness of local environmental problems—specifically deforestation, soil erosion, and the overuse of agrochemicals—is related to the gendered work the women do as farmers and providers of firewood and water for their households. Additionally, gender, race, and class all figure prominently in

indigenous women's articulation of their decisions to become environmental activists, as they view their activism as a way of caring for their families, local communities, and the larger indigenous community in Guatemala. The dissertation also examines how the women have mobilized across borders of gender, race, class and nationality through their work with the Alliance for International Reforestation (AIR), and in doing so, have challenged the organization to develop an awareness of the links between gender, race, and class in its own environmental work. The dissertation concludes by arguing for the importance of recognizing the links between gender, race, class, and the environment, and offers suggestions for how this project and the stories of indigenous women and AIR might inform feminist and ecofeminist theory and research; environmental activist work; and environmental policy.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

One late afternoon in June of 2009, Kaqchikel farmer Elena Siquinajay and I went for a walk around the outskirts of San Andrés Itzapa, the highland community in Guatemala where she has lived her entire life. As we walked, Elena told me about how she organized a group of indigenous women to begin reforesting the fields and mountains around Itzapa. In 1997 this group of women, who call themselves “Mujeres Unidas Por Amor a La Vida” (Women United for the Love of Life) began working with the transnational organization Alliance for International Reforestation (AIR or AIRE) to extend their reforestation efforts. In over twelve years of working with AIR, Mujeres Unidas Por Amor a La Vida has planted approximately 90,000 trees around Itzapa (AIR 2009: 20).

On that overcast afternoon in June, Elena took me to the small plot of land that she and the other women of Mujeres Unidas rent for use as the group’s tree nursery. As she unlocked the nursery gate she told me, “This is where we started, and this is where we continue our work. Last year we planted 10,000 trees. This year [2009] we are going to plant 11,000 trees.”

As I entered the nursery with Elena, I noted that it was small—occupying only about one half of an acre (0.2 hectares) of land—but clearly well-cared for. To the right of the entrance the women had organized neat rows of pine and aliso seedlings—*arbolitos*—that they planned to plant in late June. At the center of the plot the women had cultivated a garden with a variety of vegetables—cauliflower, broccoli, radishes, green beans, and various herbs. Elena was clearly proud of the garden, which she said that the women started in 2007. She emphasized that the garden was *todo organico*, all

organic, and that the women used the vegetables for their own household use. She also informed me that other farmers in Itzapa have noted the women's success with using organic methods and have started to adopt these methods on their own. Elena emphasized how important it is that the women's work has an impact on the larger community. "All that we do is for our families and our community," she told me. "This place, here, this nursery, is where we care for our future."

Mujeres Unidas Por Amor a La Vida and the Alliance for International Reforestation

On that afternoon in the tree nursery, I was in Itzapa with Elena as both a researcher and an activist on behalf of the Alliance for International Reforestation. I have been involved with AIR for nearly twenty years. Indeed, my mother, Dr. Anne Hallum, is one of the founding members. In the early 1990s she, along with another North American academic and a Guatemalan activist, started the organization out of a concern with environmentally destructive development processes in Guatemala and elsewhere in Central America.

Beginning in the early 1980s with the implementation of neoliberal development policies, Guatemala experienced a dramatic growth in export agriculture and a concomitant increase in deforestation as more land was cleared to grow export crops. Today, Central America has the highest rate of deforestation of any world region. From 1990 through 2005, Central America as a whole experienced a loss of 19% of its total forest cover, while Guatemala experienced a loss of 17.1% (FAO 2005). The Guatemalan National Forestry Institute (Instituto Nacional de Bosques, or INAB) estimates that during the 1990s, the Guatemalan highlands lost an average of 82,000 hectares of forest cover annually (INAB 2001). This deforestation has been linked in

turn to problems of soil erosion, mudslides, and sediment-clogged waterways, all of which impact the day-to-day lives and livelihoods of Guatemala's largely indigenous rural population. Approximately 65% of Guatemala's population lives in rural areas; 75% of the indigenous population lives in rural areas, and have depended upon farming as a source of food and income for centuries (UN 2009).

AIR was founded in 1991 to combat deforestation and related problems in Guatemala. It was incorporated in the same year as a 501(c)3 non-profit dedicated to "designing, implementing, and promoting community-based agroforestry projects" (AIR 1991: 1). The "formula" for how AIR works is relatively simple. First, the organization advertises its reforestation services in local community centers, and community members contact AIR staff if they are interested in participating. AIR agroforestry technicians (*tecnicos*) then work with a group of interested residents in a particular community to help them establish a community tree nursery, which the residents eventually learn to maintain on their own. AIR's *tecnicos* will work with a given community for up to five years, teaching interested residents how to cultivate trees and eventually how to interplant them with their crops. Participation in AIR's agroforestry projects is free, and the organization provides all the seeds, tools, and technical training needed to implement and maintain the projects. Community members are involved in all steps of designing and maintaining the reforestation projects, communicating their needs, concerns, and suggestions to the tecnico. Thus, community participation and ongoing dialogue between local residents and AIR tecnicos are crucial to AIR's "community-based" strategy.

After five years of working with AIR, community members are well-versed in the methods of agroforestry, and equipped to maintain the agroforestry projects without the help of AIR. At this point, AIR hosts a small celebration to recognize the community's "graduation" from AIR's agroforestry program, and the AIR tecnico will move on to work with another community.

Since its beginnings in 1991, AIR has remained a small organization, comprised of my mother, the president; Cecilia Ramirez, the director of operations in Guatemala; and a staff of six agroforestry technicians, four of whom are indigenous Kaqchikel and two of whom are *ladino*. While the organization has remained small, its impact has spread throughout highland Guatemala: Over the course of two decades, AIR has worked with approximately 2,000 farmers to plant nearly 4 million trees (AIR 2010).

Elena and the women of Mujeres Unidas were among the first groups of indigenous women farmers to work with AIR, and they were *the* first group of women to establish a long-term alliance with the organization. Elena and her friends Graciela and Catalina first contacted AIR in 1997, and by January of 1998 a group of eleven women—the original members of Mujeres Unidas—had established a tree nursery in Itzapa. From 1998 through 2001, the women learned how to cultivate various native tree species and worked to plant 15,000 trees in and around their community.

On October 15, 2001, the International Day of Rural Women, AIR hosted a celebration to honor the efforts of the women of Mujeres Unidas. The theme of the celebration was "*Aprendamos a ver lo Invisible*," or "Let us learn to see the invisible." During the celebration, Cecilia Ramirez and the rest of the AIR staff acknowledged the importance of recognizing women as key allies in reforestation projects and "social

development” projects in general. Cecilia read a statement written by the women of Mujeres Unidas that forcefully argued,

Aprendamos ver lo invisible, y a saber que nuestro aporte como mujeres—en cualquier época del tiempo, en cualquier parte del mundo—ha sido indispensable para la construcción de cualquier acción de progreso humano.

Let us learn to see the invisible, and to know that our contribution as women—in any time period, in any part of the world—has been indispensable for the construction of any act of human progress (AIR 2001: 4).

Following the development of the alliance between Mujeres Unidas and the Alliance for International Reforestation, AIR has made concerted efforts to “see the invisible,” and to recognize the important efforts of indigenous women in its reforestation projects. In 2001, the organization began keeping demographic records of the farmers participating in the projects. The results revealed that of the 455 farmers working with AIR at the time, nearly all were indigenous and 305 or 67% were women. These percentages have remained consistent throughout the years; in 2009, the organization was working with 510 farmers, and 357 or 70% were indigenous women (AIR 2009).¹

Purpose of Dissertation

The story of the partnership between indigenous women and the Alliance for International Reforestation is unique in some ways, but it is also important to recognize that it is part of a larger pattern of women’s involvement in environmental organizations and environmental activism in general. In regions around the world, women of all races and classes have played—and continue to play—vital roles in efforts to preserve and protect their local environments. It has been estimated that women comprise between 60 to 80% of the membership base of environmental organizations worldwide (UNEP

¹ Please note that these figures may vary from month to month, as community members participate in agroforestry projects when they can find time to do so. AIR utilizes the highest figures for its records.

2004; Warren 2000). The importance of women's work on behalf of the environment has been recognized by a number of multilateral international institutions, including the United Nations (UN) and the Women, Environment, and Development Organization (WEDO). Since the 1985 World Conference on Women in Nairobi, the United Nations has emphasized the importance of understanding and taking seriously the material connections between women and the environment. One goal that emerged from the 1985 conference was the need "to enhance awareness by individual women and all types of women's organizations of environmental issues and the capacity of women and men to manage their environment and sustain their productive resources" (UN/DPI 1986: 53). This maxim was reiterated at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, where the environment was listed as one of twelve critical areas of concern for women. The Beijing Platform for Action asserted that "women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management" (UN 1995). The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) also stresses the importance of recognizing women as important allies in struggles for environmental protection and conservation. In recent years the UNEP has partnered with the Women, Environment, and Development Organization (WEDO) to address the links between women and the environment in its advocacy work, recognizing that "women have proven to be highly effective agents of change, mobilizing all over the world to demand and work towards a healthy environment" (UNEP 2004:12). During the Ninth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in April 2010, representatives of indigenous organizations from around the world met to discuss topics of particular concern to

indigenous peoples. A main topic of discussion centered on the links between indigenous identity, gender, class, development, and environmental degradation. As noted in the UNPFII document *Gender and Indigenous Peoples* “indigenous peoples and more specifically women, who have sustainably managed natural resources for generations, could lose from a liberalization process [as] natural resources are being plundered at unsustainable rates” (UNPFII 2010:25).

While major international organizations and activists around the world recognize the importance of considering the connections between women and the environment, the subject has received surprisingly little attention in academia (Banarjee and Bell 2007; Eaton and Lorentzen 2003; Sturgeon 1997). Within the environmental social sciences, for instance, issues of gender, feminism, or women’s involvement in environmental movements have been largely ignored. In a keyword search of the top five journals in environmental social science, sociologists Damayanti Banarjee and Michael Bell found that the terms “gender” or “feminism” were mentioned in only 3.9% of all articles from 1980 through 2005. As Banarjee and Bell argue, it is clear that gender has not constituted “a concerted topic of investigation [for] environmental social scientists” (2007:4).

While environmental researchers may have neglected the topic of gender, feminists and gender scholars have largely neglected the topic of the environment (Eaton and Lorentzen 2003; Godfrey 2005; Sturgeon 1997). Even transnational feminists—who offer critical analyses of the impact of neoliberal development on the lives and work of women and men in regions around the globe—have overlooked the

environmental consequences of development, and the ways in which these consequences are also “gendered.”

One notable exception to the dearth of feminist scholarship on the environment has been the development of ecofeminism, which examines both the symbolic and material connections between women and the environment. However, ecofeminism has been largely marginalized within mainstream feminist discourse, as it is oftentimes dismissed as being too “essentialist” for articulating the woman-nature connection in “biological, universalist, ahistorical, or homogenizing ways of definition” (Sturgeon 1997: 5). While this may be true of some branches of ecofeminist thought, it does not hold true for materialist or socialist ecofeminism, which aims to highlight the everyday, material connections between women, women’s work, and the environment (Mellor 1997; Salleh 2009; Warren 2000). It should also be noted, however, that even within materialist ecofeminist thought, there has been a lack of empirical studies to support or strengthen many of its theoretical assertions. As Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen note, “ecofeminism remains largely a theoretical conversation.... The theoretical discourses linking women and nature, as developed thus far, do not sufficiently address material exclusions resulting from economic forces” (2003:5). Furthermore, a lack of empirical analyses means that ecofeminist theory has missed important opportunities for understanding the motivations and strategies that guide women’s environmental activism, and for the ways in which women articulate their activism through the lenses of gender, race, class, nationality, etc.. Thus, much of ecofeminist theory remains ungrounded in the everyday lives and activism of women

who are mobilizing to protect the environment (Godfrey 2005; Salleh 2009; Seagar 2003; Sturgeon 1997).

The purpose of this dissertation is to address these various gaps in research through a multi-method investigation of the motives and strategies of indigenous women who are mobilizing to protect their local environment in highland Guatemala. In particular, I am concerned with the following questions:

-How do indigenous women identify and experience various forms of environmental degradation in their day-to-day lives? How have race, class, and gender circumscribed these experiences?

-Why and how have indigenous women mobilized through a transnational organization to protect their local environment? How do they articulate their environmental activism through the lenses of gender, race, and class?

-How are indigenous women and the members of AIR working across borders of gender, race, class, and nationality to combat environmental problems?

-What can we learn from the story of the partnership between indigenous women and AIR, in regards to the importance of mobilizing “across borders” in struggles to protect the environment? Finally, how can this knowledge be used to inform and transform environmental policy and activism?

In addressing these various interrelated questions, I argue for the importance of an empirically-based ecofeminist analysis that highlights the links between intersections of gender, race, class, nationality, and the environment. Such an analysis is important to fully understand the social dimensions of environmental problems—to illuminate the links between interlocking systems of power and privilege in regards to both environmental degradation and environmental activism. Furthermore, an empirically-based intersectional analysis also helps to bridge the gap between activism and theory by being attentive to the ways in which environmental activism is often connected to issues of gender, race, and class. By using an intersectional analysis to understand

these connections, academics, activists, and policymakers alike are better equipped to build bridges and form alliances *across* socially and politically constructed borders to develop a broad-based and inclusive global environmental movement.

Overall, this is a feminist project that makes use of feminist theory and methodology. Specifically, I draw from both transnational feminism and materialist ecofeminism to develop a sociological ecofeminist framework that examines the links between gender, race, class, nationality, and the environment. In the following section I discuss the theoretical groundings of this dissertation.

Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminism, which has at times also been called “global feminism” or “post-colonial feminism” represents a variety of theoretical and empirical approaches that interrogate matters of gender, class, and racial/ethnic inequality within a global context (H.J. Kim-Puri 2005). Feminist scholars interested in examining these issues use the term “transnational,” as a way of denoting both the similarities and diversities in women’s experiences around the world (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Ferre and Tripp 2006; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Moghadam 2005; Naples and Desai 2002). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) propose the term “transnational” as a corrective to “global” feminism which they critique for denoting a falsely universalizing idea of a “global sisterhood” that tends to mask the diversity in women’s experiences. Grewal and Kaplan contend that in contrast to the term “global,” “transnational” feminism denotes a “cutting across” of boundaries of race, class, gender, and nation, rather than an erasure of them (6-7). M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty (1997) adopt the term for similar reasons, and argue for analyses that situate the local within the global and are attentive to the diversities in women’s experiences (xviii-xix).

Embedded within transnational feminism are a few important themes that guide the remainder of this dissertation. The first of these is the critique of the global spread of the capitalist system and how this system works to reproduce colonial inequalities as patriarchal and imperialist ideologies and practices continue to oppress those groups who have historically been “appropriated, controlled, and placed in subordinate positions of dependency” by capitalist elites (Acosta-Belén and Bose 1995:16). In their analyses of the uneven distribution and flow of global capital, transnational feminists employ various terms, including North/South; First/Third World; core/periphery; and overdeveloped/underdeveloped. It is important to note that all of these terms are hotly contested within transnational feminist discourse². Throughout this dissertation, I will continue to use the terms South/Third World interchangeably as political and analytic categories to refer to those groups who have historically been marginalized within the capitalist world system. I will do this to primarily avoid confusion, and so that my own language remains consistent with earlier feminist critiques that I draw from. However, like other feminists, I use these terms while recognizing their problematic political history.

A second theme within transnational feminism is a consideration of the ways in which systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism intersect to impact the everyday lives of women in marginalized communities around the world. To address this,

² For instance, the North/South dualism has been critiqued for the ways in which it assumes a neat geographic organization of global economic inequality, while the First World/Third World dualism has been critiqued for the ways in which it discursively justifies the construction of First World nations as dominant and more advanced (Mohanty 2003; Naples 2002). However, as Nancy Naples (2002) notes, the term “Third World” has been expanded and critically used in the context of feminist scholarship to include the concerns and perspectives of women in various geographic regions—in nations considered to be part of both the “First” and “Third” Worlds—who are marginalized on the basis of race and class inequality (5).

transnational feminist scholars have made use of a wide range of methodological approaches that bridge cultural and material analyses of social and economic inequalities, as these inequalities shape women's everyday lives (Beneria and Feldman 1992; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Kim-Puri 2005).

Finally, transnational feminists are concerned with illuminating the ways in which women are mobilizing both within their communities and across borders of race, class, gender, and nation to form solidarity in shared struggles for social justice (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Mohanty 2003; Naples and Desai 2002; Peña 2007). Taken together, all of these themes are central to this dissertation, which explores how women from a colonized indigenous group in Guatemala are mobilizing within and beyond their communities to confront the environmentally destructive impact of capitalist expansion.

Anticapitalist Critique

A critique of processes of economic globalization, which has also been referred to as the "global economic restructuring of capitalism," "structural adjustment," the "neoliberal project," or "globalization from above" (Naples 2002:7-8) is central to transnational feminist thought. In their critiques, transnational feminists draw from the theories of socialist feminists to examine the ways in which economic globalization is made up of a series of "gendered, sexualized, and racialized processes that create uneven impact on marginalized groups" (Kim-Puri 2005:140).

Socialist feminists like Zillah Eisenstein (1978) and Maria Mies (1998) first advanced the idea that the world system of capitalism is deeply connected with the world system of patriarchy, which sociologist Maria Mies defines as the rule of men at the level of the household as well as "the rule of men in most societal institutions, in politics and economics, in short, what has been called 'the men's league,' or 'men's

house.” Included within this definition are the *ideologies* used to justify this rule (1998:37). Mies goes on to note that the understanding of “patriarchy” as a system also means an understanding of the “historical and societal dimension of women’s exploitation,” and thus a recognition that patriarchy assumes different forms in different historical and social contexts (38). Socialist feminists argue that this world system of patriarchy is deeply connected with, or even an intrinsic part of the world system of capitalism, as the success of the capitalist system is predicated upon the exploitation of women’s underpaid or unpaid work (Lorber 2005).

More recently, transnational feminists have built upon the theoretical insight of socialist feminists to examine the ways in which processes of global economic restructuring have impacted women’s lives and work around the world. Many of these scholars note the ways in which the “hidden” burdens of neoliberal economic globalization and structural adjustment are often borne by women (Benería 2003; Desai 2002; Mies 1998; Mohanty 2003, 1997; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983). As noted by sociologist Manisha Desai, in this neoliberal era, the interconnection between capitalism and patriarchal ideologies has worked to impact women’s lives and work in four key ways:

First, there has been a feminization of the global labor force and an increase in women’s employment in the low-paid service sector.... Second, there has been an increase in women’s employment in the informal sector, where workers receive no protections from unemployment, no benefits, and wages below the poverty level. Third, women’s share of unpaid labor in the home has increased as public funding for health, education, and other social services has declined. Finally, as more land is appropriated for global production, land cultivation and local sustenance diminishes, and environmental damage escalates, women in the South, who depend on their environments more directly for material and cultural resources, [therefore] face great survival difficulties.... (2002:16-17).

Desai and other transnational feminists have extended the socialist feminist critique of capitalism and patriarchy to incorporate an analysis of the ways in which these systems intersect with systems of racism and imperialism to shape the lives of diverse communities of women around the globe. Thus, transnational feminists argue that this latest phase of globalization is dependent upon the “recolonization” and appropriation of the labor of not only women but other historically marginalized groups. It is these groups, transnational feminists argue, who supply the flexible, cheap, and underpaid or unpaid labor required for the capitalist world system to function (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Bose and Acosta-Belen 1995; Mies 1998). In their analyses of the intersections between capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and imperialism, transnational feminists have utilized diverse methodological approaches to explore the ways in which unequal economic, social, and political relations are reproduced, maintained, and challenged.

Cultural and Material Analyses

As noted by H.J. Kim-Puri (2005), another key element of transnational feminism is the ways in which it utilizes both cultural and material analyses to demystify the effects of capitalism on women’s everyday lives. In their analyses, transnational feminists have relied upon diverse methodological approaches to critically examine the close links between systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism as these systems shape women’s experiences within the capitalist world order.

For example, in *Scattered Hegemonies*, one of the first anthologies on transnational feminism, authors utilize methods ranging from cultural critique to discourse analysis to articulate “the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, ‘authentic’ forms of

tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-judicial oppression on multiple levels” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994:17). Taken together, the articles in this collection push the analysis of socialist feminists into a transnational context, and demonstrate the need to recognize not one singular system of patriarchy and capitalism but “*multiple, overlapping, and discrete oppressions*” (17, emphasis added).

Other anthologies by transnational feminists have focused more on material rather than cultural analyses and make use of empirical data to document the connections between multiple oppressions that impact women’s day-to-day lives. A collection edited by Lourdes Benería and Shelley Feldman (1992) documents how structural adjustment policies have impacted women’s lives in Latin America, Asia and Africa; another collection edited by Cecilia Menjivar (2003) focuses more explicitly on women’s experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean. Both anthologies document the ways in which development policies have been largely financed through a fund of super-human efforts of poor women. The detailed and nuanced studies illustrate the myriad ways in which structural adjustment—in dismantling public programs—has increased demands on women to provide health care, education, and subsistence for their families. At the same time, women have been forced to seek employment opportunities (often in informal, unprotected, and underpaid sectors of the economy) in order to supplement their families’ incomes.

Recently, transnational feminists have called attention to the importance of bridging cultural and material analyses “to understand how unequal economic, political, and social relations are mediated and reproduced” (Kim-Puri 2005:143). A 2005 special issue of *Gender and Society* calls for the development of a transnational feminist

sociology characterized by analyses of cultural representations and meanings, social structures, and the importance of empirical research. In this issue, authors rely on ethnographic research, interviews, and content and discourse analyses to critically examine the ways in which hegemonic ideologies of patriarchy and racism inform various social and economic structures and processes that shape individuals' day-to-day lives.

It is thus important to note that while transnational feminists are concerned with theorizing the connections between capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, and racism, they are also concerned with *documenting* these connections. Through a wide range of methodological approaches, transnational feminists have demonstrated that the connections between capitalism and various forms of patriarchy and racism are more than theoretical or philosophical constructs; rather, they are powerful ideologies that operate at both the macro and micro levels to shape women's—and men's—everyday experiences and opportunities.

Transnational Organizing

As they document the ways in which capitalism, patriarchy, and racism work together to exploit women, transnational feminists are also concerned with the ways in which women are organizing to combat these various interrelated problems. As noted by Chandra Mohanty, a key project of transnational feminism is to uncover the ways in which women may build a politics of solidarity in shared struggles against capitalist development (2003:230). Mohanty and other transnational feminist theorists have thus called attention to the ways in which women around the world are more than victims of the capitalist world system, but are active agents of social change working both within and beyond their communities to combat the debilitating effects of capitalist

development, or “transnationalism from above” (Mahler 1998: 66-67). In response, women have mobilized at local, national, and transnational levels to generate a counter-hegemonic “transnationalism from below,” a movement in which “the *everyday practices of ordinary people*, their feelings and understandings of their conditions and existence, often modify those very conditions and thereby shape rather than merely reflect new modes of...culture” (Mahler 1998, quoting M.P. Smith 1992). However, transnational feminists theorists also point to the difficulties and complexities that underlie the processes of transnational organizing and building solidarity across highly contested boundaries of nation, race, class, and gender.

In their edited volume on *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty acknowledge both the necessity and difficulty of cross-cultural feminist organizing. In this volume, feminist scholars document how the anti-capitalist, anti-colonial struggles of women in periphery nations are centered around issues of basic survival, as women confront problems of violence, racism, and economic deprivation that have been exacerbated under conditions of capitalist development. As noted by Alexander and Mohanty, the case studies of women’s NGOs in Jamaica, India, Nigeria, Suriname, and elsewhere offer hope in the midst of the “debilitating circumstances” of “transnational capitalist domination” (1997:xxxix).

More recent work has focused on both the successes and conflicts that have emerged from transnational women’s organizing. While these works offer analyses of opportunities for “building bridges,” they also caution against the potential pitfalls of transnational organizing, including the tensions that may arise as a result of class

and/or race dynamics, the activist/academic divide, funding issues, and political repression (Desai 2002; Ferree and Tripp 2006; Moghadam 2005; Peña 2007). For instance, in her examination of women's transnational organizations and networks' involvement in the United Nations conferences, Manisha Desai discusses both the necessity and difficulty in building transnational solidarities between women. She argues that while transnational networks and NGOs have helped women to make demands on national and international institutions concerning economic, political, and environmental rights, they are also "not without problems" (2002:31). In particular, Desai notes that women's transnational NGOs have had to confront problems of racism as well as the reproduction of global inequalities as wealthy elite women often have better access to the social and economic capital necessary to be involved in transnational networks (31-32). Additionally, both Sonia Alvarez (1999) and Milagros Peña (2007) emphasize the problem of funding for women's NGOs. Peña concludes that while NGOs offer women an important way to access social and economic capital in their struggles against violence, worker exploitation, and economic deprivation, they can not be viewed as a "panacea" for the myriad problems of that poor women face under conditions of patriarchal power and capitalist development (2007).

Overall, transnational feminism has offered tremendous contributions to the understanding of the capitalist world system as a system that is predicated on the continuous reproduction and exploitation of various intersecting forms of inequality. Feminist scholars within this field have made use of a wide array of methodological approaches to document both the cultural and material linkages between capitalism, patriarchy, and racism and the ways in which these systems of inequality interact to

impact women's day-to-day lives in regions around the world. These scholars have also documented the ways in which women are organizing across national borders to mobilize against the debilitating effects of the spread of global capitalism, and have highlighted both the successes and challenges that characterize women's transnational organizing. However, in spite of these important contributions, transnational feminists have largely ignored the question of how capitalism, as it is connected to environmental degradation, has impacted the lives and work of women around the world. Additionally, transnational feminists have failed to address questions of why and how women are mobilizing to protect their local environments from the threats posed by capitalist development.

Ecofeminism

Where many transnational feminists have offered only limited analyses of the connections between environmental degradation, capitalism, and patriarchy, ecofeminist scholars have tackled these issues head-on. The roots of ecofeminist theory can be traced to the late 1970s, as women around the world mobilized against environmental issues of toxic waste, deforestation, military and nuclear weapons policy, and domestic and international agricultural development (Sturgeon 1997: 25). Out of women's activism, ecofeminist theory was developed as a way of conceptually linking women and environmental issues; today, ecofeminist theory encompasses a wide range of perspectives that explore both the conceptual and empirical linkages "between the unequal status of women and the life-threatening destruction of the environment" (28). In her book *Ecofeminist Natures*, political theorist Noel Sturgeon identifies at least five ecofeminist "positions," while in *Ecofeminist Philosophy* Karen Warren (2000) identifies ten ecofeminist frameworks including historical, conceptual, empirical, socioeconomic or

materialist, linguistic, symbolic and literary, spiritual, epistemological, political, and ethical ecofeminisms. Some of these frameworks—including symbolic and spiritual ecofeminisms—base their arguments on the notion that women are “naturally” closer to nature due to their biology or roles as mothers and caretakers; not surprisingly, such arguments have been subject to critiques of essentialism, the homogenization of women as a group, romanticism, and a failure to consider the material and historical connections between women and the environment (Agarwal 1992; Banarjee and Bell 2007; Eaton and Lorentzen 2003; Jackson 1993).

Other ecofeminist positions have attempted to explore the material and socially constructed links between women in the environment. Like transnational feminists, materialist ecofeminists build upon socialist feminist critiques of the intersections of capitalism and patriarchy and the ways in which these systems work together to exploit the labor of women and other colonized groups. However, materialist ecofeminists extend this critique to consider the ways in which the *environmentally* destructive aspects of capitalism impact the lives and work of women around the world (Eaton and Lorentzen 2003; Mies 1998; Jaimes-Guerrero 2003; Mies and Shiva 1993; Shiva 1989, 2006; Waters 2003).

The Ecofeminist Critique of Capitalism

Like transnational feminists, materialist ecofeminists focus much of their analyses on the ways in which capitalist development has exacerbated inequalities between and within nations. In their important work *Ecofeminism*—widely considered the “foundational” text of materialist ecofeminism—Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva examine the ways in which development policies advanced by the World Bank and IMF work to exploit not only the labor but the *resources* of formerly colonized periphery nations.

They are particularly critical of the ways in which agricultural development policies have impacted the ability of rural populations to provide for their food base. As Mies and Shiva argue, “‘Development,’ as a culturally biased process destroys wholesome and sustainable lifestyles and instead creates real material poverty, or misery, by denying the means of survival through the diversion of resources to resource-intensive commodity production.” They go on to note that ecologically harmful development policies exacerbate inequalities within a nation as

First, inequalities in the distribution of privilege and power make for unequal access to natural resources...[And] second, government policy enables resource intensive production processes to gain access to the raw materials [land, water, etc.] that many people, especially from the less privileged economic groups, depend upon for their survival (Mies and Shiva 1993:72-73).

Mies and Shiva argue that the ecological burdens of development policies are disproportionately borne by women in rural areas, as women are often responsible for the “reproductive” labor required to feed their families and communities. In rural areas, this labor involves such quotidian tasks as gathering water and firewood, as well as engaging in subsistence farming. This argument is more than theoretical, as estimates from the World Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicate that women account for anywhere between 65-80% of agricultural producers in nations throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America (FAO 1995). In the case of Guatemala, historians and anthropologists alike have confirmed that indigenous women are primarily responsible for all tasks related to food production and meal preparation—from tending crops in families’ subsistence plots to gathering the water and firewood needed for cooking (Carey 2006; Katz 2000a). Thus, as Mies and Shiva argue, the connection between women and the environment is material and rooted in a gendered division of labor that places women in rural areas in the role of unpaid subsistence farmers.

Other ecofeminist scholars have reaffirmed the importance of considering the material connections between women and the environment. In her introduction to a collection of writings by scholars and activists from Latin America, Asia, and Africa, ecofeminist Rosemary Radford Ruether writes that for women in Third World nations, “the interconnection of the impoverishment of women and the impoverishment of the land is not an abstract theory to be expressed in statistics or philosophy....Rather, it is present in the concrete realities one lives and observes every day” (1996: 6). As Ruether notes, “Deforestation [from agricultural development] means women walking twice as far each day to gather fuel for firewood, [while] pollution in shantytowns means children dying from dehydration from unclean water sources” (7).

In Latin America, ecofeminist thought has been largely influenced by liberation theology and its emphasis on working on behalf of the poor. Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebrara makes explicit the connection between environmental degradation and the everyday lives of women living in impoverished conditions, noting that,

Ecofeminism is born of daily life, of day-to-day sharing among people, of enduring together garbage in the streets, bad smells, the absence of sewers and safe drinking water, poor nutrition and inadequate health care. The ecofeminist issue is born of the lack of municipal garbage collection, of the multiplication of rats, cockroaches, and mosquitoes, and of the sores on children’s skin. This is true because it is usually women who have to deal with the daily survival issues: keeping the house clean and feeding and washing the children (1999:2).

Mary Judith Ressa, another theologian who lives and works in Chile, makes a similar argument, and again emphasizes the ways in which an “ecofeminist consciousness” arises from conditions of material and environmental impoverishment. She argues that,

It is important to note that ecofeminist practices usually emerge in a very practical manner from the critical demands of life—the imperatives of a particular historical setting—and not from any set theory. When women protest against the destruction

of their environment, they usually make the connection between what is happening to their surroundings and the fact that they are women....They recognize their vulnerability to increasing environmental disasters and their lack of access to the centers of power responsible for the disasters. This has led many women to critique the present model of development (2006: 46).

Thus, materialist ecofeminists point out that as capitalist development policies have led to an appropriation and exploitation of the natural resources of many nations, they have also led to a deterioration in the conditions of the local environments where women work to provide for themselves and their families. As these ecofeminists point out, the connection between women and the environment is more than a conceptual or philosophical abstraction but is a material reality rooted in the everyday lives and experiences of many women around the world.

Intersectional Analysis

In their various critiques, materialist ecofeminists have also been attentive to the ways in which systems of capitalism and patriarchy intersect with systems of racism and imperialism to exploit not only women's work but the work of other historically marginalized groups. Indeed, as Noël Sturgeon notes, ecofeminists consider all forms of oppression to be interrelated, and so antiracism and anti-imperialism have long been key components of the ecofeminist critique (1997). However, many ecofeminist critiques—particularly those authored by white Western feminists—have remained largely theoretical and philosophical rather than grounded in the material and historical realities of women and other marginalized communities.

The writings of indigenous American women have been particularly important for challenging white ecofeminists to consider the ways in which capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, and racism have all worked to exploit both the land and labor of indigenous groups. As these theorists emphasize, the connection between the degradation and

impoverishment of the environment and the impoverishment of indigenous groups is more than theoretical but is grounded in the histories and everyday realities of marginalized populations. While she does not explicitly identify as ecofeminist, Choctaw scholar Devon Abbott Mihesuah notes the interconnections between racism, imperialism, and women's work in her book *Indigenous American Women*, in which she documents how Native lands and resources have been abused and exploited by U.S. governments and corporations. She says, "From toxic uranium and nuclear waste to PCBs in breast milk to water, air, and land pollution to the extinction of flora and fauna integral to the subsistence and religion of Native peoples, the environments inhabited and utilized by Natives have been abused and appropriated." She goes on to say that "often one finds that leaders of the fights to restore, clean up, and heal are women" (2003: 147).

In recent years, other indigenous American scholars have pushed for an expansion of the ecofeminist framework to examine not only the conceptual but material and historical causes and consequences of environmental degradation. A Native of various tribal backgrounds, Anne Waters emphasizes the need for "coalition" between Native American womanists and ecofeminists "in struggle against ecocide of our planet earth" (2003:ix). Waters goes on to note, however, that traditional ecofeminism as interpreted by white feminists needs to be seriously and significantly expanded to include understandings of how not only gender, but race, nationality, and processes of colonization are all *materially* and *historically* linked to environmental degradation.

Feminist theorist M.A. Jaimes-Guerrero makes a similar claim, calling for a new kind of theoretical framework that draws from ecofeminist theory while taking into

account intersections of gender and race, as well as history when theorizing about environmental degradation and its impact on indigenous communities and other communities of color. Guerrero says that “this intersection among nature, Natives, and women, therefore, also serves as a means of illustrating advanced genocidal agendas, because genocide (the destruction or erosion of a people) is often inextricably linked with ethnocide (the destruction or erosion of their cultures) and with ecocide (the destruction or erosion of their environment)” (2003: 68). As Miheuah, Waters, and Guerrero argue, the abuse and exploitation of indigenous lands have both material and cultural consequences for those groups who have historically depended on the land as a source of material and cultural wealth.

Critiques of Ecofeminism

While socioeconomic ecofeminists have helped to develop an important framework for analyzing the intersections between capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, and racism, their analyses have been limited by a lack of empirical evidence, as well as a tendency to both homogenize and romanticize “Third World” and indigenous women. This latter tendency has been especially problematic for the development of an anti-racist theoretical and political framework for ecofeminism, as it leads to a racist essentializing and stereotyping of Third World and indigenous women as the “ultimate environmentalists” (Agarwal 1992; Sturgeon 1997).

Lack of empirical evidence

The lack of empirical studies has led many to critique the utility of ecofeminist theory in analyzing the myriad problems associated with the global expansion of capitalism. In her important essay on “The Gender and Environment Debate,” Indian

theorist Bina Agarwal summarizes some of the critical weaknesses of ecofeminist theory as follows:

First, it posits 'woman' as a unitary category, and fails to differentiate among women by class, race, ethnicity, and so on.... Second, it locates the domination of women and of nature almost solely in ideology, neglecting the (interrelated) *material* sources of this dominance (based on economic advantage and political power). Third, even in the realm of ideological constructs, it says little...about the social, economic, and political structures within which these constructs are produced and transformed.... Fourth, the ecofeminist argument does not take into account women's *lived material relationship* with nature.... Fifth, those strands of ecofeminism that trace the connection between women and nature to biology may be seen as adhering to a form of essentialism (some notion of a female "essence" which is unchangeable and irreducible). Such a formulation flies in the face of wide-ranging evidence that concepts of nature, culture, gender, and so on, are historically and socially constructed and vary across and within cultures and time periods (1992:122-3, emphasis added).

In recent years, scholars from the fields of anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and environmental politics have echoed Agarwal's criticisms, and have noted in particular the failure of ecofeminism to address transnational issues, economics, and historical processes of colonization and globalization (Banarjee and Bell 2007; Braidotti et al. 2004; Eaton and Lorentzen 2003; Sydee and Beder 2001). As Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen argue, the "largely theoretical" discourses of ecofeminism "do not sufficiently address material exclusions resulting from economic forces," and thus they argue that ecofeminism is limited in its ability "to adequately analyze globalization as an extension of patriarchal capitalism." They go on to note a related weakness in that "while there are many grassroots activist women's organizations resisting the negative effects of globalization, these activities do not provide the primary data for ecofeminist discourse" (2003:4-5). Thus, as these various critics point out, ecofeminism needs to

be expanded to include empirical analyses of the consequences of economic globalization on the lives of women—analyses that, in the words of Chandra Mohanty, work to “demystify capitalism”—as well as analyses of the ways in which women are mobilizing against these consequences.

Homogenizing and romanticizing women

In addition to being critiqued for a scarcity of empirically-based studies, ecofeminism has also been taken to task for a tendency to romanticize and homogenize certain groups of women, particularly Third World and indigenous women. For instance, Vandana Shiva’s interpretation of indigenous Chipko women’s environmental organizing in Southeast Asia has been heavily critiqued for the ways in which it leads to a problematic essentializing of the “indigenous Third World woman” as the “ultimate ecofeminist” (Agarwal 1992; Jackson 1993; Sturgeon 1997). As noted by Noël Sturgeon, white ecofeminists have been particularly guilty for appropriating the experiences of Chipko women and using them as a “stand-in” for all Third World women. Such an appropriation has in turn led to an imperialist essentializing of all Third World women as poor peasants whose subsistence farmwork makes them natural environmentalists (Sturgeon 1997: 124-8). Critics of this interpretation charge that it both stereotypes Third World women and fails to respect the particularities of their lives and choices. These critics also acknowledge that while it is important to recognize the impact of environmental degradation on poor women’s lives, this recognition must be accompanied by an analysis of both the global and local forces of power and privilege—including class, race, and gender relations—which also impinge on women’s lives and impact their work in the environment (Agarwal 1992; Jackson 1993).

In addition to Third World women, indigenous American women have similarly been essentialized as the “ultimate environmentalists” in many popular ecofeminist works (see Plant 1989; Diamond and Orenstein 1990). In these works, the environmental philosophy and activism of indigenous women is appropriated and romanticized by white ecofeminists, who tend to characterize all indigenous people as ecologists. In *Ecofeminist Natures*, Noël Sturgeon writes that it may be true that many indigenous cultures emphasize the importance of having a connection to and respect for the land and living things. However, she also notes that it is problematic for white feminists and environmentalists alike to valorize indigenous people as the “ultimate environmentalists” without a historical analysis of how indigenous struggles on behalf of the environment are also linked to struggles for cultural and material survival (1997:120-4).

Taken together, the cautions against homogenizing and essentializing Third World and indigenous women are particularly salient for this dissertation on indigenous Guatemalan women's environmental organizing. In the various writings of indigenous Guatemalan scholars and activists, the importance of respecting land and nature is a salient theme (Ixcoy 2000; Menchú 1984; Montejo 2000), and the preservation of land and natural resources is an issue around which many Maya mobilize (CUC 2008; Nash 2001; Warren 2000). However, these issues cannot be analyzed in an ahistorical way that fails to take into account the ways in which processes of colonization and capitalist development have worked to progressively destroy the natural resources that rural indigenous populations in Guatemala rely upon for both cultural and material survival. Thus, as M.A. Jamies-Guerrero (2003) argues, any analysis of environmental

degradation and its impact on indigenous women (and men) must consider the ways in which processes of genocide, ethnocide, and ecocide all work together to threaten the survival of indigenous communities.

Towards a Sociological Ecofeminism

This dissertation attempts to bridge the gap between transnational feminism and materialist ecofeminism by making use of a sociologically-oriented ecofeminist framework. This framework draws from both transnational feminism and the more materialist, sociologically-informed branches of ecofeminism; in doing so, it addresses the “environment” gap in transnational feminist scholarship and the lack of empirical analyses in ecofeminist literature. Drawing from both bodies of literature, a sociological ecofeminist framework consists of several interrelated components. First, it provides a historical analysis of how environmental degradation is a progressive process that has rapidly accelerated in this new era of globalization and capitalist development. When relevant, it is important to understand how recent processes may also be a continuation of historical patterns; thus, as this dissertation argues, present-day environmental degradation in Guatemala is not only linked to recent neoliberal development but is also rooted in the country’s colonial history and the appropriation and exploitation of indigenous land and resources.

Second, this ecofeminism is sociological in that it incorporates an intersectional analysis of *structures* of gender, race, class/caste, and nation in analyzing both environmental degradation and environmental activism.³ As structures, gender, race,

³ Throughout this dissertation, I consciously use the term “race” rather than “ethnicity” in reference to indigenous identity. I do so out of a recognition that in Latin America and Guatemala specifically, the use of the term “ethnicity” has historically been associated with an assimilationist paradigm (Wade 1997). I also agree with those indigenous activists in Guatemala who argue that it is important to use the term

and class work together at both micro and macro levels to shape individual and community experiences, opportunities, and constraints (Risman 2004). A sociological ecofeminist analysis thus recognizes that these social markers and the systems of inequality based on them are “fundamentally embedded throughout social life” (Risman 2004:444), and as I argue, fundamentally shape the human-environment relationship.

To understand how gender, race, and class work together to shape the human-environment relationship, it is important for ecofeminist scholars to move beyond philosophical analyses to examine the concrete, material connections between women and the environment. Thus, locally-focused empirical studies comprise a third component of a sociological ecofeminist framework. However, I also agree with transnational feminists who argue for the importance of situating local studies within broader historical and global contexts (Ferree and Tripp 2005; Mohanty 2003; Naples and Desai 2003). By situating the local within the historical/global, a sociological ecofeminist analysis allows us to “read up the ladder of privilege” to make visible—and accountable—those forces that are impacting the day-to-day lives of countless women and men in various communities around the globe (Mohanty 2003: 223).

A fourth feature of this framework is that it does not reduce members of impacted communities to mere victims caught up in a tangled web of history, processes of globalization, and various systems of economic and social oppression, but shows the ways in which individuals exercise their *agency* to resist and challenge these forces. Like transnational feminism, sociological ecofeminism thus examines both the opportunities and challenges presented when women mobilize across borders of race,

“race” in order to highlight the country’s history of the racial oppression of indigenous groups (Cojti 1999; Colop 1991).

class, gender, and nation in struggles for social and environmental causes. I also argue that it is important for ecofeminist scholars to pay attention to different strategies employed in cross-border mobilization. Specifically, I agree with Milagros Peña (2007) and Papusa Molina (1990) who take note of the difference between coalitions and alliances. As Molina notes (1990), coalitions involve “temporary strategizing” to achieve specific goals or objectives; once these objectives are met, coalitions may disband (329). Peña (2007) argues that alliances, in contrast, have greater potential, as they are formed around commitments to individuals and “shared vision[s] of how society can be improved,” a vision that is “sustained throughout the duration of a movement and among networks of committed activists” (25). I argue that it is important for ecofeminist scholars to pay attention to these and other forms of mobilization when examining women’s environmental activism.

Finally, as this dissertation is focused on the ways in which indigenous Kaqchikel women are mobilizing against environmental degradation, it is also careful to acknowledge the material and cultural value of the land and environment for this indigenous group without essentializing them as the “ultimate environmentalists” or ecofeminists. A central argument of this dissertation is that the preservation of the land is more than a romantic ideal, but a crucial project that is central to the survival of indigenous communities who have historically related to the land as a source of subsistence and a place of work. Thus, indigenous women’s activism on behalf of the environment should be understood as rooted in a necessity to preserve a food base that sustains the women, their families, and their communities, as well as a necessity to prevent the ongoing degradation of the fields where they farm and work.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters that address the various interrelated components of a sociological ecofeminist framework. Chapter 2 offers a historical overview of the connections between colonization, globalization, and environmental degradation in Guatemala, highlighting the ways in which these processes have impacted the country's indigenous populations. It is within this larger socio-historical context that the present-day environmental activism of indigenous women is situated. This historical background also allows us to connect indigenous women's environmental activism to a history of indigenous resistance to colonization and globalization in Guatemala.

Chapter 3 explains the methods used to explore the motivations and strategies that guide indigenous women's environmental activism. This project is a multi-method study that relies on oral histories with indigenous women, observational and archival research, as well as interviews with AIR staff and various Guatemalan government officials. As this project is informed by feminist theories, it is also guided by feminist methodology. Specifically, this is a feminist action research project that connects the present study directly to the work of AIR and other environmental organizations, as well as to government programs and policy.

Chapters 4 through 7 present the results of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 draw from oral history interviews, observations, and archival research to examine the ways in which gender, race, and class shape indigenous women's experiences of—and responses to—local environmental degradation. In Chapter 4, I examine how indigenous women experience interrelated processes of neoliberal development and environmental degradation in their everyday lives and work, and how these experiences

have led them to an awareness of environmental problems in their communities. In Chapter 5, I draw from indigenous women's oral histories to examine how the women articulate their motivations for becoming environmental activists, and how they connect their local activism to larger social movements.

Chapters 6 and 7 bridge the gap between theory, research, practice, and policy. Chapter 6 draws from interviews with both indigenous women and AIR staff to explore both the difficulties and rewards in transnational environmental organizing. Here, I use the case of indigenous women's work with AIR to highlight both the necessity and difficulty of organizing across borders of gender, race, class, and nationality. While such work may be challenging, it is also vital to the formation of a broad-based environmental movement. Chapter 7 links the stories of indigenous women and AIR to environmental policy work. Here, I draw from interviews with government officials to examine some of the problematic assumptions that hinder the efficacy of Guatemala's current environmental programs. I also draw from the narratives of indigenous women and AIR staff to both critique Guatemala's current policy and also to offer practical suggestions for improvement.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the main arguments presented in the preceding chapters. I argue that while the story of indigenous women's activism through AIR is unique in many aspects, it also offers important lessons in regards to understanding the links between gender, race, class, nationality, development, and the environment. More importantly, this story also highlights both the possibility and necessity of mobilizing across borders in a shared struggle to protect the environment.

CHAPTER 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE “THREE CYCLES OF CONQUEST” AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN THE GUATEMALAN HIGHLANDS

On September 8, 2009, Guatemalan president Alvaro Colom declared a state of “national emergency” in response to a widespread hunger crisis throughout the country. At the time of his declaration, it was estimated that 54,000 families in Guatemala were experiencing critical food shortages (AP 2009). While the crisis was particularly severe in 2009, malnutrition is not a new problem in Guatemala. The United Nations lists Guatemala as having the fourth highest rate of *chronic* malnutrition in the world and the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean. Rural and indigenous residents are particularly vulnerable; UNICEF estimates that 80% of the indigenous community suffers from malnutrition (UNICEF 2009). In his 2009 speech, Colom acknowledged that the hunger crisis was due in large part to environmental problems that had led to crop failure, as well as “a history of unfairness that has made Guatemala live since long ago with high and shameful poverty levels, extreme poverty and undernutrition” (quoted in AP 2009).

While Colom alluded to the connections between hunger, environmental degradation, the current state of social and economic inequality in Guatemala, and the country’s long history of “unfairness,” he did not make these connections explicit. Nonetheless, in order to understand current social and environmental problems in Guatemala, it is important to elucidate their historical development. In this chapter, I outline some of the major environmental problems that exist in Guatemala today, with a particular focus on the western highland region where AIR works and where there is a large concentration of indigenous Maya. I argue that modern day problems of deforestation and soil erosion are rooted in history and directly linked to the colonization and recolonization of indigenous land

and resources. These problems have both material and cultural consequences for Maya populations, who have long depended upon the land and farming for food, shelter, and income.

In Guatemala, indigenous populations have survived 500 years of conquest, colonization, and oppression. Historian W. George Lovell (1988) organizes this period into “three cycles of conquest” that include conquest by imperial Spain, conquest by local and international capital, and conquest by state terror. I argue that in all three cycles, the appropriation and exploitation of indigenous land and resources by Spanish—and later ladino—elites were often key parts of campaigns designed to eliminate or force the assimilation of indigenous populations. These “cycles of conquest” laid the foundation for many of the environmental problems that exist in Guatemala today.

In recent years, indigenous populations have faced a new threat in the form of global capitalist expansion. I argue that this latest phase of capitalist development—spurred by neoliberal development policies—constitutes a fourth cycle of conquest as it further degrades the land that indigenous populations have long depended upon for their material and cultural survival.

It is within this larger socio-historical context that I situate the present-day environmental activism of indigenous women. As their activism protects and preserves the land that is central to the survival of indigenous communities in Guatemala, their efforts must be recognized not only as environmental activism, but activism on behalf of the larger indigenous community as well.

Environmental Degradation in the Western Highlands: Material and Cultural Consequences

In recent years, President Colom and other Guatemalan government officials have acknowledged the many material consequences of environmental degradation, citing it as a

causal factor in the food shortages facing many Guatemalans. For indigenous Mayan Guatemalans, environmental degradation has both material *and* cultural consequences, as it threatens not only their food base but the land and nature that are central to the Mayan “cosmovision” and culture. In this section I highlight some of the major environmental problems in the Western highlands of Guatemala, a region where most of the nation’s Mayan populations are concentrated (and also the region where AIR has most of its reforestation projects). In the highlands, deforestation and soil erosion pose grave threats to the lives and livelihoods of indigenous residents who depend upon the land for material and cultural survival.

Since 1991, the Alliance for International Reforestation has worked with over 2,500 farmers in 75 communities in Guatemala. All of these communities are located in the Western highlands, primarily in the departments of Chimaltenango and Sololá (see Figure 2-1). The Western highlands (*altiplano occidental*) are comprised of a patchwork of mountain ranges and volcanoes and include the departments of Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Quiché, Sololá, and Totonicapán. This region is characterized by steep and rugged terrain, with altitudes ranging from 1,600 to 3,400 meters above sea level. The climate is moderate and well-suited to agriculture; temperatures range from an average of 50 degrees Fahrenheit during the cold and rainy season of May through October to 90 degrees during the dry season of November through April (Hough, et al. 1982).

Figure 2-1. Relief map of Guatemala, with departments of Chimaltenango and Sololá (where AIR works) highlighted. Source: www.reliefweb.int



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In regards to demographics, the Western highlands are a largely indigenous region. The ethnic makeup of the highlands reflects a long history of the colonization, displacement, and resettlement of Guatemala's numerous indigenous groups. Today, there are twenty-one recognized indigenous Maya ethno-linguistic groups in Guatemala. According to official government statistics, they comprise approximately 40% of the population of Guatemala and they are primarily concentrated in the mountainous departments of the Western and Central highlands (INE 2002).

Statistics from the most recent Guatemalan census (2002) estimate that between 54 and 98.3% of the residents of Western highland departments are indigenous. Most of the indigenous residents live in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty, on less than \$2 per day (INE 2002; see Table 2-1).

Table 2-1. Indigenous populations in highland departments. Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE Guatemala. 2002.

Department	Total Population	Indigenous Population	% Total Population is Indigenous	% Indigenous Pop. living in poverty
Chimaltenango	444,133	352,903	79.5	69.0
Huehuetenango	846,544	551,295	65.1	84.3
Quetzaltenango	624,716	338,055	54.1	55.0
Quiché	655,510	581,996	88.8	84.4
Sololá	307,661	296,710	96.4	77.4
Totonicapán	339,254	333,481	98.3	72.0

The high incidence of poverty in highland communities means that most residents are dependent upon subsistence farming for survival. In these communities, farming is a year-round activity and a way of life that has been upheld for generations. For centuries, indigenous communities in Guatemala have relied upon corn and beans as a primary food source. Archaeologists and forensic anthropologists have discovered that

corn constituted approximately 70% of the Mayan diet in the 15th and 16th centuries, and the crop continues to remain a staple within Mayan communities (FAO 2003; Flannery 1982; White 1999). Corn also figures prominently in Mayan cosmology; according to the creation story of the 16th century Popul Vuh, humans were molded by the gods from corn dough. Today, many Maya still consider corn and farming as sacred, and it is not uncommon for Maya households to hold religious ceremonies during times of both planting and harvesting (Fischer 2001; Hamilton and Fischer 2005; Molesky-Poz 2006).

However, as the food crisis of 2009 made painfully clear, it has become increasingly difficult for the largely Mayan rural population to uphold a subsistence way of life. This is due in large part to Guatemala's highly unequal land distribution system, which has been connected to problems of overfarming and environmental degradation in the country. According to the UN, the Gini coefficient for land distribution in Guatemala is 0.85, one of the highest rates of inequality in the world (Wittman and Geisler 2005:6). In 1979 it was estimated that 2% of agricultural producers cultivated 65 percent of all arable land, while farms smaller than 3.5 hectares comprised 78% of all farms yet cultivated only 10% of arable land (DGE 1979).⁴ Recent statistics indicate that this inequality has persisted throughout the years: according to the Guatemalan Ministry of Agriculture, less than 1% of the population owns approximately 70% of all arable land, while 96% of the population cultivates 17% of arable land (Wittman and Geisler 2005; Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006). The UN estimates that over 500,000 rural families live below the level needed for adequate subsistence (MINUGUA 2000).

⁴ 1979 was the last year that Guatemala took an official agricultural census. More recent figures are estimates provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Grains, and Food (MAGA).

The lack of available farmland has in turn led to increasing environmental degradation throughout the highland region. Small plots of land become increasingly smaller as they are divided up and passed down from one generation to the next; thus *minifundias* become *microfundias*. The lack of land, in combination with population pressures, means that small-scale farmers can no longer practice traditional methods of shifting cultivation. Additionally, an overintensification of farming (both subsistence and commercial) has led to increased deforestation and soil erosion in the region. In 2007 the Guatemalan government declared deforestation and soil erosion as “major concerns” in highland departments (CODEDE 2007). Currently, Guatemala has one of the world’s highest rates of deforestation, having lost 17.1% of its forest cover from 1990 through 2005 (FAO 2005). A large portion of this forest cover is lost in highland regions, where an estimated 82,000 hectares is deforested annually (INAB 2001).

The lack of trees on steep mountain slopes has in turn led to problems of soil erosion and mudslides. The severity of these interrelated problems was made tragically evident in October 2005, when Hurricane Stan brought extensive rains and flooding to much of Guatemala. The flooding triggered massive mudslides in the departments of Quiché, Sololá, and Chimaltenango, destroying housing and infrastructure and causing over 1,500 deaths. The Guatemalan Ministry of Agriculture (MAGA) assessed the immediate damage at \$46 million, with small-scale farmers particularly affected (American Red Cross 2005). This tragedy was repeated in May 2010, when tropical storm Agatha made landfall in Guatemala. The rains and flooding once again triggered mudslides in highland departments, killing at least 179 people and leaving an estimated 42,000 people homeless (Schmidt 2010). In addition to the damage done to shelter and infrastructure, thousands of rural families lost the crops that they depended upon for

subsistence. An official with Guatemala's National Institute of Forestry (INAB) later said that there was "no doubt" that deforestation was a precipitating factor in the widespread mudslides (personal communication).

In addition to threatening farmers' fields and crops, soil erosion and mudslides also lead to sediment-clogged rivers and other waterways. The lack of clean, free-flowing water also impacts the everyday lives and livelihoods of rural residents, and particularly women, who have primary responsibility for everyday domestic tasks like washing laundry and dishes (Carey 2006; Hallum-Montes 2009).

For Mayan communities, environmental degradation constitutes an assault not only on their land, crops, and resources, but on their culture as well. As primarily agricultural communities, the Maya have long valued the land and nature as central to their survival (CNOOC 2006; CUC 2008; Menchú 1984; Molesky-Poz 2006). The Maya "cosmovision" emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of humanity and nature. The National Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CNOOC), an "umbrella organization" comprised of the largest indigenous organizations in Guatemala, describes the Mayan cosmovision as consisting of "two essential terms":

1. Cosmos, which means the universe, the world, the moon, the stars, the sun, fire, the earth, the mountains, the rivers, the animals, the trees, and all that exists;
- and 2. Vision, which refers to the way in which we see and explain existence, change, and the meaning of one's personal life, the collective life of human beings, and the life of all that exists in nature (CNOOC 2006: 34-5).

The cosmovision emphasizes "the concept of being human as an integral part of nature and not outside of it," and considers any assault on the natural world as an assault on the indigenous community (CNOOC 2006:36-37). The cultural importance placed on the land and environment is directly tied to the agricultural way of life that has been upheld in Maya communities for centuries. It has been pointed out that Maya have a long

history of sustainably managing their land and resources, and for honoring the earth as sacred in their spiritual practice (Colop 1991; CUC n.d.). Today, Maya spiritual leaders estimate that between 40 and 50% of Maya residents continue to practice a form of ritual honoring the land, often blending indigenous ritual with Christian ritual in their practice (Molesky-Poz 2006). As Jean Molesky-Poz (2006) observes, these rituals, while diverse in practice, share the theme of acknowledging and honoring the reciprocity between humans and the earth.

Many of Guatemala's major indigenous organizations recognize the links between the protection of the environment and the survival of the indigenous community, and make *la defensa de la Madre Naturaleza y la Madre Tierra* (the defense of Mother Nature and Mother Earth) a central part of their activist platform (CNOC 2006; CUC 2008, 2007; Waqib'Kej 2010). These organizations emphasize the importance of protecting and defending *Madre Tierra* as the source of both the material and cultural survival of Mayan communities. As the Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) argues, it is imperative to "recover and defend Mother Nature" in order to ensure the continued survival of indigenous communities in Guatemala (2007:2).

Overall, the various interrelated forms of environmental degradation that I have outlined above pose threats to both the material and cultural survival of the indigenous community in Guatemala. While it is true that problems of deforestation, soil erosion, and degraded waterways have been exacerbated in recent years, it must also be pointed out that they are rooted in history. Principally, the colonization of Guatemala and the ongoing appropriation of indigenous land and resources are important causal factors that have led to present-day social and environmental problems. In the next

section, I provide a brief overview of the “three cycles of conquest” of Guatemala. In each cycle, the appropriation and destruction of indigenous land were key components of campaigns designed to eliminate indigenous populations. In many ways, these campaigns laid the foundations for the environmental problems that exist in Guatemala today.

Conquest by Spain

The colonization of the land and indigenous peoples of Guatemala began in 1524, with the arrival of Spanish forces led by Pedro de Alvarado. From the outset, the campaign against indigenous populations was brutal and unrelenting. Alvarado employed a policy of “*tierra arrasada*” (scorched earth) in his colonization campaign, burning indigenous settlements that refused to comply with Spanish demands (Colop 1991; Warren 1998). As Sam Colop (1991) points out, the Spanish recognized the importance of the land to Maya life and culture, and so made concerted efforts to destroy fields, crops, and forests in their efforts to wipe out the Maya civilization. While many Maya communities resisted Spanish efforts and fought back, decades of warfare and forced assimilation—and the ravages of diseases like smallpox, measles, and mumps—led to the decimation of indigenous populations. Historians estimate that the entire Maya population in Guatemala declined between 50 and 80% from 1520 through 1600 (Lovell 1988; MacLeod 2007).

While Spain was motivated in part by religious mandates, it was also motivated by a desire to expand its territory and economic empire. Early colonizers found Guatemala to be an ideal place to cultivate sugarcane and indigo, two valuable crops in the world market at the time (Lovell 2005; MacLeod 2007). Chronicler and conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castiollo succinctly summarized the goals of the early colonizers when he

wrote, “We came here to serve God and the King, and also to get rich” (quoted in Elliot 1976:65).

In order to secure the land needed to cultivate export crops, the Spanish forced many Maya from their traditional land and communities, which were dispersed throughout Guatemala. The Maya who were not killed by war, disease, or forced relocation were made to live in small, concentrated settlements known as *congregaciones*. In addition to making land available for cultivation, these settlements also helped the Spanish by providing them with a means of more effectively centralizing and controlling indigenous populations. As Lovell (1988) notes, for the Spanish, “congregación promoted more effective civil administration, facilitated the conversion of Indians to Christianity, and created centralized pools of labor that could be drawn upon in myriad ways to meet imperial objectives” (30). At the time, these “imperial objectives” mainly entailed using the residents of congregaciones as slaves on the large indigo and sugarcane *haciendas* established on the southern and eastern coasts of Guatemala.

Here, it is important to note that initially the Spanish were not interested in all areas of Guatemala: while lands in the south and eastern parts of the country were ideal for cultivating indigo and sugarcane—and later cacao and coffee—the frigid highlands to the north and west were of little interest. Thus, many Maya fled to the highlands to avoid being killed or enslaved (Lovell 2005; 1988). For Maya in the southern and eastern coasts, where the Spanish presence was strong, the process of forced assimilation—through the encroachment of Spanish culture and the the widespread rape of indigenous women—was strongest. Today, the southern and eastern parts of Guatemala reflect the colonial “mixing” of Spanish and indigenous populations, as the

populations of these areas are predominantly *mestiza/o* or *ladina/o* (CUC, n.d.; Lovell 1988).

In 1550 indigenous slaves in Guatemala were freed by royal decree; however, the Spanish still needed indigenous labor to cultivate profitable export crops. Thus, the hacienda slave economy was replaced by an equally exploitative and patriarchal system of *repartimiento*, in which indigenous populations were allowed to remain on their lands as long as they provided wealthy landowners or *padrones* with free labor for a number of months every year. During these months, Maya workers migrated from their lands to live on Spanish-owned haciendas where they worked and were supervised by a field boss, or *padron*. The *padrones* controlled nearly every aspect of life for the Maya laborers, from the amount of work they did, to their living arrangements and family life (Lovell 1988; Lovell and Lutz 2000).

Throughout the next few centuries, coffee gradually replaced indigo as Guatemala's main export crop. This new crop was easily farmed not only along the coast but also in mountainous regions; thus, Spanish landowners began to encroach upon indigenous land in Central and Western Guatemala. In this way the pattern of Spanish acquisition of indigenous land, resources, and labor continued well into the 17th and 18th centuries (Cambranes 1985; Lovell 2005; McCreery 1994).

Conquest by Capitalism: the Rise of Big Agriculture

In 1821 Guatemala gained its independence from Spain and was governed by a series of conservative regimes until 1870. These regimes, as noted by Lovell (1988), favored "maintaining Spanish derived institutions that preserved the colonial status quo" (37). The "status quo" consisted of a landowning elite whose wealth was primarily derived from exporting crops—particularly coffee—to Spain. Throughout the last half of

the 19th century, coffee—and finding land on which to cultivate it—became particularly important for Guatemala’s elite. As one indigenous authority in Cobán lamented in 1862, ““After having bought land in this same city, the foreigners [Spanish] have also taken much more . . . we cannot even plant a kernel of land because they have taken the best land” (quoted in Cambranes 1985:76).

In 1873 a liberal administration headed by Justo Ruffino Barrios was elected. This administration sought to promote “progress” through a series of liberal market reforms that included the expropriation of communal indigenous lands in the fertile lowlands, the subsidization of domestic and foreign operators, and the development of an advertising campaign in Europe to attract “modern farmers with capital” (Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006:26-7). As noted by Carol Smith (1984), it was the reforms implemented by the Barrios administration that unleashed on Guatemala “the full force of capitalist development” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (203). The world market demand for coffee was great and greatly benefited Guatemala’s landowners: by 1889, Guatemala was the world’s fourth largest exporter of coffee, with coffee accounting for 96 percent of national export earnings (Bulmer-Thomas 1987).

As coffee became increasingly important for profit, more indigenous land was appropriated to cultivate it. During this period, the government divided and sold parcels of land classified as *baldía* or “empty”—even though it had been used by indigenous communities for centuries for seasonal cultivation of subsistence crops (Davis 1997; McCreery 1994). Between 1871 and 1879, 155 parcels of *terrenos baldíos*, measuring almost 75,000 hectares, were awarded to private coffee entrepreneurs. These lands were subsequently cleared and used for farmland (Davis 1997:10). Later, in 1894, an

agrarian law was passed to encourage settlement and coffee production in the Guatemalan highlands. This law extended the practice of dividing and selling land to the western and northern highland region. Thus, as noted by McCreery (1994), indigenous Guatemalans found themselves “priced out of the market for land they had always imagined was theirs” (183). Between 1896 and 1921, a total of 3,600 landowners acquired 16% of Guatemala’s national territory, in both the lowlands and the lower altitudes of the highlands. This land was subsequently cleared and used for either agriculture or pasture (McCreery 1994; 1990).

During this period, Guatemala was governed by a number of political leaders who were also military officers—typically high-ranking generals in the Guatemalan army. These leaders, called *caudillos*, or “strongmen,” made use of the military to force poor farmers off their land. Thus, even though indigenous farmers resisted the takeover of their lands, in most instances this resistance proved futile when confronted with the strength of the Guatemalan army. Overall, it is estimated that in the last half of the 19th century, Maya communities in Guatemala lost half of the lands they owned during the colonial period (McCreery 1990; Palma Murga 1997; Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006).

This period of land takeover also coincided with a period of increased deforestation in Guatemala, on the part of both wealthy landowners and small-scale indigenous farmers. In order to make way for coffee plantations, the landowning elites cleared large swaths of land once used as communal forest by indigenous communities. This process in turn pushed indigenous groups further to the highland regions, where they also had to clear land in order farms subsistence plots (Grandin 2000). Taken

together, both of these processes led to high rates of deforestation that concerned local and national authorities alike; it has been estimated that approximately 80,000 hectares of land was cleared annually from 1880-1900 (Cabrera Gaillard 1996). In 1891 a national forest code was enacted that declared forests to be “an integral part of the wealth of the nation,” and forbade the cutting of young trees and ordered municipalities to carry out reforestation projects (quoted in Grandin 2000:150). While predominantly indigenous municipalities strictly followed the code, it was less stringently enforced amongst ladino elites (Grandin 2000).

Guatemala’s incorporation into the world market continued into the twentieth century when greater numbers of multi-national agribusinesses (many of which were based in the United States) entered the country and took control of land to grow export crops. The largest of these companies was United Fruit, which set up operations in Guatemala in 1901 and worked closely with the Guatemalan government to fund improvements in infrastructure for the country. In return, the Guatemalan government allocated more land for agricultural production to United Fruit. This land was given at the expense of rural small-scale farmers, both ladino and Maya (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006). Thus, the influx of agribusinesses further contributed to the appropriation, privatization, and deforestation of land in Guatemala; by 1924, the Guatemalan government had ceded a total of 188,339 hectares to United Fruit alone (Thiesenhausen 1995).

It is important to note that the capitalist-driven exploitation of indigenous groups and their lands did not go uncontested. The first half of the twentieth century was marked by a series of revolts and uprisings of both Maya and ladino farmers protesting

government and corporate land takeovers. These protests were often met with violent repression on the part of the Guatemalan military and police. However, after a series of revolts in the early 1940s, a democratic administration led by Juan Jose Arévalo was elected in 1945. He was later succeeded by Jacobo Arbenz, who led from 1951 until 1954. This period, referred to in Guatemala as the “Ten Years of Spring,” saw the institution of numerous social reforms, including an enormous land distribution campaign in which uncultivated lands were expropriated from elite landowners and international agribusinesses. In 1953 and 1954, the Arbenz administration issued 1,002 expropriation decrees for a total of 603,616 hectares of land—of which 146,000 hectares were from United Fruit. This land was subsequently redistributed to 100,000 peasant families (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Thiesenhausen 1995; Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006).

Response to these socialist reforms was swift and severe. As noted by Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka (2006), the reforms were opposed by landed elites, the Catholic Church, the middle-class business sector, foreign plantation owners, expropriated landowners, as well as the U.S. government wary of any “Communist threat” (29-30). In 1954 a CIA-backed military coup ousted President Arbenz and forced his resignation. The overthrow of the democratic administration, and the re-institution of military rule under caudillo leader General Ydigoras Fuentes led to the migration of several thousands of Guatemalans to neighboring countries such as Honduras and Mexico (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). Following this overthrow, Fuentes worked with both the military and ladino elites to nullify the majority of expropriation decrees. His administration then proceeded to institute a “top-down” redistributive land reform, in

which small-scale farmers were allotted only the smallest of land plots that failed to meet the subsistence requirements of their families. By the time of the 1964 agricultural census, farms smaller than the 7 hectares required for subsistence constituted 87.5% of all farms in Guatemala and cultivated only 18.6 percent of all arable land, while 2.09% of farms cultivated 62.5% of arable land (Hough et al. 1982, see Table 2-2).

Table 2-2. Land distribution in Guatemala, 1950-1979. Source: Hough, et al. 1982.⁵

Size (in hectares)	Percentage of Farms			Percentage Farm Area		
	1950	1964	1979	1950	1964	1979
<0.7	21.30	20.39	31.36	0.77	0.95	1.33
0.7-1.4	26.26	23.64	22.83	2.54	2.77	2.75
1.4-3.5	28.62	30.94	24.19	5.70	7.85	6.40
3.5-7.0	12.17	12.47	9.74	5.32	7.04	5.74
7-22.4	7.72	8.87	7.60	8.36	12.95	11.91
22.4-44.8	1.76	1.59	1.72	5.10	5.90	6.77
44.8-450	1.86	1.88	2.31	21.86	26.53	30.66
450-900	0.16	0.13	0.17	9.52	10.03	12.81
900-2,250	0.10	0.07	0.07	13.32	11.22	12.00
2,250-4,500	0.03	0.01	0.01	8.81	4.92	5.43
4,500-9,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.28	5.17	2.12
>9,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	13.43	4.67	2.05

Between 1964 and 1979, the level of inequality in Guatemala's land distribution increased. In 1964, the Gini coefficient⁶ for land distribution in Guatemala was reported to be 0.824; by 1979 it was 0.851, higher than any other nation in Latin America (von Braun, Hotchkiss, and Inmink 1989:21).

Conquest by State Terror: the Continued Destruction of Land and People

The next three decades were particularly brutal for the indigenous populations of Guatemala. Following the military coup, a number of junior officers and civilians

⁵ Note that 7 hectares is required for adequate subsistence for a family of four (Sandoval 1987; Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006).

⁶ The Gini coefficient ranges from a scale of 0 (perfect equality), to 1 (perfect inequality).

mobilized in 1960 in an attempt to overthrow Fuentes. This revolt—el Movimiento Revolucionario de Noviembre—was ultimately crushed by the army; however, its original members went on to mobilize a number of guerilla armies, including the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP). For the next 36 years, these groups were in armed insurrection against the Guatemalan government and military, and dedicated themselves to fighting on behalf of the rural poor of Guatemala (La Feber 1993).

Guatemala's civil war marks the third period of conquest of indigenous populations (Lovell 1988). During this time, the Guatemalan government targeted those populations it felt presented a "Communist threat." As noted by Victoria Sanford (2003), this meant that any community that was predominantly poor and appeared to be organizing or protesting in any way was a potential "threat." Thus, according to Sanford, the fact that indigenous populations constituted the majority of the poor led to the conflation of ethnic, class, and political identities; in the eyes of the Guatemalan government and military, *any* impoverished indigenous person was a potential Communist.

In this way, the Guatemalan state's war on leftist groups became a war against indigenous populations. By the official end of the war in 1996, 626 Maya communities had been burned to the ground; an estimated 200,000 people had been killed or "disappeared;" and 1.5 million more had been displaced (CEH 1999). The fact that all communities targeted for destruction had been Maya, and the fact that 83% of those killed were Maya, have led many to conclude that what may have begun as a civil war turned into a systematic campaign of genocide on the part of the Guatemalan government and military, who were deemed responsible for over 93% of the casualties (CEH 1999; Churchill 1998; Falla 1993; Sanford 2003).

The destruction of indigenous land and crops was a key part of the military's counterinsurgency campaign of 1981-84. During this time, under the command of Generals Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt, the army employed a scorched earth strategy (not unlike the one employed by conquistador Pedro de Alvarado some 450 years earlier) (Manz 1988). This campaign was concentrated in the central and western highland region, where there was a large indigenous population. In the department of El Quiché, there were at least 344 recorded massacres, while in the smaller departments of Chimaltenango and Sololá there were 70 and 16 massacres, respectively (CEH 1999). Following the destruction of communities, the army oftentimes would burn much of the surrounding fields and forest areas, in an effort to track and kill any survivors (Sanford 2003). In the highland region the army's scorched earth campaign had a devastating impact not only on rural populations but the land where they lived and farmed. A recent study indicates that the amount of "heavy vegetation" in the department of El Quiché declined by nearly 50 percent between 1979 and 1986 (Schimmer 2006).

As noted by Beatriz Manz (1988), the army's brutal counterinsurgency campaign had immediate and long-term consequences: faced with the destruction of their communities, fields, and forests which they depended upon for food, firewood and other resources, many indigenous residents fled. From 1980 to 1983, there was a mass exodus of an estimated 1 million people from the highland Guatemala (Lovell 1988). The continued tradition of displacement and migration was especially traumatic for Maya populations, whose religion and culture emphasize the importance of attachment to place and cultivation of one's land; indeed, many scholars have characterized

traditional Maya religions as “place based” religions. Thus, displacement for many Maya groups was more than traumatic; it was sacrilegious (Stone 2000; Montejo 2000).

The most violent period of the war coincided with the Guatemalan state’s implementation of neoliberal development policies. Like the rest of Latin America, Guatemala adopted the neoliberal model of development in an effort to correct trade deficits brought about by decades of import-subsidized industrialization (ISI). In sum, the policies included measures to drastically cut or eliminate public spending, ease trade restrictions, lower import tariffs, and privatize land and resources (Franko 2007). Some scholars have argued that the state, anticipating popular protest against these measures, sought to disrupt or crush potential revolts before they had a chance to take hold (Loucky and Moors 2000; Lovell 1988; Sanford 2003). In this way the Guatemalan state “reasserted its hegemony by resorting to premeditated acts of terror” (Lovell 1988:45). In many ways this third cycle of conquest constituted an effort to protect capitalist aims; as Lovell (1988) argues, in its effort to promote “a certain kind of capitalist development,” the Guatemalan state “declared war on its own citizenry, especially its indigenous peoples” (45).

In 1996, under pressure from the international community, leaders of the Guatemalan government, the revolutionary armies, and the United Nations met to draft and sign a series of peace accords, bringing an official end to the civil war that had ravaged the nation for the past four decades. As noted by Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka (2006), the accords recognized that both “the historical social exclusion of Guatemala’s indigenous and campesino rural populations and the unequal distribution of land were not only root causes of the civil conflict, but also primary obstacles to long-term national

development and a lasting peace” (23). Land reform was therefore a key component of the agreement. However, rather than promoting government-assisted land reform that led to the redistribution of idle lands, the accords call for a “market-based approach” that includes measures to strengthen property rights (regulation policies), register land titles, implement taxes on large-scale farms, improve financial mechanisms to facilitate access to land (land purchase), provide technical assistance and capacity building, provide complimentary social and economic investment, as well as protect the environment. However, the accords do not provide measures for the expropriation and redistribution of idle land to small-scale farmers. Furthermore, the existing measures have not been largely enforced by the Guatemalan government (Garoz and Gauster 2005; Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006).

In addition to the peace accords, in 1996 the Guatemalan government also ratified Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization. This convention recognized the social and cultural rights of indigenous people, as well as their rights to land and natural resources to which they had “traditionally” had access (Deere and León 2001). As noted by Deere and León (2001), Convention 169 recognizes that “collective land rights are the basis of indigenous cultural identity and are necessary to the very survival of indigenous people” (231). Articles 14 and 15 of the Convention state that,

The rights of ownership and possession of [indigenous] peoples concerned over the lands which they traditionally occupy shall be recognised. In addition, measures shall be taken in appropriate cases to safeguard the right of the peoples concerned to use lands not exclusively occupied by them, but to which they have traditionally had access for their subsistence and traditional activities.... The rights of the peoples concerned to the natural resources pertaining to their lands shall be specially safeguarded. These rights include the right of these peoples to participate in the use, management and conservation of these resources (International Labor Organization, Convention 169).

Despite the seemingly progressive measures taken by the Guatemalan government to recognize the importance of protecting the land and resources of indigenous peoples, there are many critics who allege that the government has only pledged nominal support of indigenous peoples' rights, without truly trying to transform social and institutional arrangements (Garoz and Gauster 2005; Palma Murga 1997; Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006). The Coordination of Organizations of Mayan Peoples (COPMAGUA) issued a particularly strong critique of the peace accords' market-based approach to land reform, arguing that "this agenda breathes fresh life into structures inherited from the colonial period, and fails to challenge the overriding interests of large landowners" (quoted in Palma Murga 1997). In their review of the 1996 accords, Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka (2006) reach a similar conclusion, stating that the agreements "do not offer a strategic, long-term plan for resolving rural development problems and the inequitable system of land concentration in Guatemala" (38). It would seem that until Guatemala makes serious efforts to recognize and redress the historical roots of its current inequalities, indigenous populations and their lands and resources will continue to be subject to the political will of the national and international power elite.

A Fourth Cycle? Neoliberal Development and the Continued Degradation of the Environment

While the state-sanctioned terror of Guatemala's civil war was officially ended in 1996, in recent years indigenous groups have faced a new threat to their livelihoods in the form of global capital expansion. Mechanisms designed to promote capitalist growth and free trade—first implemented in the neoliberal policies of the late 1970s and more recently with the ratification of CAFTA in 2005—have contributed to the

degradation of the environment that indigenous populations depend upon for food and income. Free trade policies and the promotion of export crop cultivation have compounded problems of land scarcity and have contributed to the overintensification of farming practices amongst small-scale farmers in the highland region. This has led to increasing deforestation, soil erosion, and the contamination of water resources, all of which threaten the subsistence base that indigenous populations depend upon for their survival.

Today, most government officials in Guatemala argue that environmental problems in the highlands are due to a combination of population pressures and “*el avance de la frontera agrícola*” (the advance of agriculture) (SEGEPLAN 2007). Increasing population and the lack of arable land⁷ have forced many highland residents to clear areas formerly reserved for community forests. Historically, residents of highland communities have worked together to manage these forests, which have served as important resources for firewood and materials for building construction.⁸ However, the combination of land hunger and population growth have led to the undermining of informal agreements regarding the use and management of community forests; residents are left with few options but to slash and burn forests to make way for their *milpa*⁹ (Katz 2000b).

⁷ The most recent estimates indicate that more than 95 percent of farms in the Western highlands are less than 7 hectares, and nearly half of these are *microfundias* of less than 0.7 hectares (Katz 2000b).

⁸ It has been estimated that firewood accounts for 68 percent of the total national energy consumption in Guatemala (Cabrera Gaillard 1991; Katz 2000b).

⁹ Milpa refers to subsistence plots in which farmers plant corn and beans, and usually some other type of vegetable, usually a variety of local squash.

In recent decades, the environmental problems due to lack of available land have been compounded by the increased cultivation of export crops by small-scale farmers. In the late 1970s, export crop cultivation was widely promoted by development policymakers as a way of strengthening Guatemala's position in the global economy. Certain crops—particularly broccoli, snow peas, cauliflower, and green beans—were found to be particularly suitable for cultivation by small-scale farmers due to the intensive, year-round care that they require (von Braun, Hotchkiss, and Inmink 1989). In the 1980s, smallholder cultivation of these “non-traditional agricultural export” (NTAE or NTAX) crops in Guatemala dramatically expanded as a result of the easing of trade restrictions that constituted part of the neoliberal structural adjustment “package.” Data from the Guatemalan Association of Exporters shows that snow pea exports increased from 1,678 metric tons in 1986 to 16,511 tons in 1995 (Hamilton and Fischer 2005: 35). This growth has continued into the new millennium, as data from the Food and Agriculture Organization shows that exports of broccoli and cauliflower increased from 14,676 metric tons in 1993 to 35,116 tons in 2005, while exports of green beans increased from 154 metric tons in 1993 to 3,526 tons in 2005 (FAO 2008). Overall, from 2002 through 2006, agricultural exports from Guatemala have increased by 15% annually (AGEXPORT 2008). Many of these crops (including approximately 90% of snow peas and 53% of broccoli) are cultivated by small-holding farmers in the Guatemalan highlands, who contract with exporters and cooperatives to market the crops (Hamilton and Fischer 2005; Katz 2000a). In some cases, the adoption of NTAX cultivation has led to economic gains for smallholders, with wages in the non-traditional

agricultural sector rising 10-20% annually from 1995 through 2001 (Rudert and Coolidge 2003).

However, while small-scale farmers have realized some economic benefits from growing and selling NTAX crops, it is also important to weigh the social and environmental costs of export crop cultivation. For instance, there is evidence that the expansion of NTAX cultivation has led to further land appropriation on the part of multinational agribusinesses. From 1990 through 2005, the amount of land devoted to large-scale plantation farming increased from 32,000 hectares to 122,000 hectares, an increase of 281.3% (FAO 2005). Currently, INAB estimates that the Gini coefficient for land inequality in Guatemala is 0.85, higher than it has ever been (Wittman and Geisler 2005:6). Some have argued that the rising value of export crops and the promotion of NTAX cultivation have been major contributors to the increasing level of land inequality (Wittman and Geisler 2005; Wittman and Tanaka-Saldivar 2006).

There is also evidence that NTAX crop cultivation has been a major contributor to environmental degradation in the highland region. In the central and western highlands, where the majority of export crops are grown, 95% of farms are smaller than 7 hectares, with over half of these smaller than 0.7 hectares (Katz 2000:122). Most of the plots are located on very steep mountainsides that are both difficult and dangerous to farm. Both the small size of the plots and the difficult terrain on which they are located mean that many of these plots are barely capable of yielding enough crops for subsistence purposes. However, as values for export crops have risen throughout the years, many farmers are clearing additional land in order to grow NTAX crops to earn additional income. Prior to the adoption of NTAX cultivation, it was common for farmers to leave

parts of their plots forested, in part to protect against the problem of soil erosion. These forested areas have also served as important and convenient sources of firewood for farmers and their families, as farmers can gather fallen branches or prune trees on their own land (Castañeda Salguero 1995). However, as farmers adopt NTAX cultivation, they slash and burn additional areas of their land in order to accommodate both subsistence and export crops.

Taken together, the lack of arable land and the clearing of land for export crop cultivation have been major contributors to deforestation in the highland region of Guatemala. From 1991 through 2001, the departments of Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Quiché, Sololá, and Totonicapán lost 67,296 hectares of forest (INAB 2005, see Table 2-3). This deforestation in turn leads to soil erosion which contaminate water sources, destroy farmers' crops, and threaten the safety of their communities. As I pointed out earlier, soil erosion precipitates a greater danger of mudslides during the rainy season, which can wipe out entire communities.

Table 2-3. Forest cover change in highland departments of Guatemala, 1993-2001.

Source: INAB

Department	Total change (hectares)	Total change (%)	Average annual change (hectares)	Average annual change (%)
Chimaltenango	-1,612	-1.72	-149	-0.16
Huehuetenango	-30,966	-12.67	-3,091	-1.26
Quetzaltenango	-816	-1.66	-93	-0.19
Quiché	-28,634	-8.51	-3,301	-0.98
Sololá	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Totonicapán	-5,268	-10.27	-488	-0.95
Total	-67,296		-7,122	

In addition to deforestation, soil erosion, and mudslides, the cultivation of export crops has also been linked to the overuse of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, both of

which have a harmful impact on local environments and the health of rural populations. The Guatemalan government subsidizes both pesticides and fertilizers, and export contractors encourage liberal application of these agrochemicals on commercial crops (Fischer and Benson 2006). Many large scale growers advocate using up to twenty applications of pesticides per growing cycle (Hamilton and Fischer 2003: 95). The use and overuse of these chemicals in turn affects local environmental quality as it destroys various forms of plant and animal life. Additionally, agricultural run-off containing pesticide residue also results in the contamination of water sources, affecting the health of rural populations. In 1997, the Guatemalan government sponsored research on pesticide use through the Pesticides and Health Project (Plagsalud). The project reported that nearly 2 million people living in rural areas come into direct contact with chemical pesticides and fertilizers on a daily basis, and as many as 30,000 farmers are treated each year for symptoms associated with pesticide poisoning. The project also indicated that while some pesticides were used on domestic and/or subsistence crops, the vast majority were used on crops intended for export to the United States and Europe (PAHO 1998).

Recent actions by the Guatemalan government may further contribute to the environmental problems that residents in highland communities currently face. In March of 2005, despite widespread protests from a variety of sectors, the Guatemalan government ratified the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). This agreement further solidifies past neoliberal policies by promoting a pro-development agenda. In summary, the agreement includes measures to completely eliminate trade

barriers like tariffs and import fees, as well as measures to encourage and protect foreign investment (see Table 2-4).

Table 2-4. Summary of CAFTA measures.

Chapter 3	"Most favored" trade status between member states (U.S., Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica)
Chapter 10	Elimination of tariffs (phased out over a 10 year period from the time of ratification)
Chapter 10	Protection of investors' land and property from expropriation
Chapter 15	Protection of investors' intellectual property rights
Chapter 16	Commitment to observe international labor standards, commitment to enforce national labor laws (as determined by each member state)
Chapter 17	Recognition of each state's right to design and implement its own environmental laws
Chapter 18	Commitment to transparency by making the text of CAFTA-DR and related documents publicly available

While the agreement includes guidelines to protect the environment and workers' rights, many of these are voluntary and left to the discretion of each party. As stated in Article 17.1 of CAFTA, the agreement "recogniz[es] the right of each Party to establish its own levels of domestic environmental protection and environmental development policies and priorities, and to adopt or modify accordingly its environmental laws and policies" (see CAFTA-DR 2004). CAFTA also includes a number of strong measures to protect the land and property of foreign investors; however, there is no mention of protecting the land and rights of indigenous groups anywhere in the agreement. As noted by Legler, et al. (2007), CAFTA's measures to protect the private property of

investors actually *nullify* many of the terms of Guatemala's 1996 peace accords that promoted land redistribution. These measures benefit both foreign investors as well as domestic elites who derive much of their income from international trade and foreign investment. In this way, CAFTA in effect "accomplish[es] what the elites were unable to ensure once the peace accords were signed—guaranteeing that the country's basic social structure remains unchanged" (264).

In short, the continued expansion of global capitalism as promoted through neoliberal policies and free trade agreements like CAFTA perpetuates another cycle of conquest in Guatemala. As trade policies promote the cultivation of profitable export crops, export companies have contracted with small scale farmers to encourage them to grow the crops on their own lands. This has led to further deforestation in the predominantly indigenous highland regions, which has in turn contributed to problems of soil erosion and mudslides. These interrelated environmental problems in turn pose grave threats to the lands that indigenous groups depend upon for their subsistence and income. Free trade agreements like CAFTA further erode indigenous rights to land and resources, offering little to no measures to protect indigenous populations or the environment while ensuring strong protection of both domestic and foreign investors. In this way, the latest phase of capitalist expansion constitutes a "fourth cycle of conquest" of Mayan populations in Guatemala, as it undermines their rights as indigenous peoples while at the same time threatening to degrade the land and resources that they depend upon for survival.

Discussion

It must be emphasized the Guatemala's current environmental problems and social inequalities are not new, but directly related to the colonization , appropriation,

and exploitation of indigenous land, labor, and resources. For the past five centuries, the indigenous Maya of Guatemala have been subject to various cycles of conquest, including conquest by Spain, conquest by local and international capital, and conquest by state terror. The intentional destruction and appropriation of indigenous land by Spanish and ladino elites was a common feature throughout these cycles; in many ways, this destruction laid the foundation for the environmental problems that exist in the Guatemalan highlands today.

In recent years, indigenous highland communities have faced a new threat to their survival in the form of development policies that pave the way for the further (ab)use of lands for capitalist interests while failing to protect the needs of indigenous populations or the environment. By contributing to the destruction of the environment that indigenous populations depend upon for subsistence, this newest phase of capitalist development constitutes a fourth cycle of conquest that threatens the very survival of Mayan populations in Guatemala.

It is within this larger socio-historical context that this dissertation situates the stories of the Mayan women who work with AIR. In Guatemala, the health and quality of the land is directly related to the material and cultural survival of indigenous populations who depend upon the land for food, income, and shelter. Thus, indigenous women's environmental activism must be recognized not only as an effort to protect and preserve the land and natural resources, but also as activism to protect the survival and future of Guatemala's indigenous communities.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The goals of this dissertation are as follows: (1) to explore the ways in which indigenous women identify and experience environmental problems in their communities, while being attentive to the ways in which gender, race, and class shape their experiences; (2) to understand how and why indigenous women are mobilizing in response to these problems; (3) to highlight the dynamics involved in environmental organizing across borders of gender, race, class, and nation; and (4) to generate socially relevant knowledge that may inform activist work and public policy. Additionally, as I am directly involved with the organization AIR, this project also has the goal of creating knowledge that may be of use to the organization and its ongoing partnerships with farmers in Guatemala; specifically, I aim to contribute to the ongoing development of AIR's "gender consciousness" in its environmental work. In considering these interrelated and overlapping goals, the methodology of "feminist action research" is most appropriate for this dissertation. Broadly stated, feminist action research refers to any project in which "researchers and participants engage in cross-community knowledge construction and action" with a gender lens and a focus on "facilitating social change" (Lykes and Coquillon 2007:317).

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology of feminist action research, and how it is employed in this particular project. Here, it is important to note the distinction between "methods" and "methodologies": as described by Sandra Harding (1987) and Marjorie DeVault (1999), "methods" refer to specific tools used for research (like interviews or surveys), while "methodologies" refer to the theories that guide the use and interpretation of specific methods. Thus, for this project, the *methodology* of feminist

action research informed my choice and use of various *methods*, including oral history, active interviewing, observational research, and archival research.

I begin this chapter with an overview of feminist action research and how and why it is appropriate for this particular project. I then move on to detail the actual project itself, discussing the specifics of the methods used and how the research was carried out. Following this, I elaborate on how the data was analyzed using a “grounded theory” approach. The major themes that emerged from the data are detailed in the following chapters of the dissertation.

Feminist Research and Action Research: Making the Connections

As this project is informed by feminist theories, it is also guided by feminist insight in regards to the research process. Specifically, I locate this project in the new and emerging methodology of “feminist action research.” While feminist research and action research have historically been defined as distinct methodologies, there has been much more cross-dialogue between the two approaches in recent years (Greenwood and Levin 1998; Lykes and Coquillon 2007; Maguire 2008). Feminist action researchers emphasize that both feminist and action research have similar goals and approaches, and they have called for “an intensification of the discussion about the relationship between feminism and action research” as a “necessary condition for the success of both” (Greenwood and Levin 1998:185).

One key feature that both approaches share is a commitment to linking theory with action (praxis). As noted by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2008), action research has been employed in the social sciences beginning with the work of Karl Marx, and has been continuously developed and refined throughout the years. Generally, action research is understood as “research that is aimed at improving participants’ lives” by

bringing together “action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (Reason and Bardbury 2008:1). Thus, “the key thing that action research makes possible is the development of strategies and programs based on real life experiences rather than theories and assumptions” (Barnsley and Ellis 1992:10). For action researchers, it is not enough to simply write or theorize about a social problem or issue; *action* or activism must also be a key component or outcome of the research project.

Since its emergence in the 1960s along with the women’s movement, feminist methodology has been similarly committed to creating knowledge for the purpose of informing positive social change. Of course, feminist researchers place particular importance on women and gender issues. In her work *Liberating Method*, sociologist Marjorie DeVault summarizes some of the key principles of feminist methodology:

[First], feminists seek a methodology that will do the work of “excavation,” shifting the focus of standard practice from men’s concerns in order to reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women.... [Second], feminists seek a science that minimizes harm and control in the research process. In response to the observation that researchers have often exploited or harmed women participants, and that scientific knowledge has sustained systematic oppressions of women, feminist methodologists have searched for practices that will minimize harm to women and limit negative consequences. [Third], *feminists seek a methodology that will support research of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women* (1999:30-31, emphasis added).

Thus, praxis is also an important component of feminist research, and many have argued that research cannot be considered “feminist” unless it involves some link between theory and action/activism (Collins 2000; DeVault 1999; Hesse-Biber 2007; Naples 2003; Patai 1991; Reinharz 1992). As argued by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, feminist research is “political work” with a focus on knowledge building “aimed at

empowerment, action, and ultimately social transformation” (2007:151). Thus, while action researchers make activism an explicit part of their projects, for many feminist researchers, the link between theory, method, and action is an implicit—and critical—part of their work.

However, the emphasis on praxis is only one key concern that action researchers and feminists share. Feminist action researchers have noted other important connections between the two approaches. Included among these are the importance of “giving voice” to marginalized groups; the emphasis on consciousness-raising as part of the research process; and the necessity of challenging unequal power relations both within and through the research process (Lykes and Coquillon 2007; Maguire 2008).

Giving Voice

As Patricia Maguire (2008) notes, the themes of “voice” and of “giving” or “finding” voice are common to both feminist and action research (64). Researchers in both fields emphasize the importance of dialogue between practitioners and participants in the research process; as well as the importance of highlighting the voices and experiences of groups who have historically been silenced, forgotten, or ignored (DeVault 1999; Fals Borda 2008; Freire 1970; Hesse-Biber 2007; Reason and Bradbury 2008; Reinharz 1992).

In the field of action research, Brazilian activist Paulo Freire (1970) is largely credited with developing a model of “critical and liberating dialogue” between researchers and participants (or teachers and students) to help marginalized and oppressed groups formulate critiques of unjust power relations. Through dialogue, researchers help participants to articulate their views and critique of power, and both parties are able to develop new understandings of the ways in which power and

privilege operate in society. This method has been carried on throughout the action research tradition; as Budd Hall notes “[action research] fundamentally is about the right to speak...participatory action research argues for the articulation of points of view by the dominated or subordinated” (1993:xvii). Thus, in any action research project, the perspectives, ideas, concerns, and critiques of participants must feature strongly in the knowledge production process.

Feminist researchers hold similar values in regards to research by, for, and/or about women. As Marjorie DeVault (1999) notes, feminist research is largely about the process of “excavation,” that is, “to find what has been ignored, censored, and suppressed, and to reveal both the diversity of actual women’s lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible” (30). For feminist action researchers—and feminist researchers in general—a key part of the excavation process is beginning from the starting point of women’s everyday lives. Thus, like other feminist methodologies, feminist action research is closely connected with a standpoint epistemology that contends that the experiences and perspectives of oppressed groups can help to reveal the ways in interconnected “relations of ruling” work to structure society (Smith 1987). As Maguire (2008) notes, it is the knowledge generated by women’s everyday lives that feminist action researchers use to inform recommendations for social change. Thus, “feminist action research seeks to connect the articulated, contextualized personal with the often hidden or invisible structural and social institutions that shape our lives.... Feminist-grounded action research uncovers how gender and other locations influence people’s voicing and visioning” (66).

Conscientization

For feminist and action researchers alike, the involvement and consideration of participants' voices is connected to the process of conscientization, or consciousness-raising (Fals Borda 2008; Freire 1970; Lykes and Coquillon 2007; Reason and Bradbury 2008). As articulated by Freire, conscientization refers to the process in which researcher and participant engage in critical dialogue and reflection "which organizes their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naïve knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the *causes* of reality" (1970:131). Through a dialogical process, researchers and participants work together to make sense of their everyday lives and experiences, and to connect the "personal" to the "political" and structural systems of power and privilege.

Feminists point out that consciousness-raising has been an important part of the women's movement for many years, and that it is an important first step in the process of social change (Collins 2000; DeVault 1999; Hesse-Biber 2007). As DeVault (1999) argues, consciousness-raising as a part of the research process is an important aspect of feminist methodology, as it leads directly to "change in women's lives or in the systems of organization that control women" (34). This occurs as researchers and participants become more aware of the ways in which various systems of power, domination, and subordination shape their own lives and experiences; their awareness then becomes the basis for action. As Patricia Hill Collins states, "a changed consciousness encourages people to change the conditions of their lives" (2000:117).

Here, it is important to note that I did not (do not) hold any facile or arrogant assumptions about my ability as a researcher to "enlighten" the various indigenous women who participated in this project. As they acknowledged in the interviews, all of

the women are clearly aware of environmental problems in their communities, and all argue for the importance of recognizing the links between gender and the environment. However, it should also be recognized that conscientization is not a “one shot deal;” rather, it is a lifelong process of learning, a dynamic unfolding of consciousness that occurs as individuals continue to connect their personal, everyday lives to larger social structures and processes. As Elena, the president of Mujeres Unidas stated, “siempre estamos aprendiendo” (we are always learning).

This project was undertaken with the aim of being a part of the ongoing learning and conscientization of all participants involved (myself included). As many members of the AIR staff told me, they do feel that the organization has developed a “conocimiento de género” (gender consciousness) in its approach, but before this project they had only vague understandings of why this consciousness was important. The dialogues carried out in this project—through oral histories and active interviews—presented participants with the opportunity to discuss and clarify their thoughts and positions on issues related to development, environmental degradation, gender, race, and class in modern-day Guatemala. It is my hope that this clarified understanding and more developed “gender consciousness” can in turn help to inform the future activism of all those who participated in this project.

Reflexivity

In addition to the value placed on praxis, giving “voice” to marginalized groups, and conscientization, action researchers and feminists also place importance on challenging power hierarchies throughout the course of the research project. As Patricia Maguire (2008) acknowledges, one of the most important feminist contributions to the field of action research has been the use of “reflexivity,” a strategy which enables

researchers to locate themselves and the ways in which their own “biases, feelings, choices, and multiple identities” influence the knowledge production process (67).

Feminist scholars point out that researcher reflexivity has a few important implications. First, it draws attention to the unequal power dynamics that characterize the relationship between researcher and researched, and encourages the researcher to be critical of her own privilege as structured along the lines of race, class, and nationality (DeVault 1999; Hesse-Biber 2007; Naples 2003; Patai 1991). Second, feminist reflexivity encourages the researcher to develop research strategies and scholarship that can be used to benefit participants (Harding 2007; Patai 1991). Finally, this reflexivity also draws attention to the ways in which the situated location of the researcher influences the entire research project; in doing so, reflexivity enables us to understand the process of knowledge production as one that is shaped by the social locations of researchers and participants, and the relationships between all parties involved (Bhavnani 2007; Haraway 1988; Naples 2003).

This particular project is one that is certainly characterized by unequal power relations. Beyond gender, I share little in common with the indigenous women who are the primary focus of this dissertation. I am a North American *gringa*, a university educated woman with class privilege and the luxury of not having to worry about where my next meal will come from. In contrast, most of the indigenous women who spoke with me have not received any formal schooling beyond fifth grade, and most cannot read or write. They are members of an ethnic group that has survived a history of slavery and violent persecution in Guatemala, and they continue to face discrimination on a daily basis. Most of the women interviewed for this project live in poverty, on less

than \$2 per day, and a major, daily concern for them is whether or not their small subsistence plots will yield enough crops to feed themselves and their families.

This project, like so many others, is one in which I, the researcher, clearly occupy a position of privilege relative to the individuals who participated. As this project is one that is guided by feminist ideals, it is also one that is critical of this privilege. However, I also agree with those feminist scholars who argue for the necessity of doing more than merely “apologizing” for privilege, and who also advocate *using* this privilege on behalf of research participants who may not have access to the same social or economic resources as the researcher (Harding 2007; Lykes and Coquillon 2007; Patai 1991). As a feminist-grounded action research project, this dissertation aims to fulfill this ideal by developing knowledge that has value for activists, academics, and policymakers alike. In addition to addressing various gaps within the academic literature, the knowledge generated from this project may be used to inform the work of AIR (or any other organization working on similar issues), and thus help the organizations to better serve the needs and interests of community members with whom they work. Additionally, this project can also inform the development of environmental and social policy (as addressed in Chapter 7), and thus can generate positive social change within the political arena as well.

In addition to calling attention to inequalities in research and challenging researchers to address those inequalities, feminist reflexive practice also highlights the ways in which the situated location of the researcher influences the processes of research and analysis. By acknowledging our own limited, partial locations, we are better equipped to understand the power dynamics that characterize research and what

their consequences might be in the many different stages of research (Collins 2000; Haraway 1988; Hesse-Biber 2007; Naples 2003). As Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2007) argues, “through disclosing their values, attitudes, and biases in their approach to particular research questions and in engaging in strong reflexivity throughout the research process, feminist researchers can actually improve the objectivity of the research” (10). Thus, in stating my own social and economic background and my decided “outsider” status in terms of race, class, nationality (and gender, for some interviews), I do not mean to simply “confess” or “apologize” for privilege, but rather to draw attention to the ways in which this background may influence the research project. I am not a 100 percent objective, value-neutral researcher, nor do I claim to be; in undertaking this research, I must be aware of the ways in which my background shapes the project, and I encourage the reader to be aware of my bias as well.

However, as various feminist researchers have noted, the boundaries that supposedly delineate one as an “outsider” or “insider” are in fact fluid and permeable, and oftentimes researchers occupy both positions simultaneously (Collins 2000; Naples 2003). Thus, while I may be an outsider in terms of my role as a researcher, as well as my race, socioeconomic background, and nationality, I am at the same time an insider in regards to my involvement with the AIR organization. It is doubtless that some will charge that my association with the organization and my insider status will “bias” my research and detract from the objectivity that a researcher should maintain. However, I argue that such charges stem from the very positivist values that feminist researchers have long critiqued. I thus align myself with those feminist scholars who argue that positivist ideals of unbiased, value-free research are neither possible nor desirable, as

they often obscure the power dynamics that characterize and influence the research process (Haraway 1988; Hesse-Biber 2007).

Furthermore, I also agree with those scholars who argue that a researcher's insider status can be used to strengthen the research project, as an insider can begin the project with a heightened sensitivity to some of the key issues and concerns that revolve around the research topic (Collins 2000; Hesse-Biber 2007; Naples 2003). Thus, I argue that my close involvement with AIR and my prior experiential knowledge of the challenges and rewards involved in transnational organizing are actually a *strength* of this project. Throughout the course of my research, I used my knowledge to shape the kinds of questions that I asked, how I asked them, and how I interpreted them. Nonetheless, I have done my best to not take my insider status for granted; rather, I have tried to maintain a sense of "strong reflexivity" (Harding 1993) throughout the research process in order to understand the ways in which my own positionality and situated knowledge have shaped and influenced this entire project from start to finish.

The Research Project

All of the research for this project was conducted from 2006 through 2009 in the departments of Chimaltenango and Sololá, Guatemala (see Figure 2-1). These are the highland departments where AIR works with local indigenous communities to establish its reforestation projects. As I noted in Chapter 2, like other highland departments, Chimaltenango and Sololá are primarily indigenous, and are characterized by high rates of poverty and deforestation. At the time of the research, AIR was working with five groups of indigenous women farmers: three groups in Chimaltenango, in the communities of Itzapa, Chimal, and Puebla; and two groups in Sololá, in the

communities of Masat and Umul. Most of the research was conducted within these communities.

The current project employed a mix of various methods in order to address the research questions. The primary source of data is comprised of the oral histories that I conducted in 2009 with the ten original members of the group *Mujeres Unidas Por Amor a La Vida*, who work in Itzapa and are one of the first groups of women farmers to work with AIR. The oral histories are supplemented by active interviews with all eight members of the AIR “team,” as well as with four officials who work with the Guatemalan government in environmental programs. Both oral histories and active interviews were triangulated through archival research, which included past interviews with 31 indigenous women from Itzapa, Chimal, Puebla, Masat, and Umul (conducted by AIR staff and volunteers in 2006); as well as observations of the communities where the women live and work (see Figure 3-1 for a visual representation of the research design of this project).

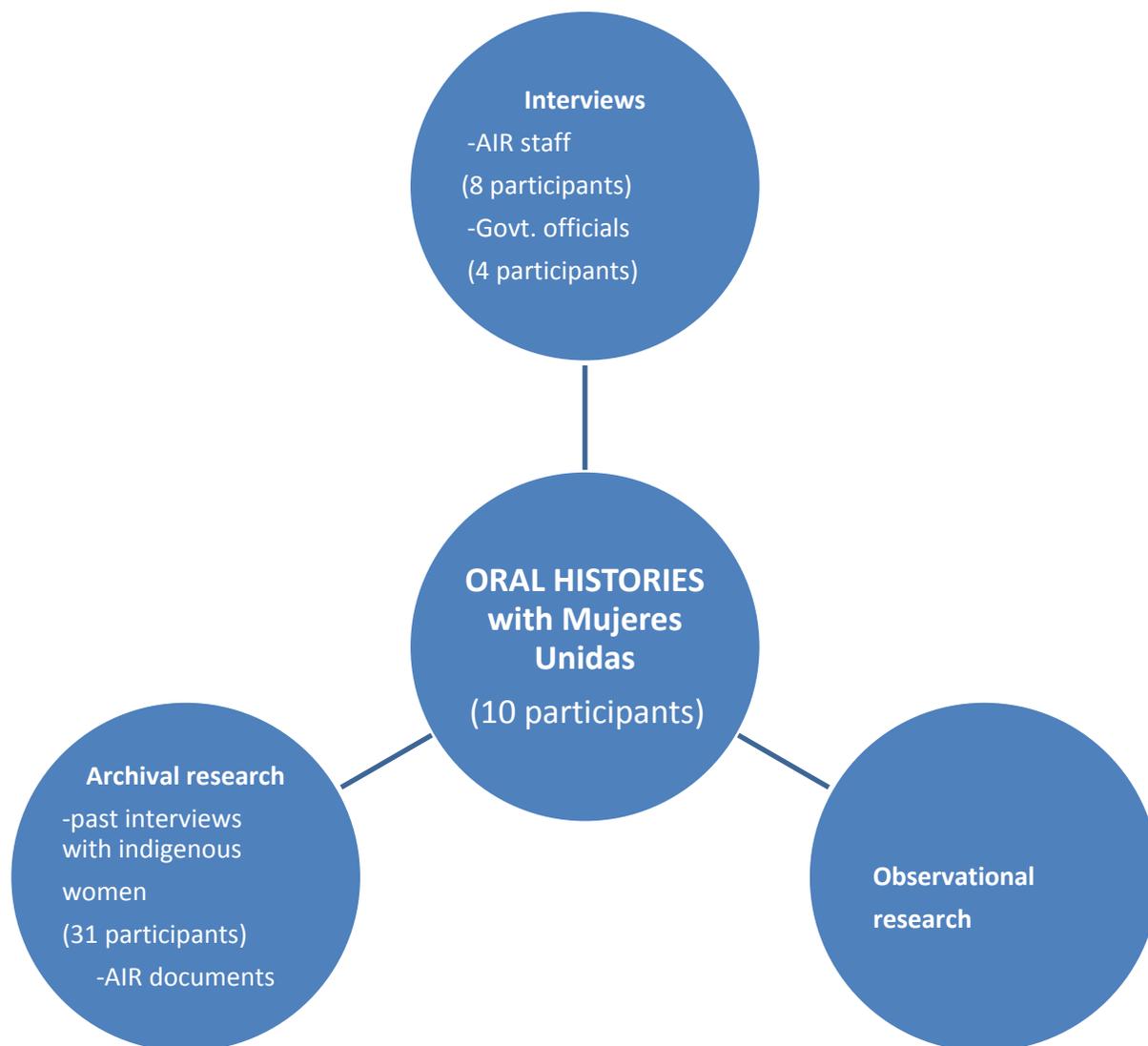


Figure 3-1. Research design. The primary research method is oral history, supplemented by interviews, archival research, and observational research.

Oral Histories

In considering the goals of this dissertation, as well as the feminist values of giving voice, building critical consciousness, and challenging power relations, I decided to employ oral histories as the primary research method for this project. Simply put, oral

history involves the process of interviewing and recording the “remembered experience” of individuals (Dunaway and Baum 1984: xix). In recent decades, oral history has been a particularly important method for highlighting the voices and experiences of those who have been silenced or marginalized in traditional historical accounts (Carey 2006; Gluck and Patai 1991; Morissey 1984; Reinhartz 1992; Thompson 2000). As noted by Charles Morissey, for many researchers oral history represents an important method for illuminating “what is variously called ‘grass-roots history,’ or the history of the nonelite, or the history of ordinary people as they live their ordinary lives” (Morissey 1984: xxi). Thus, as historian Paul Thompson argues, oral history can actually democratize the history-making process and make it more inclusive; as oral history uncovers and reclaims the perspectives and stories of “the under-classes, the unprivileged and the defeated” it also “gives back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place” (Thompson 2000: 7).

Over the past few decades, feminist scholars have embraced oral history as a way of excavating the stories of women and attending to the neglect of women’s perspectives in both history and the social sciences. Sociologist Sherna Gluck argues that oral history is an ideal method for feminist research for several reasons: it creates new historical material about women; validates women’s experiences; fosters communication between women of different backgrounds; and assists in the feminist project of discovering and reclaiming women’s history (Gluck 1984:223). In addition, feminist sociologist Shulamit Reinhartz contends that oral history serves as an important way of addressing the “fundamental sociological task” of “illuminating the connections between biography, history, and social structure” (1992:132).

Oral history is particularly well-suited for the goals of this feminist action research project. The method allows me to begin from the starting point of indigenous women's lives and uncover the ways in which their everyday lives and work in highland Guatemala have been impacted by larger macrolevel processes of neoliberal development and environmental degradation. Additionally, the oral histories conducted for this dissertation will help to illuminate the perspectives of a group whose voices have historically been silenced within both Guatemalan society and mainstream social science research (Carey 2006). Finally, these oral histories will have a direct impact on the activist and service work conducted through the Alliance for International Reforestation. As this research will foster the development of a deeper understanding of indigenous women's experiences with environmental degradation, as well as their environmental activism, it may also foster the development of a better informed partnership between these women and the *ladinas*, *ladinos*, and U.S.-based women and men who make up the AIR team. By better understanding the needs and concerns of the indigenous women with whom we work, we are better equipped to develop and sustain the long-term alliances that are vital to any activist work.

A theoretical sample, or why *Mujeres Unidas*

During the summer of 2009, I conducted oral history interviews with the ten founders and original members of *Mujeres Unidas Por Amor a La Vida*,¹⁰ who live and work in the community of Itzapa in Chimaltenango. As I mentioned previously, this is one of the first group of women farmers to work with AIR, and it is *the* first group of women farmers that developed a long-term alliance with the organization. The founders

¹⁰ Please note that there were 11 women who founded *Mujeres Unidas*. Sadly, one of the founders—Graciela—passed away in 2002.

of Mujeres Unidas began working with AIR in 1997, only two years after the organization began establishing connections in the Western highland region of Guatemala (see Table 3-1 for a list of oral history interview participants; note that participants with no last name have had their names changed and asked that their identities remain confidential).

Table 3-1. List of oral history participants.

Name	Age	Position in group	Date Interviewed
Elena Siquinajay*	48	president	12-Jun-09 13-Jun-09
Catalina Siquinajay*	43	vice-president	12-Jun-09
Luvia Perez	46	secretary	13-Jun-09
Isabel Siquinajay	33	leader	14-Jun-09
Felippa*	40	original member	14-Jun-09
Juana*	47	original member	15-Jun-09
Marta*	38	original member	19-Jun-09
Ivelisse*	40	original member	20-Jun-09
Elsa*	43	original member	20-Jun-09
Rosita*	47	original member	21-Jun-09

*These women were interviewed in 2006, and again in 2009.

Like most other residents of Itzapa, the founders of Mujeres Unidas are indigenous Kaqchikel, one of the largest of the 21 Mayan groups in Guatemala. The women are all middle aged, with an age range between 33 and 48 years. All are married, and all are mothers, with between two and six children. Additionally, like most indigenous residents in the highlands, most live below the poverty level as defined by the World Bank (less than \$2 per day). When asked to estimate their family's monthly income, 9 out of 10 women, or 90 percent estimated that their entire household income is between 1000

and 1600 Quetzales (between approximately \$125 and \$200) per month.¹¹ One woman—who runs a local school—reported that her family earns more than 3000 Quetzales (approximately \$400) per month. While no woman reported having a stable job as most Westerners understand the term, they nonetheless engage in a variety of income-generating activities. These include domestic work in the nearby city of Antigua; weaving garments to sell at local markets; growing and selling vegetables; helping to run the family store; and making food to sell on the streets. Additionally, all women reported that they helped to farm the family’s subsistence plot on a weekly basis. They do all of this work in addition to the volunteer work that they do with AIR.

This group of women was selected as the focus for this dissertation for a few important reasons. First, the stories of the women of Mujeres Unidas offer an important starting point for examining the connections between neoliberal development, environmental degradation, race, class, and gender in the context of Guatemala. These are important connections that have a salient impact on the lives and work of indigenous women in Guatemala, and yet they have remained largely unexplored within mainstream academic scholarship. While I do not claim that the stories of the women who participate in this project are representative of all indigenous women in Guatemala, it is possible to connect their individual stories and experiences to larger structural trends and processes. The sample of women from Mujeres Unidas should therefore be considered a *theoretical* rather than representative sample. As noted by Emerson (2001), theoretical sampling is used by qualitative researchers “in order to elaborate, qualify, and test analytic categories and more complex theoretical propositions” (292).

¹¹ The exchange rate typically varies between 7 and 8 Quetzales for every US\$1. In June 2009, the exchange rate was 8 Quetzales for every US\$1.

Thus, as Charmaz (2006) argues, “theoretical sampling pertains only to conceptual and theoretical development; it is *not* about representing a population or increasing the statistical generalizability of results” (101).

Theoretical sampling is best done when a researcher is already “sensitized” to certain concepts, and has a clear idea of what types of questions she wants to ask, how to ask them, and of *whom* she should ask them (Charmaz 2006). For this project, my research questions and design were largely informed by my familiarity with ecofeminist theories and my past work with AIR and indigenous women. The combination of my academic training and activist experience led me to formulate the questions that guide this current project.

A second reason for focusing on the stories of the ten original members of Mujeres Unidas is that they present a significant opportunity for understanding the ways in which long-term alliances develop, and how these alliances can shape the consciousness of all who are involved. As I have mentioned earlier, Mujeres Unidas was one of the first groups of indigenous women farmers to work with AIR, and *the* first group of women to maintain long-term contact with the organization. By focusing on the ways in which the women of Mujeres Unidas initiated, cultivated, and maintained a partnership with AIR, this dissertation highlights the ways in which individuals are mobilizing across borders of race, class, gender, and nationality to build and sustain long-term relationships in working together for a shared goal. These relationships—alliances based on dialogue and mutual trust and respect—can in turn shape the consciousness of all parties involved, individuals and organizations alike. An examination of the partnership between Mujeres Unidas and AIR therefore allows for an analysis of how this partnership

challenged AIR to incorporate a gender consciousness in its reforestation programs. Thus, the oral histories conducted with the women of Mujeres Unidas allow for insight into how the women challenged AIR to recognize environmental issues as “women’s issues.”

Finally, this sample was chosen for practical reasons, namely in regards to recruitment and the interview process. As a member of the AIR “team,” I have worked with the women of Mujeres Unidas for over thirteen years. During this time, I have developed a level of mutual trust, confidence, and respect with many of the group members. As noted by Gluck and Patai (1991), gaining the trust and confidence of participants is critical for conducting oral history interviews that often cover intimate and sensitive topics. It is particularly important when the relationship between researcher and participants is unevenly structured along the lines of race and class. However, the fact that all of the leaders of Mujeres Unidas had known me for several years helped to facilitate the recruitment and interview process. This is particularly notable, because in rural, largely indigenous areas of Guatemala there is a well-established (and completely understandable) distrust of outsiders and individuals associated with unknown institutions (Carey 2006; Ehlers 2000).

Recruitment and interview process

My insider status as a member of AIR helped tremendously throughout the research process, beginning with the recruitment of participants. Because most of the women of Mujeres Unidas knew (know) and trusted (trust) me, the recruitment process was simply a matter of informing them of the purpose of my project and requesting their participation. I did this one year in advance (in 2008), during one of AIR’s annual trips to Guatemala. During this trip, I met with Elena and Catalina, and discussed the details

and purpose of the project with them. I asked them if they thought that the other leaders of Mujeres Unidas would be willing to participate, and they agreed that it should not be a problem. Elena volunteered to recruit the other members of the group and to set up interview dates for me.

Throughout the course of the following year, I maintained e-mail contact with Cecilia (the Director of AIR), and she and the staff members of AIR maintained contact with the women of Mujeres Unidas. Through this transnational relay, I was able to communicate with Elena and exchange information about travel dates, expectations for the interviews, etc. Elena in turn set up the dates, times, and locations for each of the ten interviews and passed on the information to the AIR staff, who passed it on to me. Thus, by the time I arrived in Itzapa on June 11, 2009, I already had an interview schedule set up with all ten participants.

All oral history interviews took place in participants' homes. Elena admitted to me that setting up the interview schedule was no easy task, as the majority of women in Itzapa do not have two to four hours of "leisure time" to participate in an oral history interview. All of the women interviewed for this project are mothers, with between two and six children to look after. All women reported having primary responsibility for domestic work like cooking, cleaning the home, washing clothes, etc. In addition, the women also assist their husbands in caring for and cultivating their subsistence farm plots, and all engage in various other income-generating activities, like making *tamalitos* to sell, running a small *tienda*, or weaving garments to sell at local markets. Thus, there were limited time frames in which the interviews could be conducted: all interviews took place during the mid-morning, after the women had already sent their children off to

school; or later in the evening, after dinner. The interviews were conducted in Spanish (all participants are fluent in both Kaqchikel and Spanish), and lasted between 120 and 240 minutes. In many cases, the interview had to be stopped so that the woman could attend to her various responsibilities, like washing dishes or preparing the mid-day meal.¹² During each interview, I repeatedly asked the women if they wanted me to come back at another time, but all insisted that they wanted to finish the interview.

For each interview, I asked the women about their childhood and growing up in Itzapa; how the environment in and around Itzapa has changed since their childhood; their everyday work and responsibilities; what they perceived to be the major environmental problems in Itzapa and how these problems affected them and their families; as well as questions about their work with AIR (see Appendices A and B for a list of guiding questions). In the majority of cases, I was struck with how eager the women were to tell their stories. Beginning with the first question about the woman's childhood, many elaborated at length on all topics covered. In a few instances, I had to prod the women; for example, when I asked them about environmental problems in Itzapa, some women simply replied that of course, there are problems. This could have been due to my association with AIR, and their assumption that I already knew about environmental problems in the community. However, when I asked about their personal opinions, and how these problems affected their own day-to-day work and lives, they were quick to elaborate. Overall, the women's openness and willingness to talk with me underscored their commitment to caring for their local environment and community, as

¹² In cases in which the woman had to attend to these responsibilities, I offered to assist her while we talked. Most of the time, my offer was accepted. I wore the tape recorder on a cord around my neck so my hands were free to wash and/or dry dishes, or in some cases mold corn dough to make tortillas or tamalitos.

well as an express desire to tell the story of their work with AIR. In all interviews, I asked the women why they had decided to participate. The most common response was that they wanted people to know about their work in Itzapa, and about the importance of caring for the environment. Some women—including Elena—actually insisted that I write a book! Other women pointed out that they chose to participate because of a desire to help AIR, and to help AIR improve its work with their community. As Luvia said, “I did it [participated] because AIR has helped us a lot. So if I can help AIR I am going to do it. And AIR can use this project to help us and others, too.” Thus, while my presence and the interview process may have been an imposition in many regards, the women seemed to feel that any negative consequences of my presence were outweighed by the potential positive outcomes of this project.

Interviews

The stories of the women of Mujeres Unidas are interwoven with with the story of AIR; and the activism of both groups is shaped in large part by national and international policies related to development and the environment. Because of this, I felt it was important to interview all members of the organization AIR, as well as various Guatemalan government officials. The interviews with both groups help to supplement the information gathered from the oral history interviews. The interviews with the members of AIR are important for illuminating the ways in which indigenous women develop and maintain alliances across borders of race, class, gender, and nationality in their efforts to protect their local environment. The interviews with the government officials, meanwhile, help to shed light on the “official discourses” related to development and environmental degradation in Guatemala, and how these discourses inform national programs and policies.

For both the interviews with the members of AIR and the government officials, I adopted an “active interviewing” approach, as developed by James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium (1995). This approach is unique in that it considers both the interviewer and the respondent as collaborators in the “meaning-making process,” and allows for a more fluid and flexible interview format in which the interview takes the form of a dialogue rather than a rigidly formatted question and answer session (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:4). Thus, for these interviews I did not adhere to a fixed list of closed-ended Likert-type responses, but instead used a series of open-ended “guiding questions” (see Appendices C, D, E, and F) that addressed different topics. As noted by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) as well as various feminist researchers (Gluck and Patai 1991; Reinharz 1992), such flexibility is important as it allows for respondents to pursue and elaborate upon topics that they feel are significant, rather than only those topics that the interviewer deems worthy of exploration. Additionally, this approach offers insight into the ways in which respondents construct meaning of their activities. Thus, whereas a close-ended question and answer format might only allow respondents the option of answering “yes” to the question of whether or not environmental activism is important to the indigenous community in Guatemala, the active interview format allows respondents the chance to elaborate on *why* they feel this activism to be important.

El equipo AIRE

For this project, I conducted interviews with the eight staff members of *el equipo AIRE*, the AIR “team” or organization. The interview participants included the Director of AIR, Cecilia Ramirez, as well as six agroforestry technicians (*tecnicos*) who work with the organization. I also interviewed my mother, the founder and president of the organization (see Table 3-2 for a list of AIR interview participants).

Table 3-2. List of AIR interview participants.

Name	Age	Race; Nationality	Position	Year began working with AIR	Date Interviewed
Anne Hallum	56	White; United States	Founder, president	1991	13-Sep-09
Cecilia Ramirez	40	Ladina; Guatemalan	Director	1994	1-Jul-09
William Santizo	44	Ladino; Guatemalan	tecnico, senior	1995	29-Jun-09
Luis Iquique	31	Kaqchikel; Guatemalan	tecnico, senior	1996	24-Jun-09
Miguel Lopez	50	Kaqchikel; Guatemalan	tecnico, senior	1996	30-Jun-09
Pedro Miguel Lopez	27	Kaqchikel; Guatemalan	tecnico	2005	25-Jun-09
Carlos Hic	25	Kaqchikel; Guatemalan	tecnico	2007	1-Jul-09
Mario Pop	25	Kaqchikel; Guatemalan	tecnico	2008	28-Jun-09

As with the recruitment process for the women of Mujeres Unidas, recruiting the members of AIR was also a relatively easy task. I had informed all participants of the project a year in advance, and all had agreed to participate. For the following year, I maintained e-mail contact with Cecilia and worked with her to set up an interview schedule. Thus, as with the oral history interviews, an interview schedule was already in place when I arrived in Chimaltenango (where the headquarters of AIR are located) in June 2009.

The majority of these interviews took place in AIR's offices in Chimaltenango; some also took place in a hostel in the department of Sololá, where AIR also works. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, and with the exception of the interview with my mother, all interviews were done in Spanish. Participants were asked questions related to how and why they decided to start working with AIR; their

responsibilities and job duties; the positive and difficult aspects of working with a transnational organization; and how they negotiate working with individuals from different races, nationalities, genders, and class backgrounds (see Appendices C and D for a list of guiding questions for interviews).

Of course, the fact that I am the daughter of the president of the organization had some influence on the interview process. The power that my mother has in designing the structure of the organization—as well as paying the salaries of the staff—undoubtedly placed pressure on the members of the organization, not only to agree to participate but also in how they answered questions. To a large degree, it was impossible for me to avoid the unequal power structure that shaped the interview process. However, I did my best to mitigate it by acknowledging it openly at the beginning of the interview, and by noting that I knew that some questions might be difficult to answer because of who I was and my position within the organization. I also emphasized the importance of being open about what participants perceived as difficulties and weaknesses of AIR's work, because this honesty could help the organization to identify and overcome these weaknesses. All participants acknowledged this and agreed that honesty during the interviews would ultimately be beneficial for the organization as a whole. The fact that most participants—particularly those who had worked with the organization the longest—*were* able to identify problems that they saw with the organization is evidence that they took my suggestions to heart.

Interviews with government officials

The activism of the members of both Mujeres Unidas and AIR has developed largely in response to the environmental problems associated with the implementation of neoliberal development policies in Guatemala. As this project seeks to situate the

local activism of individuals within a larger context of national and international policies related to development and the environment, it is important to have an understanding of what these policies entail and how they are defined and facilitated through the Guatemalan state. For this reason, I thought it pertinent to also interview various officials with the Guatemalan government, to gain a better understanding of how individuals in positions of political power conceptualize and propose to resolve problems related to development and environmental degradation—specifically deforestation—in Guatemala.

Specifically, I interviewed four officials: two from the National Institute of Forestry (Instituto Nacional de Bosques, or INAB), and two from the Secretary of Planning and Programming for the Presidency (Secretaria de Planificacion y Programación de la Presidencia, or SEGEPLAN).¹³ INAB and SEGEPLAN are institutions that have responsibility for overseeing the development and implementation of policy related to forestry management and “sustainable development” in Guatemala. All officials were asked questions about environmental problems in Guatemala in general and the highlands in particular; how development policies have impacted the environment and rural populations; and the importance of considering gender and race when designing environmental programs (see Appendices E and F for a list of guiding questions for interviews with government officials).

¹³ Three officials requested that their identity remain confidential. These include both the national and regional representative of SEGEPLAN, as well as a national representative of INAB. Their names have been changed.

Table 3-3. List of government officials interviewed.

Name	Position	Date Interviewed
Armando R.	Delegate for SEGEPLAN, national level	10-Feb-09
Angela M.	Delegate for SEGEPLAN, regional level (Chimaltenango)	10-Feb-09
Edwin Periera	Region 5 INAB representative (Chimaltenango)	11-Feb-09
José M.	Executive officeholder at INAB, national level	14-Feb-09

The interviews with the government officials are important because they reveal the ways in which individuals in positions of political power understand problems related to development and environmental degradation in Guatemala. Thus, these interviews represent the Guatemalan government’s “official” narrative on environmental problems in Guatemala, particularly in regards to why these problems exist and how they can best be addressed.

Overall, the interviews with the members of AIR and officials of the Guatemalan government help to supplement the oral histories of the women of Mujeres Unidas. The interviews conducted with the women and men of AIR help to provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the women of Mujeres Unidas have worked to form transnational alliances, and highlight the various complexities, difficulties, and rewards that are involved in transnational environmental organizing. The interviews with the government officials, meanwhile, help to situate the stories of Mujeres Unidas and AIR within the context of larger national policies and processes, and provide insight into the ways in which these officials talk about and propose to resolve problems related to development and the environment in Guatemala.

Triangulation: Archival Research and Observations

In spite of the strengths of oral histories and active interviews as methods that “give voice” to individuals and allow participants and researchers alike to connect individual stories to larger social structures and forces, they are not without their drawbacks. Most notably, both oral histories and interviews are methods that rely on individuals’ memories and interpretations; as such they are both enriched and limited by this reliance. In regards to oral history, Paul Thompson notes that while the method is very helpful in illuminating individuals’ feelings and interpretations of particular events, it is not always reliable in describing the details or chronology of those events (2000: 156-172). Thus, in order to ensure better reliability of data, many qualitative researchers who make use of oral history and/or interview data advocate using other forms of data to triangulate the research (Dunaway and Baum 1984; Gluck and Patai 1991; Reinhartz 1993). For this project, I made use of both archival and observational research as a means of supplementing the data from the oral histories and interviews, and as a way of ensuring the reliability of the data.

In particular, I analyzed archival materials from the organization AIR, including annual reports, notes from staff meetings, e-mail correspondence, as well as data from 31 interviews conducted with indigenous women farmers in 2006. These interviews were conducted with the leaders of groups of women farmers in the departments of Chimaltenango and Sololá; eight of the interviews were conducted with members of Mujeres Unidas in Itzapa, who were again interviewed in 2009 for the oral histories. The interviews were conducted by AIR staff and volunteers (myself included) as part of a effort to compile feedback from farmers for AIR’s annual reports (see Table 3-4). In these interviews, women were asked about the major environmental problems in their

communities, why they had decided to work with AIR, the strengths and weaknesses of AIR’s agroforestry programs, and whether or not they had any suggestions for how AIR might improve its work.

Table 3-4. Summary of 2006 interview participants. With the exception of Itzapa, all community names have been changed to protect participants’ identities.

Community	Number respondents
Chimaltenango	
Chimal	7
Puebla	5
Itzapa	8
Sololá	
Masat	5
Umul	6
Total	31

Community	Number participants
Department of Chimaltenango	
Chimal	7
Puebla	5
Itzapa	8
Department of Sololá	
Masat	5
Umul	6
Total	31

In addition to analyzing archival materials, I also conducted extensive observations of the communities where the women live and work. During the summers of 2006 and 2009 I accompanied the women of Itzapa, Chimal, Puebla, Masat, and Umul to their fields on a daily basis to assist them in planting trees and crops. In many cases, the women also showed me around their communities, so I could see for myself and document the various environmental problems that were of concern to them. After each observation period, I would try to find a quiet place—either a room at one of the

women's houses, a shaded area under a tree, or a local café—where I could write down all that I could recall. Altogether, I documented over 200 hours of observations.

Taken together, both the archival research and observations serve as important ways of triangulating the data gathered through the oral histories and interviews. For instance, I used data from the 2006 interviews to supplement the data from the oral histories, and to help me develop a more nuanced understanding of how indigenous women identify, experience, and respond to environmental degradation in their communities. The observational research allowed me to see firsthand the extent of environmental degradation in the various communities. Additionally, a review of AIR's e-mails and annual reports helped me to better understand how AIR's approach to agroforestry work changed following the development of partnerships with indigenous women farmers. In addition to helping me to "flesh out" or "saturate" various analytical categories, the archival and observational research also helped me to check the validity of my data, by ensuring that individuals' recollections of certain events and dates were accurate.

Analysis: Developing Grounded Theory Through Atlas.ti

For this project, I employed a "grounded theory" method of analyzing and interpreting the data. As described by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, grounded theory is an inductive approach to qualitative data analysis in which the researcher "allows the theory to emerge from the data" (Strauss and Corbin 2008:14). Early formulations of ground theory had a distinctly positivist approach, emphasizing the "discovery" or "emergence" of theory from qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). More recently, however, researchers have turned to a constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz 2006, 2002; Clark 2007; Strauss and Corbin 2008). As

noted by Charmaz (2002), this approach assumes that theories are not “discovered” but rather constructed through “the shared experiences of researchers and participants and the researcher’s relationship with participants” (Charmaz 2002:675). Thus, data and the theories that emerge from it do not reflect some concrete, external reality; rather, they reflect a complex interaction between participants, researchers, and their memories and interpretations of events and experiences.

It has been argued that a constructivist grounded theory approach is implicitly feminist in the ways in which it privileges the voices and interpretations of participants while at the same time encouraging strong researcher reflexivity (Charmaz 2005; Clark 2007). Thus, “constructivist grounded theorists on modes of knowing and representing studied life,” which means “giving close attention to empirical realities and collected renderings of them—and locating oneself [as a researcher] in these realities” (Charmaz 2005:509). This point is particularly important for the feminist goal of critiquing and challenging the power structure in the research process. Thus, while my voice is privileged as the narrator of the dissertation, I am as much a participant as any individual that I interviewed; conversely, all participants should be understood as co-researchers who helped me to construct the ideas and theories presented in the chapters that follow.

As formulated by Strauss and Corbin (2008) and Charmaz (2006, 2002), grounded theory involves a step-by-step process in which the researcher moves from analyzing and assigning codes to small bits of data to linking these bits across categories to build analytical categories, and eventually, to developing a coherent theoretical framework. As Charmaz (2006) explains, the process begins with the “initial

coding” of qualitative data, in which the researcher examines the data word-by-word and assigns temporary labels or “codes” to particular phenomena. Following this, the researcher identifies related codes through “focused coding” and links them in order to develop analytic categories. Finally, these categories are used to develop a theoretical framework that addresses the focus of the research project.

In order to assist with data analysis, I made use of the qualitative software program Atlas.ti. This software program served as a useful (and time-saving) tool to help manage and organize data from the oral histories and interviews. However, it should be pointed out that Atlas.ti does not actually generate data analysis; it only helps the researcher to more efficiently organize the process of analysis, thereby saving time and energy.

Using Atlas.ti, I began the coding process by perusing the transcribed interviews line by line, assigning initial codes to each segment of data. As noted by Charmaz (2006), it is during the initial coding phase that researchers “mine early data for analytic ideas to pursue in further analysis” (46). Throughout this process, I drew from my past work with AIR, as well as my research experience and familiarity with feminist and ecofeminist theory in order to make meaning of the various segments of data. In this way, I maintained a dialogic relationship between theory/experience and data analysis, taking note of when and how this relationship produced tension (i.e., the data challenged or conflicted with certain theories). From this initial exercise in “meaning making,” numerous initial analytic ideas began to emerge; code phrases like *walking for firewood; cultivating export crops; harvesting corn; deciding to take action* represented my attempt to grapple with what the data meant. By the time I finished the initial coding

phase, I had generated a list of over 1,200 codes in Atlas.ti. It was also by the end of this phase that I had developed a more nuanced understanding of the data and had begun to identify theoretical linkages between bits of coded data.

As I was developing my list of codes in Atlas.ti, I was also developing a list of “code families” which grouped related codes under more general headings. This phase of data analysis mirrors what Charmaz refers to as the process of “focused coding,” which involves “using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (Charmaz 2006:57). It is during this phase that researchers begin to make comparisons across interviews and observations, and to develop and refine theoretical linkages. Thus, “through comparing data to data [researchers] develop the focused code. Then [researchers] compare data to these codes, which helps to refine them” (Charmaz 2006:61). Through constant comparison between sets of data, I grouped the most frequently occurring codes into a total of 151 “code families.” In this way, codes like *harvesting corn*, *cutting grass*, and *gathering seeds* were grouped into the code family “working in the field.”

In the final phase of coding—theoretical coding—I began to use the code families to form a coherent theoretical framework. This was perhaps the most intellectually rigorous part of the coding process, as it was at this point that I began “to weave the fractured story back together” (Glaser 1978:72). As Charmaz (2006) points out, this is the “integrative” phase of coding, as “theoretical codes help to tell an analytic story that has coherence...not only [conceptualizing] how substantive codes are related, but also [moving] the analytic story in a theoretical direction” (63). During this phase, the use of the “network view” in Atlas.ti was particularly helpful, as it allowed me to visualize

relationships between code families. Using this feature helped me to further develop theoretical linkages; thus, I connected the code family of “working in the field” to related codes and code families of “walking for firewood” and “gathering water for household use,” and grouped them together under the broader analytic category of “indigenous women working in the local environment” (see Appendix G for a simplified visual representation of how these codes are related). It was through this process of piecing together the analytic puzzle that I began to develop a sense of the story of this dissertation—a story of stories, so to speak—of the experiences, opinions, and reflections of a diverse group of participants who, despite their differences, were nevertheless connected in meaningful ways. It was not until this final phase of coding that I was able to recognize these larger connections, and use them to build the theoretical framework that guides this dissertation.

Discussion

As a feminist project, this dissertation is informed by both feminist theory and methodology. Specifically, this dissertation is guided by the principles of feminist action research, and aims to generate knowledge that has both academic value and practical relevance for activists and policymakers. In addressing the feminist goal of excavating women’s voices and experiences, this dissertation relies on the oral histories of indigenous Guatemalan women as a primary source of data. These oral histories are supplemented in turn by interviews with AIR staff; Guatemalan government officials; as well as archival and observational research.

A grounded theory approach to data analysis has allowed me to develop a coherent analytical story based on a close reading of the experiences, reflections, and interpretations of the various individuals who participated in this study. As both a

researcher and a member of the AIR team, I also count myself as a character in this story, and thus I also have played a role in shaping and interpreting the storyline. The major themes that emerged from my interpretation of the data comprise the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4 THE GENDER DIVISION OF LABOR AND SITUATED KNOWLEDGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Doña Elena Siquinajay, the president of Mujeres Unidas in Itzapa, said that she and a few of her friends began noticing environmental problems in their community in the mid-1990s. One of the first problems they noticed was the lack of trees and branches available for firewood. As she described it,

First it was the problem of the lack of firewood. We were not able to find enough firewood. So we started to look for pinecones to burn, instead of branches. We told our children, 'Go get pinecones in the field,' and they would come back and say, "There are no pinecones." And that worried us. We started to ask ourselves, 'Why are the pinecones and the trees disappearing?'

The lack of firewood was a major concern that the women of Mujeres Unidas expressed; for many, it was a precipitating factor in their decision to work with AIR. In Guatemala, a typical rural household requires between two and three trees each month (or between 24 and 36 trees per year) for firewood (Katz 2000b:121). In highland communities it has traditionally been the responsibility of women to take care of all tasks related to cooking and other domestic work—including gathering firewood (Carey 2006; Katz 2000a). Thus, when Elena and her friends began worrying about the lack of trees in their community, their concern was directly related to the work that they do as women to maintain their households.

According to much ecofeminist literature, the gender division of labor is key to understanding *why* and *how* women develop an awareness of environmental problems in their local communities. As Mary Mellor argues, women's association with the natural world cannot be understood in essentialist or purely symbolic terms, but must be recognized as socially constructed, "reflect[ing] women's role as mediators of human society" (1997:189). Through their "reproductive" work of maintaining the household and

having primary responsibility for childcare, women “interact more closely with their local environment than do men” (Mellor 2003:13). Thus, women’s awareness of environmental problems stems from their “situated knowledge” as caretakers of their homes. As Joni Seagar summarizes,

Women are usually the first to notice—or to anticipate—environmental problems in their communities. Typically, what women ‘notice’ is pretty mundane. Because women, worldwide, still have primary responsibility for feeding, housing, and childcare, they are oftren the first to notice when the water smells peculiar, when the laundry gets dingier with each wash, when children develop mysterious ailments.... [This perspective] is important because environmental degradation *is* typically mundane: it occurs in small measures, drop by drop, well by well, tree by tree (1996:280).

This “gender division of labor thesis” is a cornerstrone of materialist ecofeminist analyses (see also Eaton and Lorentzen 2003; Mies and Shiva 1993; Salleh 2009). However, it is a thesis that is not without its weaknesses. First, it tends to treat the gender division of labor as a given or “natural” feature of any society, without calling into question how various social forces and/or processes might shape it. I argue that while it is true that traditional gendered household arrangements often *do* play an important role in dictating the work that women and men do within the household, it is also important to recognize the ways in which the gender division of labor can be quite fluid and shaped by changing social, economic, political, and historical conditions. By construing this division of labor as a “given,” materialist ecofeminists risk falling into the trap of essentialism—of making a social arrangement which has been *socially* and *historically* constructed appear to be an essential, inherent part of any society, and therefore immune to efforts to change it. A second weakness of this thesis is that by focusing its analytical lens primarily on gendered social arrangements, it may neglect the ways in which race and class also mediate women’s relationships with their local environments.

Thus, I agree with those critics who fault any ecofeminist framework that fails to offer an intersectional analysis of the ways in which individuals experience and respond to environmental degradation (Agarwal 1992; Sturgeon 1997; Taylor 1997).

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the gender division of labor has led to indigenous women's awareness of environmental problems in their communities.

Drawing from the stories of the women interviewed, I argue that while women's work in the environment is shaped in part by "tradition" and traditional gendered arrangements within the household, it is also shaped in large part by interrelated social, political, and economic factors. In the case of Guatemala, these factors include the aftermath of the civil war, which left many women as the sole providers of their households; gendered patterns of migration; and the advent of export agriculture—all of which have led to women's increased participation in agricultural work. From their everyday work in agriculture and the environment, indigenous women have become more aware of environmental problems in their communities.

However, I also argue that environmental problems cannot be analyzed only through the lens of gender; rather, it is important to adopt an intersectional perspective that considers race and class as well. When analyzed through the lens of a sociological ecofeminist framework, it becomes apparent that environmental degradation in Guatemala is a gendered, racialized, and classed process with great consequences for the entire indigenous community—a primarily agricultural community that has depended upon the environment for material and cultural survival for centuries.

Costumbre, Conflicto, y Capitalismo: How Tradition, War, and Capitalist Development Shape Women's Environmental Awareness

All of the indigenous women who were interviewed for this dissertation reported that they spend a great deal of time working outside in the environment on a day-to-day basis. The ten leaders of Mujeres Unidas reported spending between 15-25 hours each either working in *el campo* (the field), or gathering firewood and water for daily household use. All of these mundane tasks require the women to be in close, intimate contact with their local environment everyday.

While the work that women do in the environment is due in part to *costumbre*—traditional gender divisions of labor, it is also shaped by various social, political, and economic developments. In highland Guatemala, women's work has been impacted by the civil war, gendered patterns of migration, and the increasing adoption of export crop cultivation by small-scale farmers. Taken together, these factors have contributed to what Carmen Diana Deere (2005) terms a "feminization of agriculture" amongst small-scale farmers in Guatemala. In the following section I explore how these processes have shaped indigenous women's work in the environment, and led to their awareness of environmental problems in their communities.

La Responsabilidad de la Mujer: Tradition and the Development of Women's Environmental Awareness

Elena and the other women of Mujeres Unidas acknowledge that it was the lack of firewood and clean water in Itzapa that led to their initial concern about changes in their local environment. For these women, this concern is directly related to a traditional gender division of labor that characterizes many households in highland Guatemala: the man works outside of the home, either for wages or in the family's subsistence plot,

while the woman is primarily responsible for the reproductive labor of maintaining the household and caring for the children (Carey 2006; Ehlers 2000; Katz 2000a).¹⁴

In highland communities like Itzapa, two tasks that have traditionally been defined as “women’s work” are gathering firewood and water, as these activities are directly related to cooking, cleaning, and the overall maintenance of the domestic sphere. In the interviews, the women made it clear that they have primary responsibility for these tasks, and that it has been this way in their families for generations. As Felippa, 40, explained,

Each part of the work of cooking—gathering the firewood, making the tortillas, and all that—and each part of the work of cleaning the house is the responsibility of the woman.

The reproductive labor that indigenous women engage in on a daily basis is time-consuming and can be very exhausting. Elena vividly summarized a typical day for an indigenous woman in Itzapa.

She has to wake up at 4:00 or 3:30 in the morning. At 3:30 in the morning she is running around. She makes the fire, prepares the firewood, prepares the corn dough, sweeps the house. At 4:00 in the morning she makes tortillas, one hour to make tortillas and coffee. Well then the children and her husband wake up. After breakfast, she washes the dishes and takes the children to school. After...maybe she has to get firewood. It’s typical to get firewood once each week. And we have to walk very far to get it...almost three kilometers each way. If she needs it, she brings water from the spring, too. At twelve or one in the afternoon she cooks for her husband. They eat lunch, and afterwards she washes the dishes again. Sometimes she may help her husband in the field. At 2:00 or 3:00 she gets the children. Maybe then she has a little free time, so she weaves or makes tamalitos to sell. At 6:00 or 7:00 she and her daughters make supper. And afterwards they

¹⁴ It is also true that for indigenous women in Guatemala, there is some flexibility in this division of labor. For instance, if a woman’s husband needs her assistance in the field, then she will provide it. However, it is exceedingly rare to see men take on women’s roles. Historian David Carey attributes this to the overall devaluation of women and women’s work in the indigenous community; thus, as “gender relations impose an inferior standing on women, their assumption of male roles [can] be seen as an attempt to improve their status.” However, for a man to take on tasks traditionally defined as “women’s work,” would be humiliating and an indication that he was “choosing subordination” (2006:115).

wash the plates. We usually go to sleep at 11:00 at night. And the next day we get up and do it again.

Procuring firewood can be a particularly arduous and time-consuming task. All of the women note that they have to gather firewood between one and three times each week. Of the women interviewed in 2006 and 2009, only three reported that they own enough land to allow them to prune branches from trees in their own fields. Occasionally, the women buy firewood from a local vendor. In highland communities, the cost for one load of firewood ranges between 60 and 100 Quetzales (between USD\$7.50 and \$12.50), and the load may supply a family with enough firewood to last one to two weeks. For many women, the cost is equal to one week of income for their family, and is simply too much to afford. Thus, most women gather firewood from a nearby communally-managed forest. The members of Mujeres Unidas report that they walk between one and four kilometers, one way, to the forest on the outskirts of the city. In the forest, they will prune branches or gather fallen limbs, which they then wrap in a bundle and carry on their heads, using a *yagual* or *soto'y*.¹⁵ Oftentimes, the women will also gather and carry a mix of grasses that they use to feed any farm animals that they might keep (see Figure 4-1).

¹⁵ A *yagual* is a small piece of folded cloth used by indigenous women to help them carry burdens on their heads. The *yagual* is placed on the crown of the head and helps to more evenly distribute the weight of the burden. *Soto'y* is the Kaqchikel word for *yagual*.

Figure 4-1. Woman in Itzapa carrying firewood and grasses.



Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the women of *Mujeres Unidas* began noticing an increasing scarcity of trees in and around Itzapa. As they explained, their awareness developed *poco a poco*—little by little—as they found it increasingly difficult to find sufficient amounts of firewood. Ivelisse is a 40-year-old mother to four children, ages 10 through 22. She noted that in the early 1990s, prior to beginning agroforestry work with AIR, she had to devote an entire day to looking for firewood:

Every week, once or twice each week, I would walk nearly two or three hours, out of the community, up into the mountains, up, up, just to find some branches, firewood. I would have to walk so far, because I had no trees in my field, and no one else had trees, and I was not going to steal other people's trees or branches! Then, I would carry all this back down, on my head or my back, and it was very difficult if it ever started to rain. Finally, I would get home, almost eight hours after I left. And then I would have to cook for the family!

Juana, 35, said that by the mid 1990s she had to walk nearly four kilometers to find firewood to cook for her family of five. She described how she reflected on the lack of trees every day that she walked to gather firewood:

I had the same thoughts. That before there was enough firewood and we would go to get firewood...there [pointing to a hillside], there was enough. Now there is not. Now there is some...but the trees are far. And...that is the other problem, too. The lack of trees. Now there is no longer firewood here for the fire.

Thus, women's initial awareness of the increasing scarcity of trees in Itzapa was related to the ways in which this scarcity impacted their everyday work and responsibilities to provide their families with firewood for cooking. Individual frustrations with tiring and time-consuming treks soon developed into concerns that the women shared. Most of the women of Mujeres Unidas are life-long residents of Itzapa, and most know the other group members as friends, relatives, or acquaintances. It is common for the women to visit each other or to walk together to the market, to church, or to the fields or forests. It was through these informal meetings that the women began to share their individual worries about the lack of trees and firewood in Itzapa. As Elena explained,

This was the topic of our conversations, whenever we met. At the market, in the the street, when we visited, sharing coffee. We talked a lot about how the trees...that the trees were disappearing. We talked about how we were not able to find enough firewood for cooking, and about how far we had to go to find branches or pinecones.... This was a major concern for us, the deforestation and the lack of trees.

The women's concerns were valid and well-founded. A 2008 report issued by the local government of Itzapa estimates that from 1975 through 2007, Itzapa lost 60% of its 5,200 hectares of forest cover. From 1995 through 2007, Itzapa lost 0.91 hectares of forest cover annually, or between 10,950 and 12,775 trees each year (Monografía

2008). The steep hillsides around Itzapa that were once completely forested are now a patchwork of farms and houses (see Figures 4-2 and 4-3).

The women of Itzapa expressed concern about what this deforestation means not only for their individual work, but also for the future of their families and communities. As Marta emphasized, "How can we cook if there is no firewood? And if we cannot cook, then we cannot eat!" Catalina explained that the members of Mujeres Unidas share this concern for the future. She pointed out that:

About ten or twelve years ago approximately it [the environment] changed. We realized it because we were not able to find branches...I had to buy firewood in the street, and that costs a lot, 60 Quetzales [USD\$7.50]. It was because the majority of people started to cut trees. It did not matter to them. If there were small ones, big ones, the people just cut the trees. They never thought that it is damaging...that it is damaging the earth. Never do the men think that if they cut a tree it is like...how do you say...cutting our life.

In Itzapa and other highland communities, women have connected deforestation to other environmental problems. Of particular concern to many women is the contamination of local water sources. As more trees are cleared on steep hillsides, soil erosion leads to more instances of sediment-clogged waterways. Heavy rains exacerbate the problem of soil erosion in highland communities, leading to rivers, springs, and other water sources being partially or completely covered with mud, rocks, and other sediment due to flooding (see Figure 4-4).

Figure 4-2. Deforested hillsides on the outskirts of Itzapa. According to the women of Mujeres Unidas, these hills were forested in the early 1990s.



Figure 4-3. Deforested hillside on the outskirts of Itzapa.



Figure 4-4. River near Umul, Sololá, circa 2006. The river was completely covered by a mudslide following Hurricane Stan.



Like deforestation, the lack of clean water in rivers, springs, and wells has a direct impact on women's work in highland communities. In these communities, women have primary responsibility for washing clothes and dishes—and for gathering the water needed to accomplish these daily tasks. Currently, the World Health Organization estimates that 35% of households in rural Guatemala lack running water (WHO/UNICEF 2008). For the households that *do* have running water, the supply is often limited; in Itzapa, for instance, the municipality turns on the water for ten hours each day. When there is an insufficient supply of water to meet daily household needs, the responsibility falls on the women of the house to find ways to accommodate. This typically means that women must gather water from a nearby river, spring, or well. If there is not enough water for laundry, then women will make use of a community *pila* (a set of outdoor sinks) in order to wash clothes. Some pilas are supplied with running water from the city, while others are located next to a natural water source so that the women can

easily gather water as needed. Thus, like collecting firewood, obtaining water is also a distinctly gendered task that is tied to the domestic sphere and the reproductive labor that women engage in to maintain the household (Carey 2006; Ehlers 2001; Socolow 2000).

Figure 4-5. Community pila in Itzapa, supplied with running water from the city.



In Itzapa, the women of *Mujeres Unidas* began to notice the gradual degradation of a local river, Xipacay, around the same time that they began to notice the problem of deforestation. According to Elena and the other women of *Mujeres Unidas*, at one time the river was *cristilino*, crystalline, and very wide. The women noted that when they were children, it was common for them to go with their mothers and neighbors to the river to wash laundry. Marta acknowledged that while laundry is a time-consuming chore, she also enjoyed the opportunities to socialize during the weekly trips to the river.

Every week we went to the river...I went with my mother and neighbors too. Then [30 years ago], the river was crystalline. Now, it is not...it is dirty and dry. Before, we went and we spent the day there, chatting, washing, laughing, all that, and...I liked it a lot. Before, the river served us well. In contrast now it does not serve us. It is very sad, yes. Now no. Now it is not clean.

The women of Mujeres Unidas said that they became aware of the degradation of the river Xipacay little by little, over time. Ivelisse recalled that in the late 1980s she began to notice that every time it rained, the river became very muddy. She explained how this impacted her everyday work, noting that, "I was not able to go to wash clothes, because it [the river] was dirty...the water was black. So I had to wait a few days to wash."

In addition to being important for very practical purposes, the river Xipicay was also important for various religious practices in Itzapa. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, it is common for indigenous community members to practice a syncretic blend of religious traditions that integrate indigenous ritual with Christian ritual (Molesky-Poz 2006). This was the case in Itzapa, where, every June prior to the festival of Corpus Cristi, a group of indigenous women from the local Catholic church participated in a ritual washing of the robes worn by statues of saints in the church. According to Elena, who participated in the ceremony on a few occasions, they washed the robes in the spring that fed Xipicay because the water was clean and fresh, and it was "very important" to the community of Itzapa. However, as both the spring and river became more contaminated, the women were no longer able to wash the robes in the waters. Elena recalled:

It was 1994...that was the last year that we washed [in Xipacay] the robes of the saints, of the images of the Catholic Church. Now we use the pila, because the spring is too dirty and has a lot of contamination. Before, the people respected the river but now it is very small and dirty and everyone throws trash in it.

The story of the contamination of Xipacay points to both the material and cultural consequences of environmental degradation for indigenous communities. Prior to the contamination of the river, it served as a source of clean water for daily use, as well as an important religious and cultural symbol. Its subsequent degradation was thus not only traumatic for the community insofar as its material consequences, but also for the loss of a sacred symbol as well.

It was through their informal meetings that the women of Mujeres Unidas connected the degradation of Xipacay with the increasing deforestation around them.

Luvia explained:

We talked and we realized it was not a coincidence, that both of these things were happening at the same time. We saw how every time it rained, it washed soil into the river. And we saw that if there were less trees, there was more erosion. So yes, they are connected.

Now, the condition of Xipacay has deteriorated to the point that it is hardly recognizable as a river. Years of deforestation and soil erosion have led to the river becoming clogged with sediment from run-off; now it is only a small stream that runs along the outskirts of Itzapa. As Elena and the other members of Mujeres Unidas lamented, the river that was once of great material, cultural, and religious value to the community is now being used as a *basurero*, a trash dump (see Figure 4-6).

The women of Itzapa are not the only women who are concerned with the degradation of their local water sources. In 2006, 26 of the 31 women interviewed mentioned that the protection of local springs and rivers was one of the major reasons why they decided to work with AIR. A group of women from Masat, Sololá were particularly concerned with protecting a spring that supplies water to a community pila (see Figure 4-7). As the women explained, the deforestation of mountain slopes around

Figure 4-6. The river Xipacay, circa 2009. Note the height of the river banks, which provide some indication of the past width and depth of the river.



the spring has led to more sediment being washed into the water. This problem was particularly severe in 2006, in the aftermath of Hurricane Stan. The heavy rains and flooding from Stan led to massive soil erosion and mudslides which destroyed many farmers' crops, and which also partially covered over the spring that fed the pila. For a while, the women were unable to use the pila because of the lack of clean water. The women explained that the degradation of the spring and being unable to wash clothes at the pila has both material and cultural consequences. Francisca, 53, described making weekly trips to the pila as a long-standing tradition that she and other women in her community had shared. For her, the time spent gathering water from the river and washing clothes with other women in her community was a time to talk and commune with her friends and neighbors, and it was an important way of preserving both Maya

tradition and community solidarity. When asked about the degradation of the spring, Francisa expressed a profound sense of loss, lamenting that,

We are very sad, very sad. When we were children we went with our mothers to wash clothes there. As adults, we went there together with our daughters. But, after Stan, the river was gone. And now, we can no longer do that which we have done for many years.

Figure 4-7. Community pila supplied with water from a spring in Masat, Sololá.



Thus, as ecofeminists argue, the work that women do in relation to their reproductive labor of maintaining the home oftentimes *does* place women in close, immediate, and regular contact with their local environment. For indigenous women in Guatemala, the day-to-day work of gathering firewood and water means that women spend a large portion of their day working in the environment—walking to and from forests and springs, gathering and pruning branches, and finding clean water for

household use. However, indigenous women's work in the environment is not shaped by a traditional gender division of labor alone. In recent decades, more women in highland Guatemala have taken up agricultural work in response to certain political, social, and economic developments. This "feminization of agriculture" also shapes women's work in the environment and their awareness of environmental problems in their communities.

War and its Aftermath

Nearly four decades of civil war devastated rural communities in Guatemala. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, and estimated 200,000 citizens were killed during the war, 83% of whom were indigenous (CEH 1999). While exact statistics are unavailable, it is estimated that the war left between 40,000 and 80,000 widows in rural Guatemala (Green 1995). It is notable that one of the largest indigenous women's organizations in the nation is CONAVIGUA—the National Coordination of Widows of Guatemala (*Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala*).

While some indigenous widows have remarried since the war, many have not, and have taken up the role of being the sole providers for their families (Godoy-Paiz 2005; Zur 1998). This has dramatically altered the gender division of labor in many highland communities—particularly in regards to farming, an activity that has traditionally been defined as men's work in highland Guatemala. Time-use studies of agricultural labor in Guatemala estimate that men are responsible for between 75 and 91 percent of the labor time needed to grow traditional crops (von Braun, et al. 1989). However, as the grim toll of war has forced many widows to assume the roles of sole or primary providers for their households, they have also taken up the full responsibility of subsistence farming in order to feed themselves and their families.

While Itzapa was largely spared from the violence of the civil war, other communities where AIR works were not. The small town of Chimal, for instance, suffered the loss of several men who were killed by the army because they were suspected of assisting guerilla armies. In this town, AIR works with a group of approximately twenty indigenous women, four of whom are unmarried widows. In the years since the civil war, these women have assumed primary responsibilities for farming for themselves and their children.

Santiago, 48, is one of the leaders of the group in Chimal. Her husband was killed in 1984 during an army raid of Chimal. In a 2006 interview she recalled that,

During that time my situation was very difficult. It was very difficult because I lost my husband and the father of my children. And so I was alone and I had to take care of everything, everything on my own.

Santiago noted that in addition to caring for her three children, she also had to assume full responsibility for farming the family's milpa plot. She worked in the field nearly every day to ensure that she had enough crops to feed herself and her children. During this time, she relied upon her brother and her friends for social and financial support, as well as assistance with farming. She credited her family and friends for her survival, saying that "I thank God for them every day."

After years of farming her family's milpa, Santiago began to notice changes in the local environment of Chimal. In particular, she grew concerned with problems with soil erosion. She said that the soil quality became "much worse" and that she started to lose crops when it rained. She heard about AIR through a friend from the community of El Rincón, where AIR had established an agroforestry project and planted 75,000 trees. Santiago recalled that

[My friend] told me that I should go to AIR, because they could help me. And so I went, because I was very worried about my crops. My family is very poor, and if we do not have crops then we do not have food.

From meeting and talking with AIR técnicos William and Miguel, Santiago learned that the soil erosion that concerned her was likely connected to the deforestation around Chimal. Santiago resolved to “do something” about the problem, and in 2003 she organized a group of eight of her friends and relatives and began to work with AIR. Since then, the group has grown to include over 40 women. Santiago is a religious woman, and when she reflected on the story of how she started to work with AIR, she said that it was the work of God:

I say ‘thank God’ every day because only God can make a tragedy into...into something good. And so I lost my husband because of the Violence. And it was very difficult.... I learned to do everything by myself, yes I had the help of my family and friends but I was still alone, without my husband. But I also learned how to take care of the land. And now we are working here in Chimal to make a better future for our children, and for all our community, too.

Santiago’s story illustrates how the tragedy of Guatemala’s civil war left many women in rural communities as the sole providers for their households. As widows, women like Santiago had to assume responsibility for all major household tasks—including farming the family milpa plot. Through assuming additional work in the field, Santiago began to develop a recognition of environmental problems in Chimal. Thus, her story also illustrates the link between one’s experience and material connection to the environment, and the development of one’s environmental awareness. It was through the development of this awareness that Santiago became motivated to take action to protect her local environment—and thus ensure “a better future” for her community.

Export Agriculture and Gendered Migration

In addition to the impact of the civil war, recent economic developments have also contributed to a feminization of agriculture in highland Guatemala. According to economist Carmen Deere (2005), two main reasons for this trend have been the adoption of non-traditional export (NTAX) crop cultivation by small-scale farmers; as well as gendered patterns in migration that have left women as *de facto* household heads.

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, the adoption of export agriculture by small-scale farmers has been promoted in Guatemala since the 1970s as a way to both alleviate rural poverty and make the country more competitive in the global market (Deere 2005; Katz 2000a). For their part, small scale farmers have turned to export crop cultivation as a means of earning additional income for themselves and their families (Fischer and Benson 2006; Hamilton and Fischer 2005). Supplementing family income has become particularly important in the neoliberal era, as state cutbacks in education, welfare programs, and food subsidies have led to higher costs of living while wages have remained the same. Today, it costs between USD\$350 and \$400 per year to send a child to school beyond the primary (elementary) level in Guatemala. All of these price increases have a dramatic impact on the estimated 56% of the Guatemalan population who live on less than \$2 per day (CEPAL 2007). Thus, for many small-scale farmers in Guatemala, NTAX cultivation is an attractive option that allows them to continue to cultivate their own land, augment their household income, and support their families.

Studies of women's participation in NTAX cultivation have shown that women contribute more labor time to household production of these crops. This is due in large part to the high input of time and labor required to successfully grow these crops (Dary

1991; Hamilton and Fischer 2003; Katz 2000a; von Braun et al. 1989). For instance, von Braun et al. (1989) found that women contribute between 21 and 30% of the labor needed to grow export crops like snow peas and broccoli. Oftentimes, women engage in NTAX cultivation at the expense of other income-generating activities, like weaving or growing and selling traditional crops (Blumberg 1994; Dary 1991). As Deere (2005) concludes, in many ways neoliberal development and the advent of export agriculture have increased the workload of women in rural areas in Guatemala.

The indigenous women interviewed for this dissertation indicated that they do spend a great deal of time in *el campo*, maintaining the field and their crops. Of the 33 women interviewed in 2006 and 2009, 30 reported that they shared farming responsibilities with their husbands. Two women reported that they had sole farming responsibilities as their husbands migrated to the United States to seek employment. Another woman reported that her husband had primary farming responsibilities for their milpa, but that she assisted him “sometimes,” when it was time to harvest crops. Many of these women also indicated that their work in agriculture has increased in recent years due to a need to diversify and expand their household income. For instance, twelve women reported that their households have adopted NTAX cultivation in the past ten years as a means of increasing their household income. Many of these women also reported that their workload have increased since they began farming the new types of crops.

Elsa, 43, is a member of Mujeres Unidas whose husband works in Itzapa as a schoolteacher. She and her husband share responsibilities for farming their two hectare subsistence plot. Elsa explained that they began to work with the export contractor

Legumex¹⁶ in 2000 to grow green beans and snow peas in order to supplement their family's income. She noted that while the export crops have provided a needed source of income, they also require much more work on her part. Prior to growing the green beans and snow peas, Elsa spent one or two days each week working in their family's plot. Since adopting export crop cultivation, however, she works four days each week in the field:

I did not [used to] have the responsibilities that I have now. Now I wake up every day at four or five in the morning. I make breakfast. Then I clean up after breakfast. Then I go to the field. I am fortunate because my [two] older daughters can look after the younger children while I work in the field. After five or six hours of work, then maybe I have to go get firewood, or maybe I have to wash some clothes. Then I get home at around six or seven at night. Then I have to cook for everyone, and clean up again. I go to bed around eleven. A lot of women I know here work like this. We do this every day, except Sundays. On Sundays we go to church and thank God for another day of struggle.

Marta, 38, is another woman whose workload has increased considerably in recent years due to changes in local and global economies. In 2001, Marta's husband left Itzapa to search for work in the United States. Like many other men in rural Guatemala, Marta's husband made the decision to migrate in order to increase his household income. In recent decades, migration has been another important means of augmenting household income for both rural and urban Guatemalans. National data

¹⁶ Legumex is an agro-export company that was founded in 1976 in Guatemala. It contracts with local, small-scale farmers to grow a variety of export crops, including snow peas, broccoli, green beans, cauliflower, as well as a variety of fruits. It exports both fresh and frozen produce to the United States and Europe; it is worth noting that the website of Legumex is in English. Two of the company's major contractors in the U.S. include Superior Foods and Inn Foods. Superior Foods in turn supplies produce to a variety of other companies, including Sysco and U.S. Food Service, the second largest food distributor in the U.S.. In 2006 Legumex was cited by the National Labor Committee and the U.S. State Department for violations of workers' rights and for employing and underpaying girls under 14 years of age to work in its factory (see NLC 2007). The headquarters of Legumex are in El Tejar, approximately 7 kilometers from Itzapa.

indicates that in 1980, the number of Guatemalans living abroad was approximately 100,000; by 2008, this figure had increased to 1,313,931 persons. While the number of female migrants has increased, men constitute the majority—approximately 73.4%—of international migrants (OIM 2009). The migrating population is largely motivated by a number of push and pull factors, including the lack of economic opportunities in Guatemala, and the promise of better opportunities to the north (Franko 2007). Indeed, remittances are very important to Guatemala's national economy; in 2008 Guatemala received roughly USD\$4.4 billion in remittances, about 13% of its GDP (OIM 2009). In 2008 the population benefiting from remittances totaled 4,172,987 persons; 56.3% of this population was located in rural areas, and women comprised 54.7% of this population (OIM 2008).

As men in rural areas migrate to the north in search of better economic opportunities, women in rural areas are left as the *de facto* heads of household, and must provide food for themselves and their children. Marta acknowledges that since her husband left, her workload has increased considerably. While her husband sends payments on a monthly basis, Marta pointed out that she still must farm to feed herself and her four children.

Oh yes, I have to work... more now than before. I care for the children by myself, and I farm by myself. When he [my husband] left, I became the farmer. It was very difficult at first, because I had never worked by myself before. It was very difficult, because at first he did not send money. Now, he sends money, and I use it to send the children to school, and I can buy clothes and food, too. But I still must farm to feed us. It sometimes makes me tired.

Rosita, 47, is another woman whose work in agriculture has increased due to migration. She has three children; two daughters and one son. In 2007 her 16 year-old son left with his friends to go to the U.S. in search of work. As Rosita explained, her son used

to help her husband in the field, where the family farms a mix of subsistence crops and export crops, including broccoli and cauliflower. Since her son left, Rosita and her daughters have had to start working in the field to help her husband. Her increased work in agriculture has impinged upon Rosita's other income generating activities, particularly weaving garments to sell at local markets.

Before my son helped my husband in the field...cleaning, planting...the harvest, all that. Now no. Two years ago he [my son] left. Two years ago I was with great sadness because I only had one, my son, and he left me for the north...he was very small, only 16 years old.... [Now] Margarita [my daughter] and I work in the field because we have two hectares of land and it is too much for [my husband]. Each week we work...once or twice each week we work in the field. Now I do not have much time to weave, only at night.

Taken together, women's increased involvement in farming, as well as their continued responsibilities as caretakers of their household, means that the women have experienced increased demands on both their time and energy. In addition, the women's responsibilities to provide crops, firewood, and water for their families means that they are in direct and immediate contact with their local environment on a regular basis. It has been through indigenous women's work in *el campo*, in addition to their traditional responsibilities, that they have become more aware of environmental problems in their local communities. Elena highlighted the links between indigenous women's work in the field and the development of their environmental awareness. According to Elena, while women's work as *agricultoras* may have increased in recent years, indigenous women have long been accustomed to farmwork. As she said,

We, the indigenous people, are a community of farmers. The indigenous woman is accustomed to working in the field, from very early, she does things with love. The indigenous woman walks with her feet on the earth, like this.... So, it does not bother us to dirty our clothes, to dirty our feet. And because of our work in the field we started to recognize that there was a big problem in our community, that of deforestation, soil erosion, the lack of trees and birds too.

Thus, the women of Itzapa and other communities acknowledged that environmental problems of deforestation and soil erosion affect the gender-specific work they do as caretakers of their household, particularly in relation to traditional responsibilities of locating firewood and clean water. The women also pointed out that environmental problems have a direct impact on their work as farmers. However, it is important to recognize that when discussing environmental problems and their relation to farmwork, the women frame these problems as *community* problems with consequences for the health and livelihoods for all members of the indigenous community. Thus, I argue that when discussing the ways in which women are impacted by environmental problems, it is not enough to for ecofeminists or other scholars of gender and the environment to focus the analytical lens on gender alone. Rather, we must adopt an intersectional analysis that allows us to understand the ways in which gender works with race and class to shape individuals' experiences of and responses to environmental degradation.

Environmental Problems as Community Problems

In discussing how their experiences shaped their awareness of local environmental degradation, indigenous women often framed environmental problems as community problems. Here, it is important to note that indigenous women used the term *comunidad* (community) in reference to both their geographic community (the community of Itzapa or Chimal), as well as the indigenous community more generally. In many cases, women interchanged the term *comunidad* with *el pueblo indígena* (the indigenous people). Thus, race and class were central to indigenous women's understanding and articulation of "community." In the interviews, the women

emphasized that environmental problems are community problems insofar as they threaten the land and crops that indigenous populations depend upon for survival.

The women of Mujeres Unidas were particularly emphatic in taking note of the centrality of agriculture to the indigenous community. Catalina explained that in Itzapa, indigenous children learn from a young age that “life is in the field.” This was her experience as a child, as she recalled:

Yes, I worked...my brothers [and sisters] and I...from the age of 9, 8 years [we worked] in the field. We went to the field, there...planting or cutting the grasses...and we [my sisters and I] caring for our little brothers. And this is what I did...after, when we were 14, 13, 15 years old, we continued to work...helping our parents. Eh...cutting the grass for the animals or gathering beans when it was the the harvest, or when it was the harvest gathering the milpa, the corn. We had to go help our parents and they never told us about our studies...only, only in the field. They taught us how to farm.

Like other impoverished families in the highlands, Catalina’s family did not have the resources to send her or her siblings to school. Instead, all family members were expected to work in the field to help cultivate the milpa, and thereby ensure the day-to-day survival of the family. As Rosita explained, for indigenous families in the highlands, “we farm so we can eat.” Thus, as soon as they are old enough, indigenous children are expected to work in the field, helping their parents to ensure that all family members will have food on their plates.

While many of the women interviewed recognized the importance of formal education and lamented the fact that they did not attend school when they were younger, they also took pride in the indigenous tradition of farming and in being part of a community of farmers. Luvia, for instance, said that she thanks God every day because her parents taught her and her sister and two brothers how to farm. Like Catalina and Rosita, Luvia highlighted the importance of farming for all members of the indigenous

community—men and women alike. As she explained, she and the other women of Mujeres Unidas have developed an awareness of environmental problems in Itzapa not only because they are women but because they are *indigenous women*:

I think that we, the indigenous people, we know more about working in the fields. Because for example the people like, the ladinos, they are not accustomed to working in the field, and they cannot carry heavy things.... So they use more, for example, stoves, blenders, all that. So it does not bother them much, the lack of firewood. In contrast we, the indigenous, use more firewood. And we have more experience working in the, the fields. Maybe it's because of that, that they [the ladinos] do not care much about the environment because they only think about themselves. But they do not think about the future.... In contrast we, thank God our parents taught us to work like this, very hard. To work with a shovel, with a machete. And we know how to cut firewood, all that. Maybe because of this, maybe we the indigenous are concerned more [about the environment] because we have more experience working in the fields.

It has been noted that in Guatemala, the distinction between urban city dwellers and rural farmers is organized along racial lines—ladinos are overwhelmingly concentrated in urban settings, while an estimated 75% of the indigenous population resides in rural areas (UN 2009). This distinction is so clear that in Guatemala, it is almost automatic to consider the ladino identity as an urban identity, and the indigenous identity as a rural identity (Ehlers 2000; Hale 2006). Thus, it is unsurprising that Luvia considered environmental problems to be of little concern to ladinos whom she characterized as urban dwellers and thus far-removed from their local environment. In contrast, she considered environmental problems to be of special concern to the indigenous community who, as a rural and agricultural-based community, depends upon the environment for day-to-day survival.

Marta echoed Luvia's concerns, and also incorporated an analysis of class in explaining how environmental problems impact indigenous women and men. As she

argued, the largely impoverished indigenous community does not have the financial resources to ignore or escape the consequences of environmental degradation.

Because the indigenous, we are poor, and the ladinos...[the environment] does not concern them. Because they have money if they do not have water. They can buy Salvavida [bottled] water. It does not affect them. We cannot buy Salvavida, right? And they live in the city...they cannot see, or they don't...don't want to see environmental problems. Because they do not use trees, they do not need trees.

Thus, when speaking about environmental problems and their consequences, many indigenous women characterized them as being clearly organized along lines of race and class. As the women explained, they are problems which have a particularly strong impact on the largely impoverished indigenous community, which has long depended upon the environment for food, shelter, and income. When speaking of environmental problems in Itzapa, Fidelia, another member of Mujeres Unidas, pointed out that,

These are not only my problems. All of us here depend on our land for survival, and if we do not care for it, then it will not care for us. We must protect our land to protect our future.

Thus, while indigenous women characterized some problems as having gendered consequences—as is the case with the lack of firewood and clean water—they noted that others impact all members of the indigenous community. In particular, the women expressed a concern with soil erosion and mudslides, as well as the widespread use of agrochemicals by small-scale farmers.

Soil Erosion and Mudslides

In highland departments, high rates of deforestation have led to a lack of firewood and increased incidence of soil erosion and the contamination of water resources. Soil erosion poses a particular danger in highland communities to farmers and their crops in highland communities. In Itzapa, Chimal, Masat, and other areas of highland

Guatemala, most farmers' plots are located on very steep hillsides where it is both difficult and dangerous to farm (see Figures 4-6 and 4-7). Indeed, in some areas, the

Figure 4-6. Deforested hillside with soil erosion outside of Chimal.

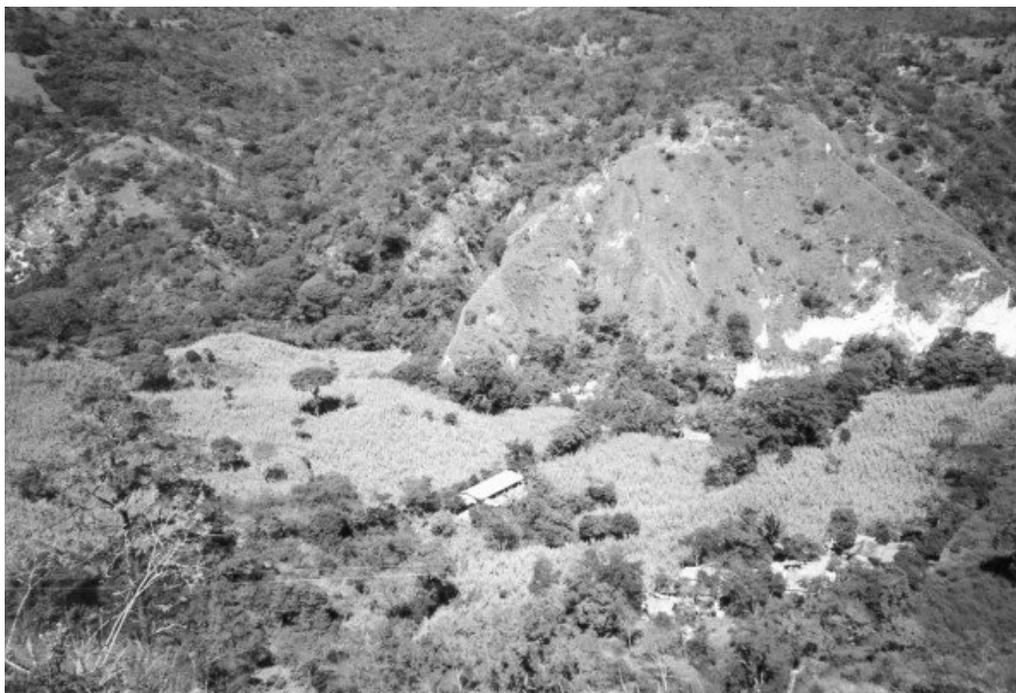


Figure 4-8. Deforested milpa plot in Masat with evidence of severe soil erosion. Trenches opened in the plot following a heavy rainfall in June 2009.



terrain is so steep and rocky that farmers will tie themselves to nearby trees as they work, in order to keep from sliding down a hillside.

In these mountainous areas, soil erosion aggravates the possibility of mudslides, which can completely destroy residents' communities and crops. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, the connections between deforestation, soil erosion, and mudslides were made painfully clear in 2005 when Hurricane Stan brought torrential rains and flooding to much of Guatemala. Highland communities throughout Chimaltenango and Sololá experienced high incidence of soil erosion and mudslides during the hurricane, and also during the weeks and months that followed. For Elena, it was clear that the mudslides in Itzapa were connected to the deforestation of mountain slopes:

Because...because of the erosion of the soil, right? They cut all the trees, only the loose roots remained, and the earth was very loose. And when the hurricane came, it was very easy for it to bring all the earth, uprooted trees, more trees. And all for not being reforested, they deforested all the mountains. So, this is a grave problem that we are seeing now, right?

It is notable that *all* of the women interviewed in 2006 and 2009 mentioned soil erosion and mudslides as some of the biggest environmental problems in their communities. As the women explained, both of these problems pose a grave threat to crops, as well as the safety of farmers and their communities. Mona, from Puebla, is a farmer and a mother of four children. She described some of the dangers that she contends with on a day-to-day basis when she works in her field:

The soil can be loose, and it is easy to slip on the rocks. I do not like to bring my children...the little ones with me, because it can be a little dangerous. So I ask my older ones to watch them when I am working [in the field].

Mona extended this danger beyond her own personal experiences, however, saying that, "I am only one of many farmers here. I know that others have the same difficulties like I have." Thus, Mona connected her experiences to the experiences of others in

situations similar to hers, concluding that the dangers inherent in farming on steep, unstable slopes are dangers that many farmers in her community must contend with on a day-to-day basis.

Other women noted the threat that mudslides pose to their crops, as many farmers had significant portions of their fields washed away during and after Hurricane Stan.

Catalina, from Itzapa, linked the problem of mudslides with the problem of deforestation in her community. She argued that,

We have to farm to eat, of course, but the only places to farm are here, on these mountains that are very steep. This is a problem because people want to clear more and more space for their crops, and not everyone knows the importance of trees. But then, when the rain is strong, there are many crops that are washed away, and then what do people have to eat?

Ivelisse, also from Itzapa, similarly linked problems of deforestation, soil erosion, and mudslides. She argued that she began working with AIR in large part to protect her crops from the dangers of soil erosion. One of her neighbors had lost all of his crops in a mudslide that occurred during the week following Hurricane Stan. She noted that he is not the only one, explaining that,

People came here afterwards to give us clothes and water, but they did not understand all that we had lost. We lost our crops, our food. It will take a long time to recover from this....This is why our little group [Mujeres Unidas] works with AIR. We work with AIR to plant the trees to protect our crops and protect our families, our future.

Thus, while soil erosion and mudslides may impact individual farmers and their crops, the women interviewed do not characterize them as problems that are limited to one or two individual farmers. Rather, the women view these problems as part of a larger pattern of environmental degradation that threatens the food base, safety, and future of the entire indigenous community.

Agrochemicals

Through their work as farmers, many women also developed a sense of concern over the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. From the 2006 and 2009 interviews, a total of six women (four from Itzapa and two from Chimal) reported using agrochemicals on either their subsistence crops, their commercial crops, or both. All expressed some uneasiness in doing this, however, as there is a growing awareness in Guatemala of the health risks associated with agrochemical use. Recent estimates indicate that the number of acute illnesses resulting from pesticide use in Guatemala varies between 10,000 and 30,000 annually (PAHO 1998). In the present study, the indigenous women who reported using agrochemicals said that they began doing so when they adopted export crop cultivation. In order to secure a contract with an export company, farmers usually must agree to apply a certain amount of pesticides and fertilizers to the export crops for each growing cycle. Previous studies have shown that farmers may apply as many as 20 applications of pesticides per growing cycle (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; Hamilton and Fischer 2003). Pesticides and other agrochemicals are available at small stores located throughout communities (see Figure 4-9).

Felippa and her husband, Pedro, adopted export crop cultivation in 2002. Like Elsa, Felippa and Pedro contract with the local exporter Legumex. Felippa said that in order to secure the contract, Pedro had to agree to use a certain brand of pesticide and fertilizer, and to apply them a certain number of times every month. While Felippa noted that the company is very strict in showing farmers how to apply the agrochemicals to the crops, she also said that the company made no mention of the health risks of the chemicals.

Figure 4-9. Inside of one local store that sells agrochemicals in Itzapa. Stores like these are a common sight in communities throughout Chimaltenango and Sololá.



This is particularly alarming, given that many agrochemicals commonly used in Guatemala have been banned in the U.S. due to concerns about the risks that they pose to both humans and the environment. One of these is Methamidophos, manufactured by Bayer and sold under the names Tamaron or Monitor 4. This insecticide has been linked to health problems amongst both humans and animals, and the World Health Organization classifies it as a type 1b (Highly Hazardous) chemical (Lee 2008). However, due to relaxed government regulation of the agro-export sector in Guatemala, methamidophos and other harmful chemicals are readily available for purchase at any local *tienda*.

Despite using the chemicals on their export crops, Felippa and her husband do not spray them on the family's subsistence crops of corn and beans. She said that this is a compromise she reached with her husband:

He has worked for many years in a farm [on a seasonal basis in Tecpán] and they use many chemicals there. He has a bad cough that he has developed since

working there. When we started growing these crops [snow peas], I told him that we can use chemicals on these crops, but not on the maize [for family consumption]. I know that the chemicals are bad for his health, and I do not want him to use them. I think they are bad for our family.

The other women who said that their families used agrochemicals on their crops also reported reservations in doing so, and acknowledged that they worry some about the long-term consequences of using these inputs. Indeed, concern over chemical inputs is cited by many women as one of the main reasons why they chose to work with AIR. Through AIR, the women have learned how to make and use an organic fertilizer/pesticide mixture (made from charcoal). Rebecca, from Chimal, explained why she preferred the organic mixture, noting that, “If we can farm in a way that does not hurt our land or our health, then of course we will do it. Why should we use those chemicals if we know that they are dangerous?” Lidia, also from Chimal, concurred with Rebecca. She noted that farming in a sustainable way, without the use of chemicals, has both short and long-term benefits for individual farmers, their families, and their larger communities:

In this way we take care of our health and the health of our families. What good are crops if they are poisoned and if they make you sick to grow them and to eat them? We can grow them without using those chemicals, and we can grow them in a way that does not make us sick and does not make our children and grandchildren sick.

Discussion

As the words and stories of women like Elena, Catalina, and Rebecca make clear, indigenous women in Guatemala have a well-developed awareness of environmental problems in their local communities. In particular, indigenous women from communities in Chimaltenango and Sololá expressed a great deal of concern with problems of deforestation, soil erosion, the contamination of water sources, and the overuse of

agrochemicals. The women's awareness of environmental problems was due in part to their traditional responsibilities as the primary food, fuel, and water providers for their families. In this respect, I contend with ecofeminist scholars and argue that women's environmental awareness *is* shaped to a great deal through the gender division of labor and women's roles as "mediators" between society and nature. However, I also argue that the gender division of labor is much more fluid than many ecofeminists recognize, and that it is also shaped in part by social, political, and economic developments. Thus, indigenous women's awareness of environmental problems in Guatemala is also due in large part to their increasing responsibilities as both subsistence and commercial farmers, roles which they have been forced to assume as widows in the aftermath of Guatemala's civil war, or in response to gendered patterns of migration and the advent of export agriculture.

It is also important to point out that while indigenous women acknowledged that some environmental problems directly impacted their work as women, they also characterized these problems as community-wide problems that posed threats to the land and crops that the indigenous community depends upon for survival. Thus, themes of gender, race, and class were central to indigenous women's explanations for how and why they developed an awareness of environmental problems in their local communities. Overall, their testimonies highlight the importance of an intersectional analysis of environmental problems. Thus, I argue that ecofeminists and other environmental scholars must recognize how interconnected social markers and systems of power and privilege work together to shape how individuals and communities identify, experience, and respond to environmental problems.

In the next chapter, I examine how and why indigenous women's awareness of environmental problems led them to take action to protect their land and communities.

CHAPTER 5
THE WILL TO ACT: GENDER SOCIALIZATION AND THE CAREWORK OF
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

In 1997, three years after what she refers to as the “death” of the river Xipacay, Elena Siquinajay was still thinking about the environmental problems facing her community of Itzapa. She shared her concerns with an acquaintance, Francisca. Francisca told Elena about a presentation that a local organization was planning to give the following week:

She told me that the organization was about the environment, and I was excited. ‘Ah, how good!’ I told her. ‘So let’s go!’...So the next week, we went to the presentation, and this was the presentation of AIR.

It was at this presentation that Elena met William Santizo, a ladino agroforestry technician who started working with AIR in 1994. During the presentation, William spoke about deforestation and its connections to soil erosion, mudslides, and other environmental problems. For Elena, the presentation clarified many of her worries about the environment, and also sparked a strong reaction in her.

I started to cry. He [William] was talking about all the damage we are doing to the earth, the way we are destroying it. And he was talking about ‘Mother Earth.’ And I, I started to think about my childhood. My father was very violent. Many times he hit my mother...never us, the children. But my mother, yes. And I had to take care of my little brothers and little sisters, because I was the oldest, and my mother was not able to take care of us when my father hit her. And so I was thinking, ‘We are destroying the earth. And the earth is like our mother, like a beaten mother. How can the earth care for us when she is abused?’ ...So I decided that I wanted to do something to help...not just to take care of her, Mother Earth, but us, her children too.

Like many other indigenous women who choose to work with AIR, Elena describes her environmental activism as carework—as a way of caring for the earth, the family, and the community. In particular, Elena and other women relate their

environmental activism to their work as mothers, in that they characterize their activist work as an extension of the carework they do within the household.

Indigenous women in Guatemala are not alone in using their identities as mothers and caretakers to inform their activist work. Indeed, mobilizing around these identities is an important strategy for women around the world who are working for social, economic, and environmental justice on behalf of their communities (Collins 2000; Craske and Chant 2003; Godfrey 2005; hooks 1990; Naples 1998; Pardo 1998; Seagar 1996, 1993). As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and bell hooks (1990) note, for women living in socially and economically oppressive conditions, mobilizing around the identity of mothers is often an important pathway to broader-based community activism. Nancy Naples (1998) makes a similar argument, and uses the term “activist mothering” to describe any type of activism that involves carework for individuals within one’s household and larger community. As Naples explains, “Activist mothering not only involves nurturing work for those outside one’s kinship group, but also encompasses a broad definition of actual mothering practices” (113). Here, it is important to recognize that “community” is not used simply in reference to geographic or spatial locations, but is also constructed along “a convergence of racial-ethnic identification and class affiliation” (Naples 1998:114). Thus, in many cases women’s community carework is connected to larger struggles against racism, sexism, and poverty. In the case of indigenous women in Guatemala, I argue that it is also part of a long struggle against the colonization of indigenous land and resources.

While I contend that it is important to recognize environmental activism as a form of community carework, and as an extension of the carework that women do within the

household, I also caution against viewing this carework as a “natural” tendency for women. Rather, I argue that the propensity of women to become community activists stems directly from their gender socialization, in which women have been taught since childhood to be caregivers within the household. In this chapter I explore how the gender-specific socialization of girls and women in highland Guatemala has led to women developing a “consciousness of care” that has guided their pathways to becoming environmental activists in Guatemala. Specifically, I focus on the oral histories of the women of *Mujeres Unidas*, in an effort to understand how gender and processes of gender socialization influenced their decisions to become environmental activists. As the women of *Mujeres Unidas* made clear, they view their environmental work with AIR as an important way of caring for their families, children, and the future of the larger indigenous community. By mobilizing around their identities as mothers and caregivers, indigenous women link their personal, everyday experiences to political activism, and extend the carework they do within the household to their larger communities.

Of course, it should be pointed out that women’s mobilization around their identities as mothers has long been a fiercely debated topic within feminist scholarship on Latin American (Alvarez 1990; Chant and Craske 2003; Molyneaux 2001; Sutton 2007). While some scholars view it as contributing to women’s oppression and confinement in the home (i.e., women have value only or primarily as mothers and/or wives), others view it as an empowering strategy, “a basis for political participation, identity, resistance, and/or transformation” (Chant and Craske 2003:10). Here again I note the importance of an intersectional analysis: while I concur that it is problematic to

continue to reinforce the link between women and motherhood, I also argue that it is important to recognize the (environmental) activist mothering of indigenous women as an important form of carework for the entire indigenous community. Understood in this way, it is possible to situate the environmental activism and carework of indigenous women within both the women's movement and the larger indigenous movement. As part of the Guatemalan women's movement, the environmental activism of indigenous women challenges scholars and activists alike to broaden our definitions of "women's issues" to include not only racism and poverty, but environmental degradation as well. Additionally, highlighting the work of groups like *Mujeres Unidas* allows for a better understanding of the ways in which indigenous women are contributing to the larger indigenous movement. As a way of caring for the health, safety, land, and future of their families and communities, indigenous women's environmental activism is an important part of the indigenous movement in Guatemala—a movement that has struggled for the past five centuries against the exploitation and destruction of indigenous land, labor, and resources.

Learning to Care: Gender Socialization and the Development of a "Consciousness of Care"

When recounting her childhood in Itzapa, Catalina Siquinajay acknowledged that she had many responsibilities as a young girl. From the age of eight she worked in the field with her parents, assisting them in clearing and planting their *milpa* plot. She also had daily responsibilities for helping her mother cook and wash clothes, and for taking the family corn to the *molin*, the community corn grinder. Catalina noted that perhaps her most important responsibility was looking after her little brothers and sisters:

I [as the oldest] always had responsibility to care for my little brothers [and sisters]. Because at times my mother had to work and she could not care for us, neither

could my father because he was working too. So it was I...I took my little brothers [and sisters] to the field, I carried the baby on my back, like this...and when my mother was sick I had the responsibility to make and carry food [to the field] for the entire family. This is what I did since the age of nine, eight years old.

Catalina is not alone; the other leaders of Mujeres Unidas also acknowledge that from an early age, they learned that they were expected to care for their families and households. These expectations were often clearly organized along the lines of gender, as Ivelisse explained in the following exchange:

Ivelisse: When I was young, I did not go to school. I did not learn many things, eh, like math, Spanish, things like that. My school was in the house, the field.

Rachel: So, what did you learn in the house and field?

Ivelisse: How to cook,eh, how to farm. How to take care of my little brothers [and sisters]. I helped my mother a lot, making tortillas, washing clothes. And if someone—my little brother for example—was sick, I helped her [my mother] to care for them. My sister and I, we helped our mother a lot.

Rachel: And your brothers? Did they help your mother?

Ivelisse: [Laughing]. No! Of course not. They were working. They worked only in the field, helping my father.

The oral histories of the women of Mujeres Unidas reveal that gender was central to shaping their childhood experiences in Itzapa. Beginning at an early age, the women learned the expectations and responsibilities that their families—and larger society—placed on them, first as girls, and later as women. Of course, it should be pointed out that this “gender socialization” is embedded within every society. Recognized as the lifelong process through which we learn “the social expectations of what is appropriately masculine or feminine,” gender socialization plays a major role in teaching the values, behaviors, norms, expectations, and responsibilities (traditionally) associated with maleness or femaleness in a particular context (Andersen 2009:33). While gender socialization influences—and is influenced by—cultural and social forces, there are also

overarching themes in this process that cut across many cultural boundaries. One of these themes entails women learning how to assume the role of caregivers. As Andersen (2009) notes, the role of caregiver involves taking responsibility for “carework,” or “all the forms of labor (including unpaid work) that is needed to nurture, reproduce, and sustain people... [and that] is critical to the maintenance of social life.” Care work is “gendered” insofar as women do the vast majority of such work within the household (ibid:147).

While both gender socialization and carework are basic sociological concepts, they are largely absent in discussions of gender and the environment. Rather, as I argued in Chapter 4, ecofeminists and other gender and environment scholars tend to treat the gender division of labor and women’s roles as caregivers as given features of any society, largely ignoring the ways in which these arrangements are *socially constructed*. By foregrounding the concept of gender socialization, I emphasize that the role of “woman as caregiver”—and the behaviors, values, and consciousness associated with this role—are all learned attributes.

As Catalina, Ivelisse, and other women point out, their parents and families were key to facilitating the process of socialization; it was from their parents that they first learned the responsibilities that were expected of them, first as girls and later as women. Luvia credited her parents with teaching her “everything,” saying that,

As a child, I had to learn how to do many things. From my father [I learned] how to cultivate, how to work in the field. From my mother [I learned] how to cook, take care of the house, eh, cleaning, washing clothes, caring for children, all that.”

As I noted in Chapter 4, while the gender division of labor in highland Guatemala is in many ways flexible, it is *moreso* for women; that is, it is more acceptable—and in some cases necessary—for women to adopt work traditionally done by men. However,

the socially undervalued realm of reproductive “carework” is still largely reserved for women; as noted by David Carey (2006), indigenous men do not engage in “women’s work” because to do so would be humiliating, a sign that men were “choosing subordination” (115; see Chapter 4 for more on this).

Some indigenous women viewed the gender division of labor as unproblematic, describing it as simple *costumbre* and a reflection of men and women’s “natural” tendencies. Rosita, for instance, saw no problem with taking care of the house while her husband works for wages. She said,

It is tradition. The man has to work all day, some in the field, some in the plantation. My husband, for example, does all types of hard work. He works on the mountain...selling firewood, he works as an assistant to a bricklayer. So when he comes home at the end of the day he is tired, his back hurts, his hands hurt, he does not want to do anything! So I make dinner and I take care of him. This is the responsibility that I have.

Of course, Rosita neglected to mention the “hard work” that she does on a daily basis. She wakes up at 3:30 or 4:00 every morning to begin making breakfast for her family, and then goes to work in the family subsistence plot for a few hours. She tends the family store for the rest of the day, and then around 6:00 p.m. begins to make dinner. After dinner, her oldest daughter helps to wash dishes and put the younger children to sleep while Rosita stays awake until 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. weaving huipils to sell at local markets. According to Rosita, it usually takes between one and three months to make a huipil, which usually sells for 250 Quetzales, or a little more than USD \$30.

Unlike Rosita, Elena was highly critical of the ways in which the everyday responsibilities of caring for the family and household can overburden indigenous women.

At times it is a little funny, at times sad, because after [work], the man goes, if possible he goes to play a little ball or he simply stays...if he has a television he watches television, or if not, he stays on the bed like this, very comfortable, and sleeps peacefully. And the women is running, watching after the children, caring for them. 'Let's go to school! Let's go to the market! Let's go home!' And if one wants its bottle, if one wants coffee with bread, or if one wants to leave to go shopping, ay! One with children, with all the work, with all the care for her husband. The husband just brings the money. It is certain that he brings the money, but who works more? ...And we are always thinking of our husband and the children, never thinking of ourselves. So they [the women] say, 'Ah, I want to please my husband.' And I quit thinking of myself. We are always thinking of the husband. But never do we think, 'what would I like?'

However, while Elena acknowledged the burden of carework, she also pointed out that it is a responsibility that should be shared by all members of the community. She argued that it is because of their responsibilities as caregivers that the women of Mujeres Unidas decided to take action to stop further environmental degradation in Itzapa.

It is certain that we should all take care of each other, right? This is what we [the women of Mujeres Unidas] believe. That it is not just the work of women, but everyone—men, parents, grandparents, little ones, right? This is our idea...the idea that we have. And this is why we started to work with AIR, because we realized that it is very important to care for the future of everyone, our children and our community.

Luvia concurred with Elena, and also connected her concern for her children and family with her concern for protecting the environment. As she said,

This is the interest that we, the women, have: to plant more so that our children later may have a place to get firewood, and will have pure air. This is...that is what one...one has to think of the children! Not of oneself. Because now...maybe now we will not see if the future will be bad. But they [the children] will. So we have to do something now.

Like Elena and Luvia, all of the leaders of Mujeres Unidas emphasized the importance of taking care of their families, children, and community when discussing their environmental activism. While it is clear that the women see a connection between their care work within and beyond the household, this work should not be regarded as

simply a “natural” tendency for women. Rather, I argue that women make the decision to engage in community care work as environmental activists due in large part to their gender socialization as caregivers. Since their childhood, the women were taught and expected to assume a caregiving role; as “secondary” caregivers, they helped their mothers to care for their siblings and their fathers. This early learning helped to facilitate women’s transition to the role of primary caregivers—as wives and/or mothers as adults.

I argue that it is through the process of gender socialization and the assumption of traditional gender roles that women develop a “consciousness of care.” Simply put, a consciousness of care is the recognition of the importance of engaging in work to benefit and nurture one’s family, community, and larger society. This consciousness may then be an impetus that leads individuals to mobilize and *act* upon perceived threats to their families and/or communities. A consciousness of care is also something that is *learned* or *developed*, both from the material conditions of one’s everyday life as well as one’s everyday responsibilities. Here, it is important to reiterate the centrality of gender: patterns of gender socialization facilitate the development of women’s consciousness of care, as women are taught (and expected) throughout their lives to fulfill a caregiving role. This is not to say that men cannot or should not be caretakers—quite the opposite! Rather, I am simply pointing out that the caregiving role and a consciousness of care are attributes that women are taught and expected to assume, while in many societies men are actively *discouraged* from possessing (or displaying) these attributes.

It is this gendered, caring consciousness that informs women's carework within the household and larger community. As the leaders of Mujeres Unidas pointed out, it is also this consciousness that led them to make the decision to work with AIR and become environmental activists. Juana explains:

For me, to be a mother is to care for my children in all ways. Not only in the house, making food, caring for them when they are crying, and all that, but also taking care of their future.... So this is why I work in the little group with Doña Elena [and AIR], for the future, so my children can have clean air and water.

Many of the women also noted the centrality of gender in their environmental work, and pointed out that when they first started to work with AIR, the men of the community (including their husbands and members of their own families) teased them and laughed at them. As Catalina recalled,

There are many men that are not interested. Eh...for example when we first formed the group, we talked with our neighbors, our friends, and we told them that we need to plant trees for the future, to protect our future. But their husbands were laughing and said that we were wasting our time. So because of this there were not many women in our little group, because their husbands are very *machista*.

Rosita pointed out that when she joined Mujeres Unidas, her husband was not supportive at all. She said that when she first started working with the other women, "He [my husband] did not think anything. He told me, 'What benefits are you all making? What is the point?'"

Other women said that their husbands grew resentful, and even violent, as they thought that their wives' work with AIR would detract from their responsibilities within the home. Juana, for instance, said that when she first started to meet with the group every Tuesday afternoon, her husband accused her of neglecting him and the children, and of cheating on him. She recounted: "He got very angry. He was drinking a lot and he told me that I was going out with men. So he hit me. Every week he hit me." Eventually,

Juana began to lie to her husband, telling him she was going to the market to buy vegetables whenever she went to meet with the women of Mujeres Unidas. At the meeting, the other women gave Juana vegetables from their own gardens, so that her husband would not become suspicious. Juana says that in spite of the threat of violence from her husband, she continues to work with Mujeres Unidas because she believes in the importance of the work.

It [the group's work] is very important because we [the indigenous] do not have much! So we need to protect what we have.... What the group wants is hopefully that everyone benefits from our work. Aha. That is what...what I think...that we benefit everyone so that...in the future the people...the children will have trees, air, clean water. Yes. It's for the common good. Yes.

Safe Spaces and the Development of Critical Consciousness

Shortly after Elena attended William's presentation, she contacted her longtime friends Catalina and Graciela. They met at Elena's home and talked about William's presentation, and about the sadness they felt at the deforestation around them. Elena recounted the meeting:

I told them, 'It gives me sadness to see the trees falling. When the chainsaw comes cutting, deforesting everything, and all the little animals are running, dying, looking for their children, searching for branches to cover themselves, it is very sad.' And Catalina and Graciela were also very sentimental. 'Me too, it gives me sadness. So, what can we do?' Catalina told me. I didn't know. So I told her, 'I don't know. But we have to invite more women, and we should call William.'

Following that first meeting, Elena, Catalina, and Graciela proceeded to make use of informal social networks to invite other women to join their group. They told their friends, neighbors, and relatives that they wanted to work with AIR and plant trees in order to protect their community and their children's future. Initially, many women were unable to participate; according to Elena and Catalina, this was due in part to a lack of time, and in part to the fact that many women's husbands discouraged them from

participating. In spite of these setbacks, however, within three weeks the group grew to include eleven members: Elena, Catalina, Luvia, Isabel, Felippa, Marta, Juana, Rosita, Elsa, Ivelisse, and Graciela.¹⁷ With these members Elena then proceeded to contact William and asked him to help the group establish its first tree nursery.

The small group of women began to work with William on a weekly basis. Elena's husband supported their efforts and he and Elena allotted a small corner of their land to be used as a tree nursery. William and AIR provided the women with the seeds, tools, and training necessary to cultivate tree seedlings. The women and William agreed to meet every Tuesday afternoon for a few hours to work in the nursery. Occasionally, William took the women on tours of AIR's agroforestry projects in other communities. These tours allowed the women the opportunity to talk with other (indigenous) farmers and see how agroforestry work was being carried out elsewhere.

In July of 1998, after several months of training and work, the time came to plant the group's first batch of approximately 600 tree seedlings. The members of Mujeres Unidas voted and unanimously decided to plant the seedlings in the milpa plots of Elena, Graciela, and Catalina, the founders of Mujeres Unidas. For the women, planting the trees was a momentous occasion—it was a reward and validation for their hard work, and helped motivate them to continue. As Elena said,

We saw our dream as a reality. All of us [were] like this... crying. We were planting, and laughing, and crying... all at the same time! We realized that we have the ability to do what we want, and we wanted to do more.

Since those first years of work with AIR in 1997 and 1998, the leaders of Mujeres Unidas have made it a priority to continue to attend the weekly meetings in the tree

¹⁷ Graciela worked with the group for two years, but had to quit due to time constraints. She passed away in 2002.

nursery. According to the women, these meetings are important in two respects. First, in regards to practical issues, the meetings enable the women to learn and practice the technical specifics of sustainable agroforestry: how to plant and cultivate seeds and seedlings; how to make organic fertilizer and pesticide; when and how the trees should be planted; etc. As Catalina described it, “The nursery is our school. We are always learning things.” Second and perhaps more importantly, the tree nursery and the time spent there have offered the women invaluable opportunities to simply *be together* for an extended period of time—talking, laughing, and bonding, free (for a brief time) from the distractions and demands of everyday life.

In many ways, the time in the tree nursery has helped the women of Mujeres Unidas to cultivate a “safe space,” a place where they can “speak freely” and share conversation, ideas, worries, concerns, and laughs with each other. These safe spaces represent much more than a casual opportunity to chat with friends, however. Rather, I concur with Patricia Hill Collins (2000) who argues that safe spaces constitute critical sites of resistance where members of oppressed groups can freely express themselves, free from dominant forces of racism and/or sexism that would otherwise marginalize their voices or render them silent. Writing about the importance of safe spaces for Black women in the U.S., Collins contends that these spaces are a “necessary condition” for Black women’s resistance to objectifying racist, sexist, and elitist ideologies. Thus, “by advancing Black women’s empowerment through self-definition, these safe spaces help Black women resist dominant ideology” (2000:101).

For the women of Mujeres Unidas, the tree nursery and fields where they plant offer a refuge from the demands of everyday life, as well as a place free of oppressive

forces—the racism and marginalization of larger society, and the patriarchy that many women experience within their own homes. Many women reported that when they are in the company of other indigenous women—their friends and fellow group members—they feel more liberated to share their ideas and opinions. Marta, 38, explained that it is important for indigenous women to work together in order to find and express their voice:

Yes, it is important [to work together]. To defeat the fear, to be able to have...to reclaim the strength of the woman. To find her voice. Aha. To lose that timidity, because at times someone at the meeting says, 'what I want to say is not correct...you all are going to laugh.' But working in the group, one loses this timidity, this fear.

This hesitancy and fear of speaking develops as many girls and women are actively discouraged from expressing their thoughts and opinions within the household and larger community. Both symbolic and actual violence are used to silence women. For instance, some women noted that they fear being laughed at or ridiculed if they talk about political or social issues. Juana said that when she tries to talk with her husband or other men about the environment, they laugh at her.

They [the men] say that we are crazy, that we do not have the right to speak about many things, nor to work in the nursery like we do. They say that they want us to start a tortilla shop if the trees die.

Other women pointed out that the threat of physical violence has also led to some women being afraid to speak. Isabel drew from her own childhood to illustrate this point:

For me, for example, I grew up with my father who would not let us speak. Always if we were talking—my mother or my sister and I—he would hit us. So I was very afraid to talk and I did not want to talk much.... I still dread talking, but it is very important because we, the women...I believe that we have a good vision and we should, we need to share it with the community.

Thus, within a community and society in which women's voices are often marginalized, ridiculed, or ignored, the importance of safe spaces where women are encouraged to speak freely becomes apparent. The women of Mujeres Unidas note that their work in the nursery has given them the opportunity to share ideas, to develop a clear understanding of their goals and vision, and to cultivate an empowered sense of self as they take pride in the work that they do. As Juana summarized simply,

Here in the nursery we have more confidence with women. We have developed confidence in ourselves because we see that we have the ability, eh, *the power* to contribute to the common good.

By allowing women the opportunity to speak freely, safe spaces help to facilitate the process of conscientization—the development of a critical consciousness. As elaborated by Paulo Freire (2008), conscientization involves both action and reflection, “critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be ‘in a situation’” (109). Through this process, “individuals who were *submerged* in reality, merely *feeling* their needs, *emerge* from reality and perceive the *causes* of their needs” (110). As Friere contends, this critical consciousness in turn informs the continuation and/or extension of activist work.

Elena Siquinajay said that it was shortly after she began working with AIR that she started to become *muy critica* (very critical) of the sexism, racism, and poverty that she saw in Itzapa and elsewhere in Guatemala. Elena explains that after the women of Mujeres Unidas planted their first batch of tree seedlings, other women in the community expressed an interest in joining the group. As more women began to participate in the meetings every Tuesday, Elena began to recognize common themes in the stories the women told about their lives.

They talked about the same pain, psychologically we have the same pain...of being poor, of being women without rights, without respect. And so the idea occurred to me that we are doing this work for our children, for our families, but what are we doing for ourselves? So this is when I started to learn about gender, about sexism and racism...and I used what I learned to teach the other women.

In the fall of 1997, Elena started attending the Escuela Normal Pedro Molina por una Educación sin Sexismo y sin Racismo (the Pedro Molina Normal School for an Education without Sexism and Racism), a school sponsored by another local NGO that works to educate adults and adolescents on how to challenge sexism and racism in everyday life. It was here that Elena learned more about the history of colonization, and about the connections between various forms of oppression. It was also at this school that she learned how to educate others about these social problems, using a Freire-inspired model of pedagogy.

The school's program lasted four months, and Elena took everything she learned back to the tree nursery. In addition to the Tuesday meetings with William, Elena also started to lead separate meetings—*capacitaciones*—every other week in the nursery. During these meetings she and the women spoke about their everyday problems and learned from each other in consciousness-raising sessions (see Figure 5-1). For many women, these *capacitaciones* helped them to better understand how larger systems of power and privilege shaped their own lives. Catalina pointed out that the women learned to recognize, name, and understand the historical foundations of different forms of oppression, including sexism or *machismo* as well as racism and poverty. The *capacitaciones* also helped many leaders of Mujeres Unidas to realize the importance of continuing their activist work—not only for their families and community, but also as a way of empowering themselves. As Marta said,

We realized that we need to continue this work so that we can continue to have respect for ourselves. And...if I have respect and if I have confidence in myself, then others are going to have respect for me, too. So this is another goal that we have.

Figure 5-1. A capacitación in Itzapa, led by one of the leaders of Mujeres Unidas.



The critical consciousness that the women of Mujeres Unidas developed continued to inform the women's environmental activism, and also led some women to extend their community activism beyond reforestation work alone. Elena and Catalina, for instance, started self-esteem workshops for women and girls in Itzapa. In addition to teaching women how to value themselves, Elena and Catalina also used the workshops to recruit more women to the Mujeres Unidas group. By late 1998, the group had grown to include over 40 members.

Around the same time, the group decided to start making and selling shampoo from sábila and manzanilla plants that many women grew in their milpa plots. The shampoo sold well in both Itzapa and Chimaltenango, and in 2001 the group decided to use the proceeds to rent a small building where they opened a school to educate

indigenous children of families with “*escasos recursos* (scarce resources).” They named it the *Pajaro de Fuego* (Phoenix) School, because, as Elena said, “we believe that out of the ashes of poverty and discrimination a bright future can still grow.” Two of the members of *Mujeres Unidas* who were literate volunteered to teach classes; however, due to other demands on the women’s time, the school was only able to enroll one class of about 50 children during its first year.

Throughout this time, the women of *Mujeres Unidas* continued to grow and plant trees in Itzapa. By 2000, all the leaders of the group had reforested their own fields, and the benefits of their agroforestry work were becoming apparent: all of the ten leaders contended that the trees had greatly improved the quality of the soil in their fields, as well as the quality and quantity of their crops. Elena said that within three years, the production of her milpa plot had doubled, because fewer plants were dying or being washed away due to soil erosion. Eventually, other members of the community—men and women alike—noticed the women’s success, and started asking the women for trees to plant. The women met to decide whether to sell the trees or give them away. After some discussion, the group decided to give away a maximum of 50 trees to any farmers who asked for them. If the people wanted more, then they had to pledge to work for an agreed upon amount of time in the nursery. As Elena noted, while the women have not received monetary compensation for their work, they have received the respect of their community and the satisfaction that they are working for “the common good.” Catalina made a similar point, noting that,

For us it was an easy decision. Because we do not ask for anything, anything. We are doing this for our community, our children, and ourselves. What we receive is thanks and the promise of a better future.

Luvia agreed that the group's decision to give trees away was a good one. She also offered a critical analysis, noting that while women's unpaid work is often undervalued or unappreciated, that this is no longer the case with the work done by the women of Mujeres Unidas:

Now people see the work that we do, and they can see how important it is to protect the trees, because the trees protect our land and give us clean water and pure air. Of course, there are still people that sell firewood—they cut trees and do not plant one. But the majority, I believe, realize the importance of the little trees. And so now it is a little funny, because before people were laughing when we started to work in the nursery. And now they are asking us for trees! And so we joke and we say, 'who is laughing now?'

By 2001, the women of Mujeres Unidas had cultivated and planted 15,000 trees in and around Itzapa. On October 15, 2001, the International Day of Rural Women, the staff of AIR hosted a celebration to honor the hard work and achievements of Mujeres Unidas. Elena and the other group leaders prepared a statement for the celebration, in which they articulated their vision and goals for their activism. In addition to reflecting the women's motivations and visions for a better society, the statement also reflects the development of their critical consciousness. Their words form a powerful critique of the impact of interlocking systems of oppression—including patriarchy, racism, and colonization—on the everyday lives of indigenous women in Guatemala:

Lo que somos: las raíces de las Mujeres rurales en Guatemala, vienen directamente de las Civilizaciones Mayas, que les catalogaban como "Creadoras de vida" y "Madres." Años después con la colonización y conquista, se empiezan a utilizar como obsequios para los españoles y se les esclaviza más severamente que a los hombres...y no solo en ámbitos sociales sino también en ámbitos familiares, donde se le asignan estrictamente la tarea de procreación y otros roles secundarios (por no ser valorados adecuadamente). Iniciando o fortaleciendo un proceso de discriminación terrible y casi inhumana...no solo por el hecho de ser pobres (lo que en sí significaba ya la falta de acceso a oportunidades de progreso). También eran indígenas (catalogadas como de clase inferior y limitándolos aún más en sus propios niveles decadentes de vida). Y encima de eso Mujeres (clasificadas como inferiores a los hombres, sin derechos y con muchas obligaciones).

Lo que trajo su propia dinamica en la sociedad. Somos hijas (para quienes la educación no era prioridad, porque lo importante era que nosotras aprendiéramos los oficios domésticos para cuando nos casáramos). Somos hermanas (teniendo que servir, cuidar, alimentar a nuestros hermanos mientras ellos iban a la escuela o a trabajar). Somos esposas (debiendo respeto y servicio eterno a nuestros maridos, asignadas culturalmente a hacer todos los oficios domésticos y a tareas establecidas). Somos Madres (debiendo cuidar, crear, enseñar a nuestros hijos/as).

Y en que momento hemos sido simplemente Mujeres?

Lo que valemos: 'Aprendamos ver lo Invisible' y a saber que nuestro aporte en cualquier época del tiempo, en cualquier parte del mundo ha sido indispensable para la construcción de cualquier acción de progreso humano. Somos una parte importante en la dinámica social humana, donde no podemos ni queremos separar a hombres y mujeres, lo que queremos es que se nos brinde el espacio justo para aceptar nuestras diferencias y aprovechar nuestras fortalezas en beneficio del bien común.

Lo que queremos: Queremos empezar con lo que podamos, con lo que tenemos a nuestro alcance. Valoremos lo que tenemos: vivimos en un país donde la multiculturalidad y la interculturalidad no deben ser 'términos de moda,' deben ser parte de nuestra vida diaria, en nuestras casas, en nuestras comunidades y en nuestra Guatemala. Vernos a nosotras mismas y que nos vean como Creadoras de una Nueva Sociendad más Justa, más Equitativa, y más Humana. Es pues una responsabilidad compartida.

Who we are: the roots of rural women in Guatemala come directly from the Maya civilizations, that categorized [women] as "Creators of life" and "Mothers." In the years since the colonization and conquest, [indigenous women] were used as objects by the Spanish and enslaved more severely than men...not only in social environments but in familiar environments, where they were strictly assigned the role of procreation and other secondary roles (by not being adequately valued). This started or strengthened a process of terrible and almost inhumane discrimination...not only for the fact of being poor (which meant a lack of opportunities to progress). Also for being indigenous (catalogued as an inferior class and limited still more to the lower levels of life). And on top of this, women (classified as inferior to men, without rights and with many obligations).

This has brought its own dynamic to our society. We are daughters (for whom education was not a priority, because what was important was that we learn the domestic roles for when we get married). We are sisters (having to serve, care for, feed our brothers while they went to school or to work). We are wives (owing respect and eternal service to our husbands, culturally assigned to do all things domestic and all traditional tasks). We are mothers (having to care, believe in, teach our children).

And in what moment have we simply been women?

What we value: 'Let us learn to see the Invisible,' and to know that our role in any time period, in any part of the world has been indispensable for any action of human progress. We are an important part of the human social dynamic, where we are not able nor do we want to separate men and women, what we want is the space to accept our differences and to take full advantage of our strengths for the benefit of the common good.

What we want: We want to start with what we are able, with what we have within our reach. We value what we have: we live in a country where multiculturalism and interculturalism should not be "buzz words," they should be part of our daily life, in our homes, in our communities, and in our Guatemala. [We want to be able] to see ourselves and to be seen as creators of a New Society that is more Just, more Equitable, and more Humane. It is therefore a shared responsibility.

Since 2001, the women of *Mujeres Unidas* have continued to meet and work in the tree nursery on a regular basis. The group has planted more than 90,000 trees in and around Itzapa, and plans to continue planting between 10,000-11,000 trees each year. The group now includes 120 women from Itzapa and nearby communities, although many women are not able to attend the meetings on a regular basis due to time constraints and everyday demands. Nonetheless, the members of *Mujeres Unidas* are well known and respected throughout the community, and they have gained the attention of national newspapers like *Prensa Libre*, which published a story in 2007 on the group.

The leaders of *Mujeres Unidas* have also expanded their activist work beyond the local level to make national and international connections. In 2003, Elena developed a partnership with another international NGO to expand the work of the *Pajaro de Fuego* school. The NGO provides the school with both financial resources as well as teams of international volunteers who teach classes at the school. Today, the school offers a free education and enrolls over 300 indigenous children between the ages of 5-13 every year. Many of the women of *Mujeres Unidas* have children currently enrolled in the

school, and Catalina, Luvia, and Marta regularly help Elena to clean and maintain the building where classes are held. In a country where 43 percent of the (mostly indigenous) rural population is illiterate, the education of indigenous children and adults is a political act (Cuxil 2006). As Catalina said,

We live in a place where almost half of the population cannot read or write. And it is worse for us as indigenous people, and it is also bad for women. So, for example, I cannot read, and Elena can only read a little. But our children, yes [they can read]. It [education] is important because when we have an education, it is possible to know about our rights as indigenous people and as women. And so it is possible to make a better future for ourselves.

Through their work with the school, the leaders of *Mujeres Unidas* have made connections with the larger indigenous movement. *Pajaro de Fuego* is certified through the National Committee for Literacy (Comité Nacional de Alfabetización, or CONALFA), which works with local and national organizations to improve literacy rates amongst indigenous and rural communities throughout Guatemala.

More recently, the women of *Mujeres Unidas* have also linked their work to the larger women's movement in Guatemala. In 2007, Elena was asked to speak at a national conference organized by the group *Mujeres Líderes Guatemaltecas* (Guatemalan Women Leaders). During her presentation, Elena spoke about the importance of recognizing environmental activism as a key part of both the indigenous movement and the women's movement, noting that environmental problems have a tremendous impact on the day-to-day lives of indigenous women and men. While Elena appreciated the opportunity to speak and to make connections with other leaders in the women's movement, she was also critical of the fact that she was one of only a few indigenous women present at the conference (which included over 1,000 women). She was also the only indigenous woman who was asked to speak as a panelist.

Nevertheless, Elena made some important connections at the conference, and met with members of *Tierra Viva*, one of the largest women's organizations in Guatemala. The leadership structure of *Tierra Viva* is comprised of both indigenous and ladina women, and the organization recognizes that problems of poverty, racism, and illiteracy are all feminist issues (Tierra Viva 2010). Shortly after the leadership conference, members of *Tierra Viva* went to Itzapa to host a workshop on women's rights and self-esteem. Since then, representatives of the organization have returned to Itzapa every year to continue their work with women in the community.

Revisiting the Motherhood Question

The words and stories of the women of *Mujeres Unidas* encourage a closer examination of women's identity-based organizing, particularly around the identity of mothers and/or caretakers. As I mentioned earlier, the strategy of organizing women as mothers/caretakers has long been debated within the gender and feminist scholarship on Latin America. Many scholars are critical of this strategy, arguing that it actually impedes women's social progress by reinforcing the patriarchal idea that women *only* have value insofar as they adhere to their traditional roles as caretakers of the family (Chaney 1979; Lagarde 1994; Molyneaux 2000). Chaney (1979), for instance, argues that associations with motherhood ultimately constrain women's political participation. If women act in ways that defy traditional notions of motherhood and/or femininity, or that challenge patriarchal power, then they jeopardize their claims on the political arena and thereby risk their political power and the possibility of securing gains for women.

Others, however, point out that for many women with limited economic and political resources, the strategy of mobilizing as mothers represents an important way of gaining access to the political realm (Alvarez 1990; Craske 1999; Godfrey 2005;

Schirmer 1993). Craske (1999), for instance, notes the ways in which motherist politics can introduce women to ideas of women's rights (as well as other political issues).

Here again I reiterate the importance of an intersectional analysis: it is not enough to analyze women's organizing through the lens of gender alone. Rather, we must consider the ways in which race and class also shape women's opportunities and strategies for mobilizing. The case of *Mujeres Unidas* illustrates that for indigenous women who are daily confronted with racism, poverty, and gender discrimination, and who have had little to no access to formal education, organizing as mothers may be the most viable strategy for political mobilization. For many women, this strategy represents an important "entry point" for becoming involved in community activism and in larger social movements. The process of linking individual and community struggles with larger movements may then facilitate the process of conscientization, whereby individuals become more critical of interlocking oppressions. Thus, while the women of *Mujeres Unidas* may have first mobilized as mothers/caretakers informed by a consciousness of care, their community activism and connections with larger social movements led them to develop a critical consciousness that also informs their work and situates their activism within larger anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial struggles. This is a pattern that has been noted elsewhere in cases of women's environmental activism (Godfrey 2005; Merchant 1995; Salleh 2009; Shiva 1989). In writing about ecofeminist activism and women's mobilization as mothers, Phoebe Godfrey notes that "identities that start out as having potentially essentialist qualities can nevertheless become the means of political transformation" (2005:24).

Informed by a (critical) consciousness of care, the women of *Mujeres Unidas* do not deny or reject the importance of motherhood or the importance of caring for others. Rather, they are critical of two aspects of the woman/mother/caregiver association: First, they critique the idea that women are valued *only* as caregivers of the family and household. As Elena argued,

It is certain that we have an important role in the household, because every member of the family has responsibilities in the house. But we also believe that women, like men, should participate in all aspects of social life. We also have the right to be leaders.

A second critique is the idea that *only* women can (or should) have primary responsibilities as caregivers. Rather, the women of *Mujeres Unidas* contend that *everyone* has a responsibility to care—not only for the environment, but for each other as well. Elena explained that,

This is why we say it is ‘a shared responsibility.’ Because it is not only the responsibility of the woman to care, right? We all share this earth and this, eh, this society. We are all like branches on the same tree. So we say, ‘If the tree dies, then we die.’ A single branch cannot live without the tree! So we all have to care for each other. Not just women but men too. Husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, everyone.

The women of *Mujeres Unidas* identified carework as a critical part of their activism, and many connected their identities as mothers with their identities as activists and community leaders. Indeed, all of the leaders of *Mujeres Unidas* refer to themselves as “*madres de la comunidad*,” or mothers of the community. The decisions to embrace the label of “mother” and to emphasize the importance of caring for others do not reflect a lack of critical reflection on the part of the women of *Mujeres Unidas*; rather, *these decisions are grounded in a deep understanding of the importance of caring as a general social practice*. By mobilizing as mothers and caretakers, the women hope to

serve as an example to both the community of Itzapa, as well as the larger indigenous community. Luvia remarked,

All these problems, the cutting of trees, the lack of land, the garbage, everything, everything, they are destroying us. And we have a part in it, we are destroying ourselves too. So we as women are working to show that we have to help each other. And not just here in Itzapa, *not just here*. People ask us, 'What are they [the people] paying you [for the trees]?' And we say '[They pay us] a thank you and the promise of a better tomorrow.' Because the work that we do is for our future...for our survival.

Through their mobilization as mothers and caregivers of Itzapa and the larger indigenous community, the women of Mujeres Unidas have reclaimed the label of "mother" as a powerful political identity. Elena contended that the carework that the indigenous women do as "mothers of the community" is part of a longer tradition of carework that has ensured the survival of the indigenous community. As the Guatemalan state has historically been an enemy rather than an ally of indigenous groups, it has largely fallen upon members of the indigenous community to care for each other. Thus, for those groups who have lived through centuries of colonization, enslavement, displacement, and/or genocide, community carework is often central for their continued survival. Elena made the link between motherhood, carework, and the survival of the indigenous community explicit, noting that,

We call ourselves 'the mothers of the community' because we are working for the survival of the community. In the house, the mother cares for children so that her children can survive. And we do this too, of course we do this, but we also care for our community so that we can all survive.

Situating the Environmental Activism of Indigenous Women Within Larger Social Movements

Understood as a form of carework for the indigenous community, the environmental activism of indigenous women can be clearly situated within the larger indigenous movement. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, while indigenous community

activism has a long history in Guatemala, it has only been in recent decades that activists and organizations have coalesced as a movement with specific aims and objectives—namely, the “revindication” of indigenous ethnic and cultural rights, including “the decolonization of Maya, Xinka, and Garifuna peoples, the elimination of the consequent racism, and the the development of the indigenous identity” (Cojtí Cuxil 2006:14, my translation).

As numerous Mayan activists and organizations have pointed out, land and farming have long been central to the cultural and material survival of indigenous communities both within and beyond the national boundaries of Guatemala. The leaders of these organizations regard neoliberal development and environmental degradation as direct threats to indigenous lives and livelihoods; thus, any efforts to defend and protect the land and environment are efforts to protect the indigenous community (CNOC 2006; Cojtí Cuxil 2006; CUC 2008; Waqib’ Kej 2009). Recognizing this, the Comité de Unidad Campesina (Committee of Peasant Unity, or CUC), has adopted the slogan, “Mother Earth is not bought and sold; she is recovered and defended” (CUC 2008). Thus, while the numerous indigenous women who work with AIR may be working at (primarily) local levels, their environmental activism—rooted in a desire to protect the land, their families, and the future of their communities—links them at an ideological level to the larger national and transnational indigenous movement.

The mobilization of indigenous women around environmental issues also encourages a broader reconceptualization of women’s activism within national and international women’s movement(s). In a national context, it has been pointed out that the Guatemalan women’s movement has done important work to “[highlight] issues of

gender within the nationalist discourse and its policymaking apparatus” by fighting for “institutional reforms, employment opportunities and conditions, social conditions, and property rights based on gender equity“ (Berger 2006:1). However, as political scientist Susan Berger points out, many of the large women’s organizations in Guatemala have failed to mobilize beyond issues of gender and patriarchy to address other issues like racism and (neo)colonialism that also impact the everyday lives, experiences, and opportunities of many women in Guatemala (Berger 2006).

Stories of indigenous women’s activism help to broaden understandings of what constitutes “women’s activism.” Rather than narrowly focusing their attention on patriarchy and gender oppression, indigenous women in Guatemala recognize the interconnectedness of oppressions. The perspectives and concerns of indigenous women reflect the need to form a more inclusive women’s movement in Guatemala, one that recognizes that in addition to patriarchy, problems of poverty, racism, colonization, and environmental degradation are also “women’s issues.” The national women’s organization Tierra Viva seems to be aware of this and has made concerted efforts to be a more inclusive organization that attends to these interrelated issues. Other women’s organizations in Guatemala would do well to follow suit, or otherwise risk marginalizing themselves by being unable (or unwilling) to bridge divides of race, class, and ideology.

On an international context, the voices of indigenous women activists join the voices of other activists around the world who argue that women’s recognition and participation as allies in environmental protection efforts is key to the long-term success of the global environmental movement. Several multilateral institutions have paid heed

to the voices of these activists, and the United Nations now incorporates a gender analysis in its environmental programs. A recent publication on *Women and the Environment* by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) attests to the importance of a convergence between the international women's and environmental movements. As the UNEP states,

Women all over the world are calling for a peaceful and healthy planet. They work, organize, debate, engage and sustain their vision a reality, now and for the future...their perspectives must be heard, and [their] active participation and the application of a clear gender lens in all environment and sustainable development work is imperative (2004:102).

Thus, while the indigenous women who work with AIR may engage in environmental and community activism on a local level, they have formed connections with national and transnational environmental, indigenous, and women's organizations. Furthermore, the ideas that guide their work—including critiques of racism/colonialism, and patriarchy—connect them at an ideological level to both the indigenous and women's movements in Guatemala. The fact that the activism of Mujeres Unidas is centered around a commitment to protect their local environment also connects them to the larger environmental movement. In this way, the environmental activism of Mujeres Unidas is situated at the nexus of the environmental, indigenous, and women's movements in Guatemala. The case of Mujeres Unidas thus shows the ways in which the ideas of larger national and transnational social movements can inform local-level community activism.

Discussion

Several important lessons can be learned from the story of how and why the women of Mujeres Unidas became environmental activists. The first is an understanding of the links between gendered patterns of socialization and the decision to become

activists. As the women profiled in this chapter point out, throughout the course of their lives they have been taught, encouraged, and expected to assume caregiving roles (as wives and/or mothers) within the household. I argue that this socialization of women as caregivers is a key factor in women's decisions to become activists; informed by a "consciousness of care," women activists extend their carework from their household to their larger communities. In this way, indigenous women's consciousness of care helped them to link the personal with the political, serving as a bridge that allowed them to extend the carework they do within the household to the larger community (both their local community and the indigenous community).

It is important to note, however, that indigenous women's strategy of mobilizing as caregivers or "mothers of the community" represents more than a reinforcement of women's traditional roles. Thus, a second lesson is on the importance of recognizing community carework as key to the continued survival and strength of communities that have historically been marginalized and oppressed. Through their work, the women of *Mujeres Unidas* recognize and reaffirm the radical potential of caring as a general social practice. As their words and actions make clear, they regard carework as essential for the survival of the indigenous community—and society in general.

A final lesson is in regards to the interconnectedness of activism and the development of a critical consciousness. Freire (2008) reminds us that the process of conscientization involves an ongoing dialogue between activism and critical reflection. This has certainly been true with the women of *Mujeres Unidas*: as the women have mobilized and linked their own personal and community struggles with larger systems of oppression and discrimination, they have become involved with other forms of activism

that link their local work with larger social movements. Through this combination of activism and reflection, the leaders of Mujeres Unidas have developed their own theory and statement on the interconnectedness of racism, patriarchy, and colonialism. This critique—in addition to connections the women have formed with national and transnational environmental, indigenous, and women’s organizations—connects the local environmental activism of Mujeres Unidas to larger environmental, indigenous and women’s movements.

The ideas, goals, and visions of women like Elena, Catalina, and others have extended beyond their homes and communities due in large part to national and transnational networks and organizations. In the next chapter I explore how indigenous women have mobilized across borders of race, class, gender, and nation in order to realize their goals with the help of the transnational organization Alliance for International Reforestation. As Milagros Peña (2007) points out, it has been through networking with other organizations that many women’s groups have been able “to achieve goals that otherwise would be out of reach” (106). I argue that it is also through such networking that women are able to share their ideas and influence the goals and strategies of other organizations.

CHAPTER 6 OF THE NECESSITY AND DIFFICULTY IN WORKING ACROSS BORDERS

We had the consciousness and the strength and the vision. But we did not have the resources. And so this is why we called [AIR]...and this is why we continue to work with [AIR]...to realize our vision of planting a better future.

-Elena, president of Mujeres Unidas

While indigenous women and men throughout Guatemala share visions of how to make their society more just, equitable, and sustainable, many of them lack the resources necessary to make these visions a reality. As Cecilia Menjivar (2000) notes, the “social context” in which individuals live, “as well as their social position dictate the quality and quantity of resources they have available” (149). Thus, communities who live within a context of poverty and who have historically been marginalized by race and/or gender may not have access to the funding, technical knowledge, organizational skills, or professional and political contacts needed for widespread and *effective* mobilization. For these groups, mobilizing beyond their local communities is a crucial step towards fulfilling their activist goals. Here is where the importance of national and transnational organizing becomes apparent: as Keck and Sikkink (1998) contend, transnational organizations and advocacy networks are key to “mak[ing] international resources available to new actors in domestic political and social struggles” (1). Thus, by linking local struggles with national and transnational networks and NGOs, individuals and communities can access the social and economic resources needed to bring about positive social change.

Of course, transnational mobilizing is not without its own set of difficulties and complications. Relationships among actors involved in transnational organizations and networks are unavoidably embedded in local, national, and international power

constructions (Berger 2006; Keck and Sikkink 1998). These power constructions in turn are organized along lines of gender, race, class, and nationality, allowing some actors “differential access to material, cultural, and political resources, than others” (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998:18). Furthermore, as Milagros Peña (2007) points out, depending heavily upon NGOs for resources can be risky, as these organizations are often themselves faced with difficulties in securing the funding necessary to carry out their projects.

In this chapter I examine how indigenous women in Guatemala have mobilized across borders of race, class, gender, and nationality through the Alliance for International Reforestation. I argue that while this cross-border mobilization has helped the women achieve their goals of “planting a better future” for their families and communities, it has also been a process fraught with challenges. Namely, these challenges include the negotiation of power and privilege in organizing across borders; the intensive (but often overlooked) aspect of “emotional labor” in activist work; as well as the difficulties in finding funding for salaries and projects. Here, I draw from interviews with both indigenous women community activists as well as the indigenous, ladina/o, and North American women and men of the AIR “team” to highlight the main (and recurring) difficulties they have encountered in their many years of experience. As someone who has been involved with AIR since I was a child, I also add my own personal experiences to the narratives presented in this chapter. I argue that in spite of difficulties, certain shared commitments, values, and ideals have helped to bridge social and cultural divides and have solidified the alliances between AIR and local actors.

While the story of AIR's partnership with indigenous women and men may be unique in some ways, it is also an instructive case that offers important lessons about the challenges, obstacles, rewards, and strategies involved in transnational mobilization. In the following section, I offer a brief overview of the history of the organization, its structure, and how it works.

Building Bridges and Forming Alliances

When Elena Siquinajay attended the presentation by agroforestry technician William Santizo in 1997, the Alliance for International Reforestation was still a relatively new organization. AIR was founded in 1991 by political science professor Anne Hallum. Anne decided to start the organization after volunteering to lead a group of college students on a study abroad trip to Guatemala. Anne said that taking that trip was a “reckless” move—she had never travelled outside the U.S., did not speak any Spanish, and knew nothing about the political history of Guatemala. Nevertheless, she had always wanted to travel and so she jumped at the opportunity. The trip affected her in many ways, as she recounted:

It was scary, [Guatemala] was still in the war, so you would see military everywhere. But I also saw the deforestation. I saw a lot of hungry people and people carrying firewood , so I was touched in many ways, you know. I was...overwhelmed by how beautiful it was but also overwhelmed by how sad it was.

Upon returning to the United States, Anne decided that she had to “do something” to address the myriad problems of poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation that she had witnessed in Guatemala. She met with a former student who had experience working with international NGOs, and he suggested that she start an organization. Over the course of a long lunch, he helped her to draft a set of bylaws in which they articulated the aims of the organization to work with local farmers in “designing,

implementing, and promoting community-based reforestation projects” in Central America (AIR 1991).

In addition to having a working knowledge of NGOs, the student also knew a few activists in Guatemala. He put Anne in contact with Father Andres Girón, a ladino priest who was heavily involved in a national peasants’ movement in the latter years of Guatemala’s civil war. According to Anne, Father Girón was only involved with AIR for its first year, but during that time he had a profound impact on influencing the organization’s community-based approach. Father Girón’s advice also ensured that the founders of AIR had an understanding of the salience of race and class in their agroforestry work. As Anne noted,

We talked a lot, and he made it clear that all of the leadership had to be in the hands of the people. They had to make the decisions—not us [the North Americans]. He also said it was best if we hired a Guatemalan staff, someone with knowledge of the country and the people and the history. And preferably indigenous, because most people in the rural areas—most farmers—are indigenous.

After some initial difficulties in securing start-up funds, in late 1993 Anne met and hired her first two staff members: Eladio Iquique, an indigenous Guatemalan with a degree in agroforestry; and Chris Wunderlich, another North American who also had a degree in agroforestry and who had been working in Guatemala for a development agency to build water captation tanks. After being hired by Anne, Chris and Eladio began working in five communities in the highlands of Chimaltenango. Within only 10 weeks they had developed close relationships with local farmers in the communities and worked with them to cultivate and plant 20,000 tree seedlings.

Word of the AIR’s work quickly spread to other communities, and the organization had to hire new staff to meet the growing demand for its services. In 1995, AIR hired

William Santizo, a ladino agroforestry technician; and Cecilia Ramirez, a ladina with a background in law and business management who initially worked as AIR's secretary. In 1997, AIR also hired Luis Iquique, Eladio's son, to help with the agroforestry work. In 1998, Chris left AIR to work with another international NGO, and Anne promoted Cecilia as the new Director of AIR. Under Cecilia's leadership, the organization continued to grow. By 2002, AIR had a staff of six agroforestry technicians (*tecnicos*) who were working in a total of 26 communities in the departments of Chimaltenango, Sololá, and Huehuetenango. As of 2009, the AIR staff consisted of seven full-time employees, including six tecnicos, as well as the Director, Cecilia. The tecnicos work with anywhere between 30 and 50 communities every year. In many communities, an AIR technician may work with only one or two families, while in other communities technicians may work with very large groups (as is the case with Itzapa, for instance). The partnership between AIR and local communities results in 200,000-212,000 trees being planted each year.

In regards to its structure, AIR is truly a transnational organization. While the tecnicos and Director live and work in Guatemala year-round, President Anne Hallum and the Board of Directors are based in the United States. Additionally, AIR also has networks with other transnational organizations, including the Peace Corps, and has hosted volunteers from the United Kingdom and Japan, as well as the United States.

The President, Director, and staff of AIR describe the organization as a "team," with each "player" having a particular and well-defined role. All the team players contribute to the organization's work. Local community groups—often headed by a one or a few group leaders (like Elena, Catalina, and Luvia in the case of Mujeres Unidas)—work

closely with AIR's tecnicos to design and implement agroforestry projects. The tecnicos then communicate with Director Cecilia Ramirez to let her know the type and quantity of resources (seeds, tools, educational manuals, etc.) they will need to begin and maintain the projects. Cecilia calculates the cost of the various tools and equipment needed and communicates this to the President and Board of Directors. The President and Board, in turn, are responsible for raising the funds needed for project start-up and maintenance. Approximately half of AIR's funds are from individual donors; the other half are from foundations, churches, other organizations, or grants. These funds then go directly to fund AIR's projects and to pay the Guatemalan staff. A review of AIR's tax returns shows that since 1993, between 90 and 97% of AIR's annual income has gone directly to project implementation.

The President, Board members, and various donors also regularly travel to Guatemala in order to assist with tree-planting efforts and to meet community members. These annual or semi-annual trips are important in two main regards. First, they allow donors the chance to see how their funds are being used. Seeing the community reforestation projects "up close and personal" helps donors to recognize that their funds are being well-spent, and motivates them to continue funding AIR's projects. As one woman said, "Once you see the faces of people in the communities, and you see how important the trees are for them, it is impossible to *not* support the work that [AIR] does" (personal communication, emphasis in original e-mail). Second, site visits are also important for developing group cohesion: by allowing AIR team members the opportunity to work together and share important face-to-face interaction, these visits help to strengthen the social ties and trust between communities, AIR staff and

volunteers, and donors. As Marta from Itzapa summarized succinctly, “We know we can trust AIR because you always come back” (see Appendix H for a visual representation of the relationship between AIR and Mujeres Unidas as an example of how the AIR team works).

The transnational mobilization of individuals and resources is not without its challenges, however. In order to achieve both short and long-term goals, the women and men of the AIR team (including local community activists) must mobilize across highly contested borders of race, class, gender, and nationality. In the following sections I detail how the multiracial, multinational *equipo AIRE* negotiates power, privilege, and conflict in its work.

Power, Privilege, and Conflict

Given my position within the organization AIR (as a Board member and the daughter of AIR’s founder), I was well aware that there may be difficulty in trying to elicit stories of conflict or discontent with the organization from the many individuals who were interviewed for this dissertation. Indeed, with the exception of only three individuals, all participants—indigenous women and AIR staff alike—initially reported that they had never experienced problems with AIR! However, this reluctance to divulge is probably less indicative of actual experiences, and more revealing of participants’ efforts to maintain solidarity within the AIR team. It is also revealing of the ways in which power is negotiated within this organization, and I would be remiss to not acknowledge my position of power within AIR. As I am related to the individual responsible for founding and securing *funding* for the organization, my role as researcher doubtless placed considerable pressure on participants to describe their experiences with AIR in wholly positive terms. However, as I told participants, I was aware from personal

experience and past conversations that there have been a number of internal and external challenges that AIR has had to overcome. I also reminded participants that a key purpose of this project is to help AIR improve its work, and that in order to improve our work we need to know the organization's "weak points." After some prodding, participants acknowledged that there has been *some* conflict within the organization, and offered stories and examples of how the AIR team has had to work to resolve various issues. Broadly, these stories revolve around themes of negotiating power across borders of gender, race, class, and nationality; the exhausting (but necessary) "emotional labor" that is critical for building and maintaining cross-border alliances; and the difficulties in securing funding for the organization.

Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender in a Transnational organization

Early scholarship on civil society and social movements in Latin America was almost wholly positive, emphasizing the ways in which social movements challenged authoritarian regimes and united actors from all sectors of society around shared goals (Cohen and Arato 1992; Jaquette 1991). Writing about the early work on Latin American social movements, David Slater points out, "not infrequently civil society has been essentialized in a positive frame, as the terrain of the good and the enlightened" (1998: 385). Later scholarship has been more critical, however, and has highlighted how national and transnational organizing is a messy and highly contested process (Alvarez 1999; Alvarez, et al. 2003; Berger 2006; Kampwirth 2004; Shayne 2004). As Susan Berger (2006) contends, "in reality...civil society is much more complex, fragmented hierarchically by race, ethnicity, gender, and class" (3). In discussing transnational mobilization, I would also add the social marker of "nationality" to this list. Studying the case of AIR allows for insight into the ways in which all these social markers and local,

national, and international power relations shape processes of transnational mobilization.

In countries like Guatemala that have histories of ethnic or racially-based violence, and which are clearly stratified along racial lines, mobilizing *across* these lines to achieve common goals can be particularly difficult. Centuries of exploitation and the appropriation of indigenous land and resources have resulted in a distinct “racial hierarchy” in Guatemala, a “sharp differentiation among distinct strata along the lines of power and privilege, with ladinos generally occupying a higher stratum and Indians a lower one” (Hale 2006:209). As Charles Hale notes, the persistence of this hierarchy has led to a “pervasive Maya distrust” of ladino efforts to build solidarity with indigenous groups (2006: 174).

To successfully build coalitions or alliances in a highly stratified society, it is imperative that activists and organizations have an understanding of the historical, political, and social context in which they operate. While AIR’s founder Anne Hallum was *not* well versed in Guatemalan history or politics, she made sure to locate individuals who were (like Father Girón and Eladio Iquique), and deferred to their suggestions on organizational structure and strategy. Here, it is important to make a point on international actors and activists deferring to local actors: while I agree with Aili Mari Tripp’s assertion that “international actors should consider that local actors have the most intimate knowledge of issues, other players, conditions, laws, and cultural sensitivities” (2006:306), I also caution that international and local actors should be confident that they share the same goals and motives. In the case of AIR, Anne, Father Girón, and Eladio shared commitments to social and environmental justice, making it

easier for them to work together and have confidence in giving and receiving advice and suggestions.

One of the strongest suggestions offered by Father Girón and Eladio was in regards to hiring both indigenous and ladina/o staff for AIR. As Anne recalled,

[Father Girón] said that if our goal was to reach out to all sectors of Guatemalan society, then, then we needed to reflect that in our organization. And that...we needed to have indigenous staff, to build trust with indigenous communities. So I said, 'OK.'

Currently, five of the six agroforestry technicians working for AIR are indigenous. Having indigenous staff has helped AIR in two key ways: First, it has enabled the organization to build contacts with indigenous communities. All of AIR's indigenous staff are lifelong residents of communities in Chimaltenango and Sololá, and have family and friends who live in neighboring areas. Through staff connections and social networks, AIR has *de facto* connections with indigenous communities, and uses these connections to identify and work with those communities that interested in adopting reforestation programs.

Secondly, indigenous staff both reflect and help to solidify AIR's commitment to working in solidarity with indigenous communities. Through its staff-community connections and word-of-mouth, the organization has established a reputation as an ally of indigenous communities. This reputation, in turn, is what has led additional communities to seek out AIR's help. As Mona, 42, from Puebla explained,

We work with AIR because we trust you all. In contrast we laugh if the government says it is going to help, because the officials say many things, they have beautiful words, but they do not do anything! But AIR works with people...we have friends in other communities and they told us that we can trust AIR.

All members of the AIR team reiterate the importance of having indigenous staff who connect with indigenous residents. Luis, a 31 year old Kaqchikel resident of Chimaltenango, explained:

It is very, very important to make connections with the people, with the communities...to have people [in the organization] who can speak Kaqchikel, or Quiche, or Mam, and who know about [indigenous] traditions, and who have friends in the communities. This is why we [AIR] are able to do what we do—because we have strong connections with the people.

In addition to working across lines of race and class, the communities and AIR staff also form alliances across borders of gender as well. All of the agroforestry technicians who work with AIR are men—a fact which reflects the lack of educational and employment opportunities available for women in a patriarchal society. Cecilia, AIR's Director, confesses that as an educated businesswoman, she is an anomaly in Guatemala. She explained:

Education is very expensive, and many families in Guatemala can not afford it. So if a family has some resources, then the boy will go to school, but the girl does not, because later in life the boys will have better opportunities of being employed and earning a salary. Thank God my parents had enough to send all of us to school! But yes, it is a very sexist system.

Like many other organizations, AIR works across borders of gender and race both internally and externally through its work with indigenous communities. Externally, there has been little to no evidence of conflict between the male technicians and women community activists. Indeed, all of the indigenous women who were interviewed spoke in very positive terms about their experiences working with William, Luis, Miguel, Pedro Miguel, Mario, and Carlos. The women in Masat, for instance, have worked with Mario Pop, and described him as encouraging of their work and always willing to listen. The women of Mujeres Unidas have worked with both William and Pedro Miguel, and described both men in glowing terms. Catalina, for instance, pointed out that the women

often teased William and Pedro Miguel about being “*el gallo en el gallinero* (the rooster in the henhouse).”

While there has been little conflict between *tecnicos* and the indigenous women with whom they work, there have been some difficulties in talking about gender-based issues and challenges. Marta, Luvia, and Elena, for instance, noted that the presence of a male *tecnico* may compromise the “safe spaces” that are important for indigenous women to cultivate a sense of self-empowerment and critical consciousness (discussed in Chapter 5). During one conversation I had with Elena, she pointed out that it is often difficult for women to talk about issues of gender inequality with men. She mentioned that during the first few years of her work with AIR, she was concerned that a male *tecnico* may interfere with the process of consciousness-raising for women by giving misguided advice. She explained,

They [the *tecnicos*] are very good people, very good. But they are not gender experts. So I was a little worried at first. In our group we encourage women to share their experiences, to make connections between their experiences and the experiences of others. Because that is how we learn, right? So at the beginning I was thinking, ‘Ay, I don’t know what will happen, what will happen if a woman’s husband hits her, and she tells the *tecnico* about it, what will he tell her? To be patient or, or to not worry or to not talk about it?’ No, that is not what the woman needs to hear. We are trying to teach the women to talk more about these issues, and to find help if they need it.

On the part of the *tecnicos*, they also admitted that as men it is difficult for them to talk with women community members about “*cosas familiares* (intimate subjects).” William described the initial difficulty he experienced upon beginning work with the women’s group in Itzapa:

And for me it was difficult at first. Many women came to work in the nursery [in Itzapa] because they had problems at home. Sadly their husbands were drinking a lot, they beat [the women], [there were] many problems. They [the women] came to the nursery to leave their problems, to forget their problems. And to me, they

told me, 'Ah, Don William, I have problems.' And it is difficult because I do not want to involve myself in family problems.

Elena and William have developed a strategy for how to address gender issues in their agroforestry work. Recognizing that he is not a gender scholar, but not wanting to be uncaring, William has decided that he will listen and offer a sympathetic ear to women if they want to talk with him about any topic. However, if he feels that he is not qualified to address a problem, then he will refer the women to Elena or another leader of Mujeres Unidas. As he said, "What I do is listen. I listen to them and I refer them to Elena if I cannot help."

This story illustrates the importance of acknowledging organizational and staff limitations in transnational work. I agree that it is important that organizations guard against "mission drift"—the tendency of organizations to become involved in activities and programs that distract them from their original aims and objectives. However, because gender, race, and class are ubiquitous in shaping the life experiences and daily realities of all involved parties, it is inevitable that at some point organizations—regardless of their original mission—will have to address these issues in their work. It is therefore important that they have a strategy in place for doing so. As the case of William's work with the women of Mujeres Unidas illustrates, it is helpful for an organization to have connections with individuals and/or other organizations that are equipped to address issues of gender, race, or class inequalities. In this way, an organization can refer actors to others, and thus does not ignore issues when they arise, but also does not overstep its boundaries and area of expertise—and perhaps do more harm than good.

While AIR has had to negotiate various challenges in working across borders of race, class, and gender with communities, interestingly the most *conflict* that AIR has experienced has been within the organization itself. I argue that this conflict stems in large part from the gendered makeup of AIR's organizational structure and how this structure defies traditional norms of gendered power and privilege. Rosabeth Kanter (1993) observes that organizational power or "the ability to get things done" is largely structured along lines of gender, with men occupying the upper rungs of the organizational structure. When this traditional gendered arrangement is challenged, there tends to be conflict or outright backlash against women in leadership positions (Acker 2006; Martin 2003).

Negotiating gendered power relations has resulted in some tension within the AIR organization. Both the President and Director of AIR reported having experienced various conflicts with staff, some of which they attributed to being women leaders of an all-male staff. Anne, for instance, recalled how her decision to promote Cecilia to the position of Director of AIR was met with resistance from both the *tecnicos* and the former Director. In 1998, Chris Wunderlich, the original Director of AIR, was hired by another NGO, and Anne was faced with the difficult decision of finding a successor. As Anne recounted, Chris wanted to hire another North American "expert," something that Anne was opposed to because she wanted the organization to be run by local experts:

It didn't matter [that I was the President of AIR]...I was very intimidated by Chris. But I, I just insisted, I just felt like we needed to hire a Guatemalan, and then I finally said, 'I think Ceci [Cecilia] can do it,' and he said, 'Are you nuts? She's the receptionist.' But she was getting her business degree and she was *qualified*.... And [my husband] and I always say that Ceci was the best thing to happen to AIR, because [she] really allowed [AIR] to blossom as a Guatemalan [organization].

Despite the fact that Anne was the president and founder of AIR, she still felt “intimidated” by Chris, who she said often lectured her on how to run AIR, even though she was *his* boss. According to Anne, her intimidation stemmed in part from the fact that Chris was an agroforestry expert and highly skilled in running the organization, and in part to gendered power dynamics. Reflecting back on her decision to hire Ceci, Anne confessed that the moment stands out in her mind in part because of how much courage it took for her to stand up to Chris, and in part because that decision shaped the future of the organization. Despite Chris’s objection to promoting the receptionist to the position of Director (an objection that was also likely based in part on sexist assumptions), Cecilia has proven to be, in Anne’s words, “one of the best things to happen to AIR.” Under Cecilia’s leadership, AIR has grown into a nationally and internationally respected organization that has been honored by the Guatemalan government and the United Nations, in addition to numerous local communities.

In spite of her skill at leading the organization, however, Cecilia has also experienced conflict with staff in her years as Director. She acknowledged that she has to be “very strong” to successfully manage AIR, and that being a strong leader often clashes with the roles and behaviors she is expected to assume as a woman in Guatemala. She pointed out that being a woman leader has both advantages and disadvantages:

I have to be strong to manage AIR, to do everything that we as an organization need to do. But it is not common to have very strong women leaders in Guatemala. To have a woman as a boss, it is almost...it is very rare. So sometimes to be a woman leader also brings conflicts. Some here in AIR have told me that it makes them nervous to have a woman boss, or that I am too strong. So I have to be strong to manage the work that we do, but not too strong because I do not want people to fear me!

Both Anne and Cecilia noted that their success in managing AIR has depended in large part on their abilities to mediate conflict and appease staff, donors, and community members throughout the years. In many ways, the highly gendered—but often invisible or overlooked—work of “emotional labor” has been key to resolving conflicts within AIR and ensuring the long-term success of the organization.

Emotional Labor and the Importance of Mediators in Transnational Mobilization

As defined by Arlie Hochschild, emotional labor refers to “the management of feeling” to produce a particular emotional state in another person (1983:7). According to Hochschild, under capitalism emotions have become yet another commodity to be bought and sold, particularly in the growing and female-dominated service sector of the economy. While Hochschild and other theorists focus on the exploitation of emotional labor in for-profit industries (Hochschild 1983; Macdonald and Merrill 2009; Macdonald and Sirianni 1996; Orzechowicz 2008), I argue that emotional labor is also a significant part of work in non-profit organizations. It is particularly important for negotiating power relations and differences of race, gender, and class on a day-to-day basis, and for cultivating relationships with donors in order to secure funding. This type of emotional labor is not done by everyone within the organization. Rather, it is reserved for those who I call “mediators”—those individuals who must work to manage relationships both within the organization and between the organization and its donors and constituents. Like other forms of emotional labor, this type of work is “gendered” in that it “involves creating in others feelings of well-being or affirmation, responsibilities typically assigned to women” (Wharton 2009:149).

Anne acknowledged that emotional labor is a regular part of her work as President of AIR. Not only does she mediate between the members of the Guatemalan staff, but

between the Guatemalan staff and the North American donors and volunteers. She noted that while the work is necessary, it is also exhausting. She provided one example of when she had to fly to Guatemala to help resolve a dispute between Cecilia and William. The dispute centered around gender roles and William's assertion that Cecilia was "too strong." Anne recounted:

The whole [issue] was really about gender, don't you think? [William] said he was so nervous around [Cecilia] he couldn't sleep, he couldn't concentrate, that she scared him.... That she was giving him a nervous breakdown. And everything—and that he was losing his memory. He couldn't work with her because he was so scared that he would do something wrong and that she would criticize him. So it was just nerves. And you know, so he was going to quit. So I was trying to convince him not to quit and that they needed to talk to each other.... Over and over again I told them, 'You just need to talk.' You know, so I really was just doing a lot of mediating, um, to get them to talk to each other. It was—it certainly was stretching my managerial skills.

For Anne, Cecilia, and myself, emotional labor has been important to maintaining good relations amongst the members of the AIR staff, as well as good relations between the staff and international donors and volunteers. In this regard, there is a very distinct "division of (emotional) labor" within this transnational organization, in which the members of the organization who have primary responsibility for bringing together local and international actors also have primary responsibility for mediating relationships between actors. This division of labor has not gone unnoticed by the staff of AIR: while many of the *tecnicos* acknowledged that emotional labor is an important part of running the organization, they also pointed out that it was reserved for the leaders of the organization who communicate between the Guatemalan and North American sides. Miguel characterized Anne, Cecilia, and I as the "links" between the staff, community, and the North American donors:

Even within the same team one can see differences, right? So when the North Americans arrive, well, they have power and all that. And I believe that, for me,

there is no better link [than you all]. You all can share with the North Americans how we [the Guatemalan members of the AIR team] act, how we work, or what...what our plans are. You are the links.

As Miguel pointed out, maintaining strong connections both within an organization and between an organization and its donors is an important task. Like Miguel, Anne also emphasized the importance of mediators serving as “links” within a transnational organization like AIR:

Mediator is exactly where I place myself, because, um, I’m the North American, so I do the fundraising. Because you know, the Guatemalan fundraising is just too hard, and too, there’s just not enough people to ask for money. So it falls to North Americans: we have the money! [The Guatemalan staff] have the expertise, and the culture. So that division of labor makes perfect sense. But...*there has to be someone in the middle*. So I, I...it is difficult. I’ve certainly gotten better at it through practice [emphasis added].

I myself have often had to mediate between North American volunteers and donors and Guatemalan staff and communities. For instance, as I pointed out earlier, it is often the case that North American donors will visit AIR’s projects in Guatemala to see firsthand how AIR works and how their funds are being spent. If they are visiting Guatemala for the first time, they often experience a form of “culture shock” and may be hesitant to eat local foods, visit certain areas, or may express an urgent desire to want to return to the U.S.. When this is the case, it is the responsibility of Anne and I to put the donors at ease and also to make sure that the AIR staff and community members are not offended. All of this requires a delicate balancing act in which we try to make sure that everyone’s emotional needs are met and that relationships are not irreparably damaged. Most of the AIR staff and community members are well aware of the importance of maintaining good relations with donors—if Anne, Cecilia, and I (as mediators) do *not* engage in the emotional labor required to maintain these ties, then we risk losing important sources of funding for AIR.

Thus, in addition to being important for maintaining cohesion and alliances within an organization, emotional labor is also an important part of being able to mobilize and make connections across organizational and national boundaries. Furthermore, emotional labor is also a key—but often overlooked—part of fundraising, another challenge which every NGO must confront at some point.

The Never-Ending Search for Funding

Much of the literature on NGOs focuses on the tremendous difficulties they face in finding the funds needed to advance their projects (Berger 2006; Peña 2007; Staudt and Coronado 2002). Many organizations opt to pursue grants from large foundations; however, this strategy often leaves NGOs vulnerable to donor discipline, as “granting agencies or foundations...set the agenda for what will be funded” (Peña 2007:136). Peña notes that in order to avoid compromising their goals and objectives for donors, NGOs will often develop alternative strategies to find funding.

One strategy that AIR has developed is to cultivate relationships with individual, private donors. Approximately half of AIR’s donations are from individuals. The large portion of AIR’s additional funds are received from churches or foundations that respect AIR’s work and take a very “hands off” approach to funding. Of course, this strategy has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, it means that AIR is not wholly dependent upon the desires and demands of heavy-handed donors and funding agencies, and that it can retain the integrity of its original mission and community-based strategy. As Anne said,

The whole top-down approach, the conditionality of a lot of these grants is a bit much! And I am not going to compromise AIR’s mission just to satisfy the conditions of some granting agency. We have been doing this a long time, it works, the people [in the communities] tell us it works. So...so if it’s not broken don’t fix it, you know what I mean?

This approach also means that the leaders of AIR are not pressured to spend a lot of time writing and applying for big grants which we may or may not get. It is important to emphasize here that like many other NGO leaders, Anne and I work with AIR as *volunteers*. We also have full-time academic jobs. For those NGO leaders who balance their involvement with the organization with the demands of their work and family life, weighing the costs and benefits of funding strategies is particularly salient. Thus, for Anne and I, the time and energy spent writing a big grant proposal that has a high likelihood of being unsuccessful and/or subject to strict donor demands means that grant-writing is a strategy that we seldom pursue. In contrast, fundraising through churches and individual donors, while also time consuming, has resulted in a steady source of funding for AIR over the past two decades. Anne asserted that she can always rely on churches to donate: “They [church congregations] always come through. It may be \$1,000 here or \$5,000 there, but they give what they can and they always come through.”

However, this latter strategy—seeking funding through individuals and churches—also has its drawbacks. As I mentioned, it is very time-consuming, requiring a tremendous amount of travel and preparation to give presentations to churches and other organizations like Rotary. Anne regularly travels throughout the southern U.S., giving presentations on AIR’s work in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Anne noted that this travel, while rewarding in terms of fundraising and building connections with churches and other institutions, can be exhausting at times. She noted that when she first started the organization, she felt a tremendous amount of guilt as a mother when she had to leave my sister and I (who were both younger than 10 at the time) to go to

Guatemala or on fundraising trips. Additionally, the time-consuming work of fundraising has taken a toll on Anne's career. She acknowledged that, "I've accepted the fact that I'll never be a famous academic, or publish a ton of books or articles. I just don't have the time!" However, she went on to point out that, "I have...well, I've just accepted the importance of this work [with AIR], and I wouldn't trade it for the world." Thus, for Anne, the pros of pursuing funding by cultivating relationships with churches, other organizations, and private donors far outweigh the disadvantages of this approach. This strategy has enabled AIR to retain the integrity of its mission without having this mission being "donor driven."

Building Solidarity: the Importance of Unifiers in Cross-Border Activist Work

Transnational organizing is a process that involves the daily negotiation of power, privilege, and difference across race, class, gender, culture, nationality, and myriad other social boundaries. In order to effectively pursue their goals and objectives, it is imperative that transnational activists develop strategies to bridge these socially constructed borders and build solidarity. In analyzing AIR's strategies for building solidarity, it is evident that the organization has identified and made use of "unifiers"—a set of values, beliefs, and practices that have helped to facilitate cross-border collaboration, foster solidarity, and aid in the development and maintenance of long-term alliances.

In the interviews, both the indigenous women and AIR staff cited religion and the importance of dialogue and listening as the most important unifiers that guide their activist work.

Religion

It has been noted that religion “has always played a big role... in mobilizing collective groups to pursue social change” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007:18). In her book *God’s Heart Has No Borders*, Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that religion can unite activists by providing them with a shared belief system that gives moral weight to their causes, while at the same time serving as a common “social movement language” of ritual and shared cultural practices (2007:18-23).

In discussing their environmental work, both the indigenous women and the staff and leaders of AIR acknowledged that their religious beliefs and spirituality both motivate and unite them. All of the leaders of Mujeres Unidas, for instance, are Catholic, and frequently referenced the environment as *la Creación*, the Creation. Elsa explained that the women of Mujeres Unidas begin and end their weekly meetings in the tree nursery with a prayer. She noted that this practice helped to inspire and unite the women, “because we know we are doing God’s work, because we are working to help his Creation and his children.”

Many indigenous women also noted that religion has helped them to develop close ties with the staff, leaders, and volunteers of AIR. While many women are Catholic, they also incorporate rituals in their religious practice that blend both Mayan and Christian traditions. In spite of the difference in practices, the shared themes of caring for Creation and the importance of ritual and giving thanks help to connect the women with the AIR staff and volunteers. Dora, from Umul, pointed out that she appreciated the fact that the President of AIR is also *muy religiosa*, very religious. As Dora explained, “this unites us, because we can pray together. It the same God, right? And it is the same Creation. So...yes I think this helps us in our work because it is like, like a link.”

On the part of AIR, several of the organization's members reaffirmed the importance of religion and spirituality as important unifiers. Anne noted the ways in which religion has been both a personal resource for her, as well as an organizational resource for AIR that has helped to bridge cultural divides:

I have always felt that my religious belief and my religious familiarity has been one of my strongest resources [in my work with AIR] because that is a bridge automatically across a culture. Because when they [the staff or community residents] are talking about God, or faith, or there are rituals or ceremonies I am very comfortable with that and I know what they're talking about.... I know how that works. And I know how important it is. So, and we talk about it all the time.... So anyway, I think that religion, my religious belief ...so I'm not talking about it being a personal resource, I'm talking about it being a cultural bridge. Or both. That it is both, that's what I mean. So it's a personal resource but it turns out that it's very much a—an organizational resource and a cultural bridge as well.... I mean, we look at too often religion as a cultural divide. But it can be a powerful bridge.

William similarly noted that the ways in which religion helped to build solidarity both within the AIR organization and between AIR and the communities. For William, the belief in God and the idea of respecting difference were the most important ways in which religion helped to bridge cultural divides:

The belief in God is the important thing. Because religion...I think it is...it is a method for carrying one's belief. And each one has his/her belief. And in AIR we are also very diverse in this respect, right? So, that is my opinion. I believe that...faith in God. Faith in God. Faith in God unites us. With respect for every belief. I respect Cecilia, and I respect Don Migual, I respect Mario and his Evangelical beliefs. And I don't criticize anyone.... Respect. Faith and respect.

In addition to being a cultural bridge, religion has also provided AIR with some core values that also unite its members and guide their work. Namely, these values include humility, compassion, a love for nature, and gratitude. Anne elaborated on how religion informs these values:

Humility, would be a core value.... Humility that, eh, we need each other. And we need God, and we need prayer. And that we're not—we can't do this by ourselves. That we can't keep doing this work by ourselves. That is a core value. But what I mean by that is that we need each other. And we need God. So humility in the sense of *community*. Isn't that interesting? So humility and community go together. And then the other [value] is compassion, which that of course also has a religious basis. And then for the nature. We are true believers in Creation as something to be treasured, protected. You know. I—we really do love trees! [laughing] So that's a—I think that's a core value, sure. Our love for Creation and sense of again, responsibility, stewardship.... Gratitude, I have to put that. Gratitude is a core value. It's a motivating value, I'll say that. That we're grateful for all that God has given us and feel that—OK, it does all tie together, doesn't it?

Luis echoed these sentiments, and also noted the importance of religious values of gratitude and stewardship in guiding AIR's work:

Because we are all part of the same Creation, the Creation of God. And there is no difference [among us] in his eyes. And what we are doing simply is to contribute to the Creation of God, which he made in 6 days, and he made it very well. But little by little we are destroying this Creation. And because of that we [the AIR team] are conscious. We do what we do, and we like what we do. And we are always grateful to have this opportunity.

Thus, as the indigenous women and the members of the AIR team attest, the importance of religion as a unifier cannot be discounted in transnational activist work. By providing activists with a shared set of beliefs, values, and practices, religion can help to bridge social and cultural divides and build the kind of solidarity that sustains and motivates activist work.

Dialogue and Listening

In addition to religion, participants also noted that certain practices are also important for building solidarity. In particular, both indigenous women and AIR staff emphasized that good communication and listening are key to building relationships both within AIR and between AIR and the communities. As community-based programs

are the cornerstone of AIR's environmental work, it is particularly important for the organization to listen to the needs, concerns, and suggestions of community members. Anne noted the importance of humility when listening and considering the advice of both the AIR staff and community members. She pointed out that it when she first started AIR, her inexperience and humility were what allowed the organization to grow. Her words point to the importance of taking a "hands-off" approach to transnational organizing, and letting local experts lead in project development and implementation:

And then, and then, [there was] kind of a learning curve for me [at the beginning]...that my gift was, ironically, that I *didn't know* what I was doing. So I did the right thing: I stood back, and let it grow. And, and let, you know....so it was out of my own *inexperience* that AIR became what it is today.

The importance of humility, respect, and dialogue in transnational activism cannot be emphasized enough. As Aili Mari Tripp (2005) notes, effective transnational mobilization requires that international actors "consider that local actors have the most intimate knowledge of issues, other players, conditions, laws, and cultural sensitivities" (306). Thus, it is important to "take cues" from local actors, and privilege their voices in advocacy programs. Sustained, open, and respectful dialogue can in turn help to build solidarity and trust between international and local activists.

Of course, dialogue and listening is important for local activism as well, and is particularly important for unifying activists across borders of race, class, and gender. AIR makes concerted efforts to incorporate the voices, concerns, and suggestions of community residents in all its programs, a fact that is not lost on the residents themselves. The women of Mujeres Unidas acknowledged that their long-term partnership with AIR has been the result of sustained dialogue; as Catalina summarized, "You all [with AIR] listen to us, and you always come back. It's for this that

we have confidence and faith in AIR.” Establishing good relationships with communities has helped to build AIR’s reputation as an organization that privileges the needs and concerns of communities—a reputation which has in turn helped AIR to network with other communities. Other indigenous women noted that they heard about AIR through word of mouth, and that their friends vouched for the organization. One woman from Masat, Solola noted that she had never attended one of AIR’s presentations, but that she had heard about the organization through a friend from Chimaltenango. Her friend recommended that the women of Masat contact AIR to help them with reforestation projects. Thus, through the practice of dialogue and listening informed by humility and compassion, AIR has developed a good reputation throughout many highland departments. This reputation has in turn helped the organization to make new connections, build new alliances, and extend its work through highland Guatemala.

Hemos Aprendido Muchas Cosas Tambien: the Development of an Organizational Gender Consciousness

The practice of dialogue and listening has also helped AIR to grow and develop as an organization. Just as the indigenous women acknowledged that they have learned “many things” in their work with AIR, so too have the staff and leaders of AIR learned from their partnerships with indigenous women and men. Of particular relevance to this project has been the development of a gender consciousness within the organization. As I pointed out earlier, AIR’s founders (and Father Girón in particular) ensured that the organization incorporated an awareness of the salience of race and class in its environmental work. Thus, since its beginnings, AIR has recognized the importance of protecting the environment for impoverished indigenous communities. However, it has not been until recent years that AIR has also incorporated an awareness of the

importance of gender and gender relations in its environmental community work. I use the term “organizational gender consciousness” to refer to this awareness, and to highlight the ways in which this consciousness is not restricted to one or a few individuals, but is shared by AIR’s leaders and staff and has become embedded within the organization and its programs. Here, it is important to reiterate that AIR did not begin as a “women’s organization.” However, through the organization’s willingness to listen, recognize, and attend to the needs and concerns of both women and men in its work, the staff and leaders of AIR have developed an awareness of the importance of gender and gendered power relations in the organization’s environmental programs.

In the interviews, all of the staff of AIR agreed that the organization has developed a *conocimiento de género*—a gender consciousness—in recent years. Luis argued that this consciousness has developed as a result of the numerous partnerships that AIR has cultivated with indigenous women’s groups. From working with these women’s groups, Luis and the other *tenicos* have witnessed firsthand how important women are to environmental protection efforts:

I think so, that AIR has a gender consciousness. And now, we can say that the women have even taught us. We have learned a lot of things, too. Many things, right? And that is part of gender, that not only men can work. No, women also have space [to work].... And they [the women] have done great work. And we, as an institution, we know that effort, that work.

William explicitly connects the development of AIR’s gender consciousness with the organization’s willingness to recognize women’s work and to listen to their concerns.

We do practical work on the issue of gender. Even though many organizations apart from AIR say that they work on gender, but for me, we have done it. Without having a gender program.... But we listen. Yes, we listen to the women, right, they talk and we listen. They tell us about their problems, or, or their suggestions and we try to help them.

Thus, for both Luis and William, a big part of AIR's gender consciousness involves recognizing the value and potential of *both* women and men as allies in struggles to protect the environment. This recognition is important because as I pointed out earlier, women's work and contributions in environmental movements have historically been ignored or discounted by academics and policymakers alike (UNEP 2004).

Anne pointed out that a willingness to listen and incorporate the needs and concerns of both women and men is at the heart of any "community-based" organizing effort. As she pointed out, women's voices and contributions *must* be included in such efforts, because to ignore them would be excluding half the community.

[AIR] may have a gender consciousness. I would also call it a consciousness to listen. To listen to what people might want. To listen to what would be an integral part—the trees, we always put the tree nurseries at the core. But if the women, if the group wants medicinal gardens, let's do that! If they ask for stoves, more stoves, more stoves, more stoves—I'll write some grants! We'll build more stoves. So, I think it came that...the women came to us more than men, and we already had the mindset of listening, and then the women asked, told us what they wanted. So we got it. Does that make sense? I want "community-based" not to be just a cliché. And it is such a cliché. I'm getting sick of it. But I want it to be *authentic listening*. Yeah. Through authentic listening and then acting on what we've heard.

AIR's gender consciousness—developed from a willingness to listen to *all* community members—has fundamentally shaped the organization's projects and the ways in which it operates in two ways. First, as I have pointed out, it has allowed the organization to recognize the value and potential of women as important allies in its environmental projects. This valuation has led to AIR forming strong and lasting alliances with numerous groups of women farmers throughout Guatemala. These groups constitute the majority of the farmers that choose to work with AIR, and their collective efforts have led to the planting of nearly 4 million trees in communities throughout highland Guatemala.

Secondly, AIR's gender consciousness has also helped the organization to develop additional environmental programs that it likely would not have pursued had it failed to incorporate the concerns and suggestions of indigenous women. For instance, one of the organization's most successful projects—the construction of fuel efficient stoves—was developed with the help and suggestions of indigenous women. In the case of the stoves, it was women community members who pointed out the inefficiency and environmental costs of traditional open-fire methods of cooking. They also pointed out the health problems that both they and their children had experienced as a result of inhaling smoke from open fires, complaining of coughing, shortness of breath, and watery eyes. To address these problems, AIR began working with community members to build fuel-efficient stoves with chimneys in the homes of residents who desired them. These stoves only use between one-half and one-third of the firewood of open-fire cooking methods. Thus, in addition to preserving firewood, they also help to cut down on the number of trips women must take to find firewood. In the 2006 interviews, the women reported that the number of times they had to procure firewood had been cut in half since they had the stoves built in their homes. Since 1995, AIR has constructed 750 fuel-efficient stoves in the departments of Chimaltenango and Sololá; the organization estimates that these stoves help to conserve roughly 750 tons of firewood each year. The stoves project –which represents an important opportunity for environmental protection—developed because of AIR's willingness to *listen* and *incorporate* indigenous women's concerns into its environmental programs. As Anne acknowledged, “the stove project—that was all [from] the women. If [AIR] hadn't paid attention to them, that would have been a missed opportunity.”

Discussion

By forming cross-border alliances with AIR, indigenous women have been able to access the knowledge and resources necessary to implement and maintain environmental programs in their communities. While this transnational mobilization has helped indigenous women and their communities, it has also been a difficult process fraught with challenges and obstacles. As enumerated by both indigenous women and AIR staff, some of the main challenges include the negotiation of power and privilege across borders of race, gender, class, and nationality; the exhausting nature of emotional labor in transnational organizing; and the difficulties in securing funding. However, an examination of AIR's partnerships with indigenous communities reveals that it is indeed possible to negotiate the daunting obstacles inherent in transnational activist work. Specifically, it is important that local and international actors identify and make use of key "unifiers" that can bridge social and cultural divides. For AIR, both religion and the organization's willingness to listen to community members' needs have been important in helping the organization to build and maintain lasting alliances with indigenous communities in environmental protection efforts. While such unifiers by no means dismantle the power structures in which local and transnational activists are embedded, they *do* help these activists to bridge seemingly insurmountable divides and work across borders of race, class, gender, and nationality to achieve a shared goal and vision.

By centering the needs of community members in its environmental programs, AIR has recognized the value and contributions of *both* indigenous women and men as allies in environmental protection efforts. In particular, AIR's work and dialogue with numerous indigenous women's groups has led the organization to develop a gender

consciousness which has helped to inform and shape its environmental programs. Over the years, the staff and leaders of AIR have learned to recognize that issues of the environment and environmental degradation are also “women’s issues.” As many AIR staff members acknowledged, this gender consciousness is still growing and evolving, and some indicated that there were certain issues related to gender that they wanted to clarify. Many of the *tecnicos*, for instance, had little to no understanding of why women constitute a large majority of community residents who seek out AIR’s help. This dissertation aims to clarify some of these issues, and contribute to the ongoing development of AIR’s gender consciousness. In doing so, this dissertation also aims to provide an instructive case study that helps not only AIR but other organizations, activists, and institutions recognize that gender—as well as race and class—need to be considered in the design and implementation of environmental programs and projects.

One of the institutions that this dissertation explicitly addresses is the Guatemalan government. Despite being an institution that has a history of repressing or ignoring indigenous groups, the Guatemalan government has in recent years tried to incorporate indigenous groups’ demands into various programs and projects. In regards to environmental programs, members of Guatemala’s National Forestry Institute (Instituto Nacional de Bosques, or INAB) have recently consulted AIR on how to incorporate indigenous communities in government-led reforestation projects. In the following chapter, I examine how the stories of indigenous women and AIR can challenge and inform Guatemalan government policy on environmental issues.

CHAPTER 7

CHALLENGING OFFICIAL DISCOURSES: USING THE STORIES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND AIR TO INFORM POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

So what, then, are the political implications of this study? How might the stories and experiences of indigenous women and AIR be used to inform environmental policy design and development in Guatemala? These are particularly important questions for an (eco)feminist action research project such as this. Action researchers emphasize the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and to link research with policy and positive social change (Fals Borda 2008; Greenwood and Levin 1998; Reason and Bradbury 2008). As Orlando Fals Borda (2008) contends, action researchers are guided by a “praxis-inspired commitment,” a “practical struggle for social transformation” (30).

In the previous chapter I explored how the story of the partnership between indigenous women and AIR may be used to inform environmental activist and advocacy work. In this chapter I continue to bridge the research/practice/policy divide by highlighting the ways in which the stories of indigenous women and the AIR team may also inform environmental policy—specifically Guatemalan forestry policy. In doing so, this chapter offers a way of linking the personal stories of local actors with national-level politics and practices.

I begin this chapter with an overview of national forestry policy in Guatemala, and a discussion of the country’s government-led reforestation programs—the Program of Forestry Incentives (Programa de Incentivos Forestales, or PINFOR), and the Program of Incentives for Smallholders of Land with Forestry or Agroforestry Potential (Proyecto de Incentivos para Pequeños Poseedores de Tierras con Vocación Forestal o Agroforestal, or PINPEP). I then move on to discuss the underlying assumptions embedded within Guatemalan forestry policy, drawing in large part from interviews

conducted with representatives of the National Forestry Institute (Instituto Nacional de Bosques, or INAB), as well as the Secretary of Planning and Programming for the Presidency (Secretaria de Planificación y Programación de la Presidencia, or SEGEPLAN). Both INAB and SEGEPLAN have primary responsibility for the design and implementation of forestry policy in Guatemala.¹ In this section, I employ critical discourse analysis as outlined by Nancy Naples (2003) in order to analyze how government officials talk about deforestation and forestry policy in Guatemala. As Naples maintains, a critical discourse analysis of how government officials talk about public policy allows for important insight into the values and beliefs that guide political processes. Such an analysis also exposes the weaknesses and contradictions in public policy, and thus creates a space for critiquing and challenging policy design (Naples 2003:27-9). Thus, as Foucault (1978) contends, “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (101).

A critical discourse analysis reveals that at least four major (and problematic) assumptions guide forestry policy as developed by INAB and SEGEPLAN. First, officials within these institutions pursue a “top-down” approach to national forestry management, largely neglecting the needs and concerns of local citizens in the design of forestry programs and policies. Second, officials tend to characterize rural and indigenous communities as problems to be “dealt with” rather than allies in environmental protection efforts. Third, officials view deforestation and related environmental problems as recent

¹ INAB has primary responsibility for the design and implementation of forestry law in Guatemala. SEGEPLAN is a general office that has responsibility for coordinating policy development between the various ministries of the government

problems that are largely the result of agricultural expansion in general, ignoring the ways in which historical patterns of inequality and the appropriation of indigenous land and resources have been major contributors to deforestation in Guatemala. Finally, the programs and policies designed by both INAB and SEGEPLAN operate within a pro-development framework; officials tended to talk about economic development in wholly positive terms, ignoring the ways in which this process has contributed to environmental degradation and further exacerbated social inequalities in Guatemala.

In this chapter I also draw from interviews with indigenous women and AIR staff in order to critique each of the major assumptions outlined above. Following the overview of Guatemala's forestry policy and programs, the chapter follows a point-counterpoint format in which the testimonies of indigenous women and AIR are presented as challenges to the "official discourses" of INAB and SEGEPLAN representatives. Presenting the critiques and challenges of indigenous women and AIR staff as a way of "talking back" to INAB and SEGEPLAN officials is particularly relevant for this project because in recent years officials from both institutions have contacted AIR for advice on designing national forestry policy and reforestation programs. This chapter thus constitutes a direct response to these institutions. The overall goal of this chapter is to draw from the concerns, critiques, and suggestions of indigenous women and AIR in order to begin developing effective environmental programs and policy that recognize indigenous women and men as important allies in local, regional, and national efforts to protect the environment.

Background: Guatemala's National Forestry Law, PINFOR, and PINPEP

Guatemala's Forestry Law (101-96) was passed in October 1996 following the signing of the Peace Accords. As stated in Article 1 of the law, its primary objective is to

reduce deforestation; promote reforestation; increase the productivity of existing forests so that they realize their “economic and biological potential;” to conserve Guatemala’s forestry ecosystems; and to promote an “improvement in the quality of life” for communities who rely on forests for goods like firewood and timber. The law promotes sustainable logging of national forests, and requires companies and citizens alike to obtain permits for both commercial logging as well as domestic use of trees (for firewood or building construction) and to replant a certain number of trees for every one that has been cut.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the 1996 Forestry Law is that it created the National Forestry Institute (INAB), an autonomous institute with responsibilities for the design, implementation, and enforcement of national forestry programs and policies. INAB operates within the Ministry of Agriculture, Grains, and Food (MAGA), one of thirteen ministries that are directly supervised by the executive branch of the Guatemalan government. As stated on INAB’s website, the mission of the institute is “to execute and promote national forestry policies and to facilitate access to technology and forestry services...for all actors in the forestry sector, through the design and promotion of strategies and actions that generate a greater economic, ecological, and social development in the country” (INAB 2010a). While INAB promotes conservation of forest resources, it also promotes sustainable logging, a practice which many indigenous communities oppose because it has turned forests into another resource for national and multinational corporations to exploit (Larson 2008)

Both the Forestry Law and INAB have been met with some resentment and opposition from indigenous and rural communities. As noted by Anne Larson (2008), a

number of indigenous residents associate INAB with “two evils,” namely “[commercial] logging and the enforcement of burdensome regulations for the poor” (42). The requirement of permits for firewood use is particularly burdensome for rural indigenous residents, who have used trees as firewood for centuries. AIR tecnico Miguel Lopez was particularly critical of this part of the law, noting that most indigenous and rural residents are not even aware of its existence. Furthermore, he said that it criminalizes those who depend upon the forest for their livelihoods, pointing out that residents “do not understand why they are suddenly in violation of the law when they are only continuing to do what they have done for generations.”

Since 1998 INAB has been engaged in a process of decentralization, working with local governments to establish municipal forest offices (OFMs). As of 2005, OFMs had been established in 116 out of 330 municipalities throughout Guatemala (Larson 2008; Larson and Barrios 2006). The OFMs have responsibility for enforcing national forestry policy at local levels. Their main duties involve the issuance of permits for firewood and logging, local enforcement of the national Forestry Law, as well as assisting residents to become involved in the government’s main reforestation programs—PINFOR and PINPEP.

PINFOR was established in 1996 as an incentive program to encourage landholders to reforest parts of their land. Once registered with INAB, landholders are paid for a period of up to five years for the reforestation and sustainable management of their land. The main goals of this program are to “maintain and improve sustainable forest production” and to improve overall “natural regeneration” in Guatemala. The program aims to reforest 285,000 hectares by 2017 (INAB 2010b).

While the goals of PINFOR are admirable, the program is not without its weaknesses. First, the process of applying and registering for this program is lengthy and complex. Landholders must provide numerous documents, including their land title, a detailed plan of action for reforestation, and proof that their land is “qualified” to be forested (i.e., the terrain is not too rocky, steep, or otherwise unsuited for forests). The application must then be evaluated and approved, a process which can take several months. Overall, the process can be quite cumbersome and daunting for landowners to pursue. A second weakness is that INAB does not provide any training or financial assistance in the reforestation process itself. Rather, applicants are expected “to invest their own resources to initiate the reforestation or forest management activities, with INAB technicians supervising” (Ferroukhi and Echeverria 2003:91). In this way PINFOR marginalizes many small-scale landowners who lack both the technical knowledge and financial resources necessary to design, implement, and maintain reforestation projects. Finally, the incentive program only lasts for a period of up to five years for a given area. Thus, after five years there are no further financial incentives for a landowner to continue participating in the reforestation program. These combined weaknesses have meant limited success for PINFOR. From 1998 through 2009, PINFOR reforested a total of 94,151 hectares throughout Guatemala; however, nearly 60% of this land is concentrated in the departments of El Petén and Alta Verapaz, where the government has reforested 56,477.90 hectares, mostly in national parks (INAB 2010b). In contrast, only 10.4% of this land (9,812 hectares) is located in the western highland departments of Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Quiché, Sololá, and Totonicapán—departments with predominantly indigenous populations (ibid.).

In 2002 and 2003 INAB organized a series of forest policy roundtables in which government representatives met with a number of civil society organizations, community leaders, and national and international experts in order to evaluate Guatemala's forestry sector and develop a new National Forestry Plan (Hurtarte, et al. 2006). AIR was one of the organizations consulted during this time. One of the major concerns brought up during these meetings was that INAB had not done enough to integrate small-scale farmers in its reforestation projects. From the policy roundtables INAB developed a new National Forestry Plan in which the institute pledged to make its forestry and reforestation programs more inclusive. The primary aim of the plan is to achieve sustainable forest and environmental management so that "by the year 2012 the development of the Guatemalan forest sector will be based on principles of sustainability, thus contributing to human well-being and economic, social and environmental development; to land-use planning; and to the shaping of a forest culture within the country—through participatory management by all the stakeholders" (Programa Forestal Nacional de Guatemala 2003).

One of the programs that developed following the roundtable discussions in 2002 and 2003 is PINPEP. Launched in 2006, PINPEP specifically targets small-scale landowners (identified as landowners with 15 hectares of land or less) for participation in government-led reforestation programs. The general objective of the program is to address problems of deforestation as well as poverty and hunger by providing economic incentives for landowners to participate in reforestation projects. PINPEP also aims to accomplish the following: to increase the participation of smallholders in forestry management; to foster gender equality through encouraging women to participate in

reforestation programs; to generate employment and income in rural areas through participation in forestry management; and to strengthen the links between local and national leadership (INAB 2010c). PINPEP operates in much the same way as PINFOR—by providing economic incentives to encourage smallholders to participate in either reforestation or agroforestry programs, or to protect existing forests on their land. PINPEP offers the greatest economic incentives for establishing tree plantations, without crop integration. Participants receive a lump sum of money at the end of their first year of participation, and the incentive program lasts for up to three years for each area of land. Currently, PINPEP has reforestation and agroforestry projects in 79 municipalities in the departments of Zacapa, Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz, El Progreso, Jalapa, Jutiapa, Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, Quiche, Sololá, Totonicapán, Quetzaltenango and San Marcos. In these departments, the program has helped to reforest a total of 13,103.5 hectares from 2007-2009 (ibid.).

To date, it is too early to evaluate the long-term success and sustainability of PINPEP. From an initial review of the program's goals, it seems that PINPEP is making concerted efforts to target small-scale farmers, and that the program is concerned with connecting reforestation and poverty reduction efforts. Additionally, and from an ecofeminist perspective it is also admirable that PINPEP is conscientious about encouraging women's participation in government-led reforestation programs.

While PINPEP may look good “on paper,” there is some evidence that the program may lack efficacy when put into practice. Some studies have shown, for instance, that many rural and indigenous communities have put up a “wall of resistance” to INAB's involvement in forestry management—both in regards to the administration of Forestry

Law through OFMs and the implementation of programs like PINFOR and PINPEP (Larson 2008; Larson and Barrios 2006). Anne Larson (2008) attributes this resistance to communities' resentment of the Forestry Law and its burdensome regulations, as well as a general distrust of the Guatemalan government on the part of indigenous and rural communities (Larson 2008). This resistance is a major reason why, as of 2005, INAB had only managed to establish OFMs in 116 out of 330 municipalities throughout Guatemala (ibid.).

In addition to the lack of public trust, I argue that certain other weaknesses also limit the efficacy of both PINFOR and PINPEP in providing long-term, community-based solutions to the problem of deforestation in Guatemala. I argue that these weaknesses are based on faulty assumptions that guide PINFOR and PINPEP—assumptions which also emerged from interviews with the government officials responsible for designing the programs. In the following section, I discuss each of these assumptions in detail, and also offer counterarguments based on the narratives of indigenous women and AIR staff and leaders.

“Top-Down” vs. Community-Based Approaches

By law, forestry management is centralized in Guatemala. The 1996 Forestry Law entitles the state—through INAB—to the management and protection of forests and forestry resources in Guatemala. While the law also has provisions for decentralization, municipal forestry offices ultimately do not have much power in the creation of forestry policies and/or programs like PINFOR and PINPEP. Thus, the design of forestry law remains largely controlled by the state, with municipal offices having responsibility for monitoring and enforcing community compliance with the law.

Overall, this structure is very much “top-down” in its approach to forestry management and conservation. It entrusts the design, implementation, and enforcement of forestry policy and programs to state officials and technical “experts,” with community residents expected to adhere to and abide by the regulations. Thus, while PINPEP is touted by INAB officials as a “community-based” program, it in fact is a program that was designed by a handful of government officials and technical advisors following a series of closed-door roundtable discussions in 2002 and 2003. Only about 450 representatives of NGOs and national and international forestry experts were invited to participate in these roundtables. Community members and smallholding farmers—the “target” of the PINPEP initiative—were conspicuously absent from the discussions (Hurtarte, et al. 2006).

According to INAB officials, this top-down approach to forestry management is warranted because most rural residents do not understand the importance and/or technical aspects of sustainable forest management. Both the SEGEPLAN delegates and INAB representatives viewed the Forestry Law as an important tool for promoting sustainable management of forests in Guatemala, and that what is needed is *better education* of the public to help them understand the importance of the Forestry Law and how it applies to them. As the national SEGEPLAN delegate argued,

In the highlands we have beautiful forests and the people are not able to understand that the forest is a resource that is being lost. We may not see it now, but [we will] in the future. So we need people to understand that the law is there to protect this precious resource.

The regional representative of INAB, Edwin Periera, concurred that education is important for ensuring public compliance with the Forestry Law. Periera pointed out that

INAB works with community organizations and NGOs to develop programs to educate citizens about the Forestry Law and how it applies to them. He explained,

We have to help the population to understand the [Forestry] Law, to comply with the Law. Because the Law is like, like a guide for sustainable forest management. We have developed extra-curricular programs for children, for women, for people, for all levels of the population on the theme of sustainable management and the Law.

The emphasis on educating communities about national policy and programs (as opposed to incorporating community members' concerns and suggestions in policy design) reflects INAB's top-down, paternalistic approach to forestry management. Such an approach has resulted in a disconnect from the reality of deforestation and its impact on rural and highland communities. In these communities, residents are keenly aware of the prevalence of deforestation and related environmental problems. As I have pointed out throughout this dissertation, such problems have a direct impact on highland residents' everyday lives and work, so it is highly doubtful that they are "unable to understand" the dangers posed by deforestation. Furthermore, the fact that AIR has received hundreds of requests for assistance with reforestation projects is further evidence that highland residents are concerned with protecting the forests that they have long depended upon for food, shelter, and other resources. Considering this, it is unsurprising that many highland residents tend to view INAB as an elitist institution; indigenous residents in particular perceive INAB officials as "arrogant" and unconcerned with reaching out to indigenous communities (Larson 2008). According to AIR tecnico William Santizo, the negative perception of INAB is a major reason why the institution has failed to establish municipal offices in a large majority of municipalities in Guatemala. As he noted,

The law requires that the people comply with the policies written by the state. But the state does not listen to what the people need or want, and the people do not trust the state. INAB is supposed to be decentralized but in reality this is not the case—the communities do not have a lot of power, they don't have a voice in the process [of policy design].... So if the state does not reach out to the people, then the people think 'why should we worry about reaching out to the state?'

Itzapa is one of the communities that has refused to work with INAB. Elena

Siquinajay noted that INAB officials have repeatedly contacted her and other indigenous leaders about establishing a municipal office in Itzapa. She said that she has adamantly refused their offers, noting that INAB has a reputation for not respecting indigenous traditions in regards to forestry and natural resource management. She explained that,

We do not trust them. Because in reality they do not care about helping us—only about improving their statistics and their salaries. So I tell them that we have been working with AIR to reforest Itzapa, so we do not need their help. AIR works with us and listens to us, but INAB no.

In order to engage in effective community outreach and establish reforestation that are truly “community-based,” INAB would do well to actually incorporate community members in the design and development of its programs and policies. The institution could do this in a number of ways. For instance, INAB could host another series of policy roundtables in which community representatives—both women and men—are asked to participate. This would ensure that the needs and concerns of community members are voiced at a national level and are considered in public policy design. Another strategy would be to follow the model of AIR's community-based programs, and assist community members with the materials and technical aspects of reforestation and forest management, but leave the actual management of these programs up to the community members themselves. Regardless of the strategy, what is important is for INAB to establish and maintain an open and respectful dialogue with community members and program participants. As I have argued earlier, dialogue and a willingness

to incorporate community members' needs and concerns are central to the formation of long-term alliances that are crucial to environmental protection efforts.

Indigenous Communities as Problems vs. Indigenous Women and Men as Allies

INAB's top-down approach to forestry management has hindered the institution's ability to recognize indigenous women and men as potential allies in reforestation efforts. Instead, incentive programs like PINFOR and PINPEP target small-scale landowners as problems to be "dealt with." These programs are based on at least two flawed assumptions: first, that small-scale landowners and farmers are major contributors to deforestation in Guatemala; and second, that landowners will reforest their land only if they are presented with an economic incentive for doing so.

According to INAB officials, the major cause of deforestation in Guatemala is "*él avance de la frontera agrícola*," or the advance of the agricultural frontier. Both national and regional representatives noted that in recent decades, the growth of small-scale farming has posed a particular threat to Guatemala's forests. According to the national INAB representative, the increasing number of *minifundias* in the highlands has been associated with illegal deforestation and the non-sustainable use of forests. Edwin Periera elaborated, explaining that,

The growth in population in the highlands has resulted in agricultural exploitation. The necessity for basic grains results in the cutting of trees, and then they [the families] may introduce one cow, two cows, chickens. And of course many families in the highlands do not have the resources to buy a stove, so they need firewood. So they are always using forest resources.

By framing deforestation as a recent problem that is largely the result of the expansion of small-scale farming, INAB officials *de facto* frame small-scale farmers—the majority of whom are indigenous—as contributors to the problem of deforestation in Guatemala. This characterization is a form of "blaming the victim" that places responsibility for

deforestation on those who are most directly impacted by it. It is an argument that bypasses historical analyses of deforestation as a problem rooted in the colonization of indigenous land and resources and unequal land distribution. Furthermore, characterizing small-scale farming as an obstacle to sustainable forestry management ignores the historical role that small-scale, indigenous farmers have played in natural resource management, and also absolves large-scale landowners and other power elites of any responsibility for deforestation in Guatemala. AIR tecnico Miguel Lopez was very critical of INAB's approach to sustainable forest management, noting that the lack of land—not small-scale farming—was the major cause of deforestation in highland Guatemala:

The farmers are not the problem! They are not the problem. They have to farm to eat—is it a crime to eat? Of course not. But these programs [PINFOR and PINPEP] that INAB promotes, eh, in the eyes of INAB the farmers are the problem, but in reality the lack of land is the problem. This is certain.

Both PINFOR and PINPEP are modeled on the assumption that small-scale farming and farmers are obstacles to sustainable forestry management. By offering economic incentives to farmers, PINFOR and PINPEP turn reforestation and forestry management into a business transaction, in which the state pays off farmers to plant or maintain forests on their land. This model overlooks the numerous other incentives that rural and indigenous communities have for reforesting or sustainably managing their land. As I have pointed out throughout this dissertation, such incentives include the protection of soil, crops, and water resources; traditional indigenous respect for the land and natural resources; as well as indigenous women's motivation to protect the environment for their families and communities. By failing to recognize these other (non-economic) incentives, PINFOR and PINPEP also fail to appreciate rural and indigenous

residents as allies in sustainable forest management, rather than problems who must be “paid off” to plant trees.

Two of AIR’s tecnicos, Miguel and William, were both employed by MAGA (the Ministry of Agriculture, Grains, and Food, of which INAB is a branch) before working with AIR. They also worked closely with INAB, and both were critical of INAB and MAGA’s approach sustainable forestry management. Miguel, who is indigenous, pointed out that INAB’s failure to recognize indigenous farmers as allies in environmental protection efforts was a major reason why he left government employment to work with AIR.

They [INAB] do not talk much with the people, so they do not recognize all the opportunities for working with the people. So, for example, with the indigenous community, as you know, we have many reasons, a lot of motivation for protecting our environment, our land. But many times the state does not recognize this. They think, ‘Oh, we have to pay them to plant trees, to work on the part of the environment,’ but in reality this is not the case! We want—the people want—to protect the land. They just need to a little bit of help to do so.

As Miguel and the other staff of AIR contend, it is important for any institution involved in environmental protection to maintain open dialogue and involvement with local communities. By involving community members in policy and program design, state officials and advocates alike are more likely to recognize the many incentives that community members might have for participating in environmental protection efforts. As I pointed out earlier, community participation in environmental policy design can also lead to the development of policy that is more inclusive and effective. AIR is one organization that has adopted an approach to environmental management that is truly “community-based.” Working with primarily indigenous communities, AIR encourages the participation of indigenous women and men in the design and implementation of reforestation and other environmental projects. Respect for indigenous communities

and a willingness to dialogue and learn from community members have helped AIR to recognize indigenous women and men as important allies in its environmental programs. The alliances between AIR and local communities are based not on economic incentives but on a deep understanding of the importance of environmental management and protection—both for local communities and society more generally. Overall, AIR’s practice of fully involving community members in reforestation projects has helped to strengthen the relationships between AIR and local communities, which has ultimately aided the organization’s reforestation efforts—not only are community members more willing and eager to work with AIR, but they are more willing to participate in and maintain programs that they themselves design. Thus, I again emphasize the link between community involvement and the efficacy of environmental programs: in order to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of environmental policy and programs, local community residents—women and men alike—must be involved and incorporated at all stages of policy and program design. This is a truly “community-based” approach, and one that is most likely to ensure both community compliance and the long-term maintenance of environmental programs.

Deforestation as a New Problem vs. Deforestation as the Result of Historical Appropriation of Land and Resources

A third problematic assumption that emerged from interviews with government officials was the notion that deforestation in Guatemala is a fairly recent problem linked to population pressure and the spread of small-scale agriculture. INAB officials contended that the PINFOR and PINPEP initiatives aim to stop the cycle of deforestation by encouraging landowners’ sustainable management of their own lands. However, neither of these programs addresses what I have argued is the root cause of

deforestation in highland Guatemala: a highly unequal land distribution system that is the result of centuries of appropriation of indigenous land and resources. To recap from Chapter 2, centuries of elite takeover of the best agricultural land in Guatemala has left rural (primarily indigenous) populations with only small plots of land to farm in highland areas. Within highland communities, these plots are passed from one generation to the next and divided amongst a family's children. Thus, minifundias (small farms) become microfundias (very small farms). As these farms—many of which are less than 0.7 hectares—do not yield enough crops for adequate subsistence, families are left with little option but to clear forested areas to plant additional crops. This has led to increased deforestation of highland areas, and the undermining of traditional agreements on the use and management of community forests (for more on this, see Katz 2000b).

When asked about the link between unequal land distribution and deforestation, government officials conceded that land inequality constitutes a “major problem” in Guatemala, but that this problem is beyond the scope of INAB's objectives and responsibilities. Officials instead noted that the government program FONTIERRAS (*Fondo de Tierras*) has primary responsibility for overseeing land reform in Guatemala. Implemented in 2001, the FONTIERRAS program utilizes a market-based approach to land reform in which the government grants low-interest loans to individuals or collective groups to help them purchase or rent additional land. However, as noted by Garoz and Gauster (2004), implementation of this program has been “very patchy,” and its success in promoting widespread land access has been limited. As of 2009, a total of 19,450 individuals had received credit to purchase 93,022 hectares (FONTIERRAS 2009). This

equates to an average of 4.8 hectares per family—an amount that represents roughly half the area necessary for adequate familial subsistence. The program for renting land—started in 2004—has seen a bit more success, with a total of 180,802 individuals receiving loans to rent 125,808 hectares. This equates to an average of only 0.7 hectares per family. However, the granting loans to rent or purchase land hardly equates to meaningful land reform. Despite FONTIERRAS' efforts, Guatemala still retains one of the highest levels of land inequality in the world, and evidence indicates that the level of inequality has increased since the implementation of neoliberal development policies. Currently, the Gini coefficient for land inequality in Guatemala is 0.85, higher than it has ever been (Wittman and Geisler 2005). Furthermore, nearly half of the land owned by the top 1 % of large-scale landowners land can be classified as *terreno baldio*—empty or unused land (ibid.).

Despite the fact that both INAB and FONTIERRAS are housed within the Ministry of Agriculture, Grains, and Food (MAGA), there has been very little collaboration between the two programs. According to the SEGEPLAN delegate, “they are both autonomous institutes within the government, and each one has its separate goals: INAB for the forestry sector, and FONTIERRAS for land access.”

Both the inefficacy of FONTIERRAS and the disconnect between FONTIERRAS and INAB constitute major obstacles to long-term sustainable forestry management. In order to break the cycle of deforestation in highland Guatemala, it is imperative that state programs recognize and address deforestation as a problem rooted in a history of land appropriation and unequal land distribution. Incentive programs like PINFOR and PINPEP are merely “quick fixes” that do not address the root causes of much of the

deforestation that is occurring today in Guatemala. In order to stop the cycle of slash-and-burn farming and the environmentally destructive advance of agriculture, it is imperative that the Guatemalan state recognize and develop programs to address the interrelated nature of social exclusion, land inequality, and the ongoing destruction of forests. Programs that allow for government purchase and redistribution of unused land are thus important ways to address both the social inequalities and many environmental problems confronting Guatemala today.

Development as a Beneficial Process vs. Development as Neocolonialism

In addition to overlooking the connection between unequal land distribution and deforestation, government officials also failed to acknowledge the role that development plays in exacerbating environmental degradation in Guatemala. Rather, officials framed development as a wholly positive process, a way to make Guatemala “more competitive” in the global economy, as well as a way of combating poverty within the country. Even INAB officials contended that allowing international timber companies access to forests in Guatemala could be beneficial for the country’s economy if commercial logging is done in a sustainable manner, in accordance with the law. This characterization of development is at odds with how many indigenous activists and organizations view the process—as an assault on their land, resources, and way of life that constitutes a form of neocolonialism.

Representatives of both SEGEPLAN and INAB viewed the recently passed Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) as an accord that would ultimately benefit Guatemala at both international and national levels. According to the regional SEGEPLAN delegate, at the international level CAFTA will help Guatemala to become “more competitive” in the global market. As the delegate explained, Guatemala is trying

to position itself as a major player in the global agricultural export sector, and CAFTA helps to facilitate this. As she noted, “[CAFTA] integrates our country into the world market. It gives us access to international resources and encourages businesses to invest in Guatemala.” She went on to argue that free trade also benefits small-scale farmers by allowing them access to the export market; thus, “the small producers can sell their crops not only in local markets but international markets as well through contractors, and they can augment their income.” However, she also noted that she had “many doubts” in regards to the environmental consequences of CAFTA, saying that the regulations are “very vague.”

INAB officials viewed CAFTA as beneficial for both the agricultural and forestry sector, and the national representative noted that in many ways trees are like “another crop” for Guatemala. As he explained, “if we manage the process of development in a sustainable way, then it can help us to realize the economic potential of Guatemala’s forests.” Both he and Edwin Periera pointed out that Guatemala’s forestry law provides for strict regulation of commercial logging, and mandates that companies can only log in certain areas and during certain hours of the day. Furthermore, companies are required to plant a certain number of trees for every one that they cut. However, Edwin Periera also conceded that it can be difficult to enforce the Forestry Law at all times, and that the timber industry often engages in illegal logging practices, either cutting more trees than permitted or failing to replant trees when required to do so.

Overall, government officials’ characterization of development in positive terms contrasts with the narratives of the many indigenous activists presented in this dissertation. As women like Juana, Elena, Luvia, and others have revealed, the

development process has led to greater environmental degradation of their local communities, exacerbating problems of deforestation, soil erosion and mudslides, and the overuse of harmful agrochemicals. As Luvia pointed out,

The government always talks about how this process of 'development' benefits us. But we have not seen the benefits. We are still very poor, and now we have all these [environmental] problems, too. So, my question is: who benefits?

Elena was similarly critical, and also noted that those who stand to benefit from the development process comprise "a very small group." As she contended,

It [development] is a process by the rich and for the rich. They are the ones who benefit. And we are the ones who suffer. The poor, the rural and indigenous population suffers. And the environment too. All, all for the benefit of the rich.

The concerns and critiques of indigenous women who work with AIR are shared by indigenous activists at national levels. It is noteworthy that many indigenous organizations protested in Guatemala's capital city immediately before and after the ratification of CAFTA in 2005. Shortly afterwards, the National Coordination of Peasant Organizations (Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, or CNOC) published a document on *Alternative Development of Indigenous and Peasant Agriculture* (2006) which critiques the western neoliberal development model as "unsustainable" and "incapable of generating a better quality of life for rural populations" (8). This document characterizes development as a form of "neocolonialism" as it has led to the further appropriation and degradation of indigenous land and resources. Unlike INAB and SEGEPLAN officials, the authors of the document view development (as it is currently practiced) as a direct cause of environmental degradation in Guatemala. The authors call for a "new paradigm" of development that is based on principles of environmental and social sustainability, and one that is inclusive of women and men of all sectors of society.

Discussion

In this chapter, I have attempted to bridge the gap between activism and policy by presenting the narratives of indigenous women, AIR staff, and other activists as a way of challenging the problematic assumptions embedded within Guatemalan environmental policy and political discourse. Namely, these assumptions include a belief in the efficacy of “top-down” approaches to environmental policy and forestry management; the notion that indigenous and rural populations pose problems to sustainable forest management; the idea that deforestation is a recent problem linked to the expansion of small-scale farming; as well as the characterization of development as a beneficial process for all of Guatemala. Ultimately, these faulty assumptions have hindered the ability of government institutes and environmental programs to address and remedy deforestation and related environmental problems in two major ways. First, the government has failed to recognize the links between deforestation, unequal land distribution, and unsustainable development practices. Thus, the government’s main reforestation initiatives—PINFOR and PINPEP—function only as “quick fixes” that do not address some of the major underlying causes of deforestation and related environmental problems in Guatemala. Secondly, the government has also failed to recognize and incorporate indigenous and rural residents as allies in environmental protection efforts. INAB and SEGEPLAN’s “top-down” approach to forestry management has meant that the concerns and suggestions of community members are not incorporated in policy design and implementation. This has led to a disconnect between government and local communities that has hindered INAB’s ability to establish municipal offices and work with communities in sustainable forestry management. This disconnect has also meant that INAB has missed important

opportunities to form alliances with rural and indigenous communities in environmental protection efforts.

Overall, I contend that the government's inability (or unwillingness) to address both the causes and possible solutions to deforestation in Guatemala is a major reason why the nation continues to have one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world. In order for the Guatemalan government to establish effective and long-term solutions to the problem of deforestation, it must work with local communities to address the underlying causes outlined above. Additionally, government programs should be integrated so that there is more dialogue and collaboration between various institutes. For instance, if it is understood that deforestation is linked with unequal land distribution, then it is possible to link the work of the FONTIERRAS program with INAB. Whatever strategies the government pursues, it is imperative that it work with local communities in the development of effective, inclusive, and long-term solutions to the myriad environmental problems confronting Guatemala today.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

In 2010, AIR was invited to participate in the Ninth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). Over the course of two weeks in April 2010, representatives of indigenous organizations from around the world convened at UN headquarters in New York to discuss topics of indigenous identity, cultural rights, climate change, and sustainable development. A central theme that emerged from the was how intersections of indigenous identity, gender, and class impact indigenous communities' experiences of—and responses to—environmental degradation and climate change.

I attended the UNPFII session as a representative of AIR. For our organization, the session offered an important opportunity to link the local with the global—to recognize the ways in which indigenous women's environmental work with AIR in Guatemala is linked with indigenous women's involvement in environmental movements around the globe. This connection was particularly evident at one of the final meetings on indigenous women and climate change. During this meeting, a representative of the Asian Indigenous Women's Network spoke about the need to recognize both diversities and similarities in stories of indigenous women's environmental activism. She explained that each story has "lessons to teach," noting that,

While each of our stories might have different plots, characters, and locations, it is also important that we learn to recognize the lessons that can be taken from each.... By learning from each other, we can build solidarity and alliances at local, national, and global levels in shared struggles against environmental degradation and climate change.

While I acknowledge that the story of the partnership between indigenous women and AIR is unique in many aspects, I also argue that it offers important lessons that can

inform not only academic scholarship, but activist work and policy development as well. In this conclusion I highlight some of the broader implications of this locally-focused ecofeminist project.

One lesson has been on the importance of using an empirically-based, intersectional analysis to examine the connections between neoliberal development, environmental degradation, and gender, race, class. As I discussed in chapter 1, such an analysis has been lacking within both the environmental social sciences and (eco)feminist studies—while the environmental social sciences have neglected the topic of gender, feminist studies have largely ignored environmental analyses, and ecofeminist scholarship has failed to provide much in the way of empirical evidence for its theoretical assertions. I argue that these gaps constitute major “blind spots” within the respective bodies of literature. In failing to recognize the concrete ways in which various various macrolevel processes and structures interact to shape human-environment relations, these blind spots have impeded the abilities of academics to recognize the complexity of the social dimensions of environmental issues. A primary goal of this dissertation was to address these gaps: through an empirically based, sociological ecofeminist analysis, this dissertation has highlighted the interconnections between macrolevel process of development and environmental degradation, structures of gender, race, and class, and the local experiences and environmental activism of indigenous women in Guatemala. In utilizing a sociological ecofeminist analysis, this project has revealed that environmental degradation in highland Guatemala is not a gender, race, or class-neutral process. Rather, as evinced through the testimonies of indigenous women, local problems of deforestation, soil erosion, mudslides, and

agrochemical overuse have had a direct impact on the largely agricultural (and largely impoverished) indigenous communities that depend upon the land for food, shelter, and income. These environmental problems have not only material but cultural consequences for indigenous Maya as they also destroy the land and resources that many Maya consider sacred. Furthermore, environmental degradation is also a “gendered” process in that it directly impacts work done by indigenous women within highland communities—including farming and gathering firewood and water. Against these various interrelated problems, indigenous women have mobilized around their identities as caregivers and “mothers of the community,” forming an alliance with a transnational organization in order to protect the land that their families and communities depend upon for survival. Overall, this empirically-based ecofeminist analysis highlights the salience of race, class, and gender in shaping how individuals and communities experience and respond to local environmental degradation. I argue that it is important for academics—whether environmental social scientists or (eco)feminist researchers—to adopt similar analyses that recognize how interconnected macrolevel processes and structures of power and privilege shape local experiences. Only through such analyses is it possible to develop a fuller understanding of the complexity that shapes human-environment relations and social responses to environmental problems.

As a feminist action research project, this dissertation addresses itself not only to academics but activists as well. Thus a second—and related—lesson pertains to the importance of linking theory with activism. This lesson is of particular importance for ecofeminist scholars, who in recent years have focused much of their work on

developing philosophical reflections on the women-environment connection rather than empirical analyses grounded in the actual, day-to-day experiences and activism of women around the world. I argue that in failing to ground their theoretical analyses in women's environmental activism, ecofeminist scholars risk developing theory that is distanced from and of little relevance to the millions of activists—women and men alike—who are mobilizing to protect their local environment and communities.

For this particular project, I have made a concerted effort to bridge the gap between theory and activism by highlighting the voices and experiences of indigenous women activists and their allies. An intersectional analysis grounded in the everyday experiences of indigenous women has revealed how their environmental activism is connected to issues of gender, race, and class. As the women of *Mujeres Unidas* explained, they link their local environmental activism to both the indigenous and women's movements. They characterize their activism as a way of caring for the indigenous community by protecting the land that the community depends upon for both material and cultural survival. In this way, they are ideologically connected to the Guatemalan indigenous movement, which makes the defense of "Mother Earth" a central part of its activist agenda (CNOG 2006; CUC 2008). Mobilizing around their identities as "mothers of the indigenous community," indigenous women also challenge the Guatemalan women's movement to recognize environmental issues as "women's issues." Finally, the women have also encouraged the transnational environmental organization AIR to incorporate an awareness of the links between race, class, and gender in its reforestation projects. Through developing connections with national and transnational environmental, indigenous, and women's organizations, and in drawing

from the ideas of the indigenous and women's movement to inform their environmental work, the women of Mujeres Unidas situate their environmental activism at the nexus of the larger indigenous, women's, and environmental movements. In this way, the indigenous women profiled in this dissertation demonstrate the ways in which various social movements and causes can inform local activism. They also demonstrate how different movements and causes may overlap and develop connections in terms of shared goals and values.

The narratives of the indigenous women activists presented in this dissertation push academics and activists alike to recognize the importance of maintaining a mutually beneficial dialogue between theory and activism. I argue that such a dialogue strengthens academic scholarship by ensuring that it is timely and attuned to the latest developments in social movement organizing; conversely, this dialogue can also benefit activists by providing them with a relevant theoretical platform that can justify, inform, and motivate their activism. Furthermore, this dialogue can also help academics and activists alike to consider the ways in which various social movements may be connected through shared goals, values, motivations, and strategies. In this way, both academics and activists are better equipped to identify and understand shared points of interest between social movements that may in turn facilitate the development of alliances and/or coalitions between movements and movement actors.

The story of indigenous women's partnership with the Alliance for International Reforestation also offers a lesson on both the necessity and difficulty of mobilizing across borders to achieve shared goals. As I noted in Chapter 6, when community activists lack the financial, social, or and/or political resources necessary to achieve

their goals, it may be necessary for them to mobilize beyond their local borders and seek outside assistance. In the case of Mujeres Unidas, it was necessary for Elena and the other women to form an alliance with AIR in order to realize their goals of “planting a better future” for their local community. This alliance has entailed the sometimes difficult negotiation of power and privilege across borders of gender, race, class, and nationality. However, both indigenous women and AIR staff identified important “unifiers” that have helped to bridge social and cultural divides—namely through dialogue, listening, and religion. It is also through these unifiers that AIR and indigenous women’s groups have been able to learn from each other. This dissertation represents both an outcome and a continuation of this ongoing learning process. In order to continue to move this process forward, I plan to share the results of this dissertation with both the indigenous women participants and AIR staff. In doing so, I hope to clarify issues of confusion or uncertainty that participants identified in the interviews—particularly in regards to the “gender question” in AIR’s environmental work. By initiating and participating in this dialogue between indigenous women and AIR staff, I hope to contribute to the ongoing conscientization of participants—myself included—not only in regards to gender, but the links between gender, race, and class in environmental work. This conscientization may in turn lead to the development of stronger alliances between AIR and local indigenous women’s groups.

Of course, this dissertation has implications not only for participants, but for any activists and organizations who regularly work “across borders.” As such cross-border work is often necessary to combat both local and global problems, it is also necessary to learn how to bridge social and cultural divides and build solidarity amongst diverse

groups. Drawing from the experiences of indigenous Guatemalan women and AIR staff, this dissertation offers some practical suggestions and strategies for how to accomplish this.

Finally, this dissertation also offers practical lessons in regards to policy development and implementation. In Chapter 7, I detailed how the stories and experiences of indigenous women and AIR may be used to challenge and inform Guatemalan environmental policy—specifically forestry policy. I emphasized the importance of maintaining dialogue between government officials and community members, and incorporating the needs and suggestions of community members in public policy and design. In this way, government officials can develop policy that not only addresses the problem at hand (in this case, deforestation), but can also do so in a way that incorporates community members' needs (instead of ignoring them—or worse, criminalizing the community members themselves). In Chapter 7, I also reiterated the importance of an intersectional analysis: just as it is important for academics and activists to recognize the links between processes of neoliberal development, environmental degradation, and race, class, and gender, so is it important for policymakers to do the same. In doing so, policymakers are better equipped to recognize the underlying connections and causal factors between social and environmental problems. In the case of Guatemala, I have argued that deforestation in highland regions is linked to the historical appropriation and exploitation of indigenous land and resources, and has been exacerbated in recent years as a result of neoliberal development policies. Thus, it is important for officials within both INAB and SEGEPLAN to recognize the links between deforestation, unequal land distribution, and

neoliberalism in order to develop policies and programs that address these interrelated issues. Furthermore, an awareness of the gendered, racialized, and classed dimensions of environmental issues also helps government officials to identify and develop strategies to incorporate potential allies in environmental programs. By recognizing the ways in which women and men within rural indigenous communities are impacted by environmental degradation, INAB and SEGEPLAN officials are better equipped to develop strategies to reach out to indigenous communities and incorporate community members in environmental program and policy design. This approach is quite different from the “top-down” approach presently pursued by the Guatemalan government in regards to forestry management, which treats indigenous and rural residents as problems—and sometimes criminals—rather than allies, and has resulted in a disconnect between state institutions and local indigenous communities.

While I note the various contributions this project offers to feminist scholarship, activist work, and policy design, I also believe it is important to acknowledge the project’s limitations—what it does *not* offer. In taking note of these weaknesses, I also suggest how they might be addressed in future research.

One limitation of this project is that much of its analyses and conclusions are based on a small sample size of indigenous Guatemalan women. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the primary sources of data for this project are the oral histories conducted in 2009 with the ten leaders of Mujeres Unidas for the oral histories. These oral histories are supplemented by archival research that included data from interviews conducted in 2006 with 31 indigenous women (eight of whom were interviewed again for the oral histories). Part of this small sample size is due to the fact that I was specifically looking

to interview the leaders of indigenous women's groups who were working with AIR. In 2006, AIR was working with five groups of indigenous women in the departments of Chimaltenango and Sololá, and so I—along with other AIR staff and volunteers—interviewed the leaders of these groups as part of AIR's efforts to collect information for its annual report. The ten oral histories conducted with the founders of Mujeres Unidas, on the other hand, constitute a “theoretical sample,” a type of sample used by qualitative researchers in order to elaborate, qualify, and develop theoretical propositions (Charmaz 2006; Emerson 2001). Thus, while some may argue that this small sample size means that the results are not generalizable to all indigenous women in Guatemala (or anywhere else, for that matter), I contend that generalizability was not the intent of this project. Rather, this project was about highlighting the narratives and experiences of indigenous women to explore how the connections between gender, race, class, and the environment shape everyday lives, realities, and activism. Drawing from the narratives of indigenous women to elucidate these connections, this project makes important contributions to the development of ecofeminist theory, and feminist theory more generally.

Related limitations have to do with the project's focus on women's activism in only one region (highland Guatemala) and work with only one environmental organization (AIR). Despite the fact that women form a majority of the membership of environmental organizations around the world (UNEP 2004; Warren 2000), I was only able to focus on the case of indigenous Guatemalan women's work with AIR due to both time limitations and financial constraints. These constraints prevented me from engaging in comparative studies on women's environmental activism with other organizations in

other contexts—studies which might qualify and/or enrich the conclusions of this dissertation.

Taken together, the limitations of this project point to possible areas of future research. In order to elucidate certain themes that emerged from this project—for instance, the salience of gender, race, and class to environmental activism—it would be helpful to conduct comparative studies across borders of gender, race, class, and nationality. Researchers could, for instance, develop studies that involve indigenous Guatemalan men as well as women, to compare gendered differences in how individuals experience and respond to environmental degradation.

Another theme that has emerged from this project has been the ways in which the ideas and goals of various social movements may converge to inform local-level activism. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the community environmental activism of *Mujeres Unidas* has both organizational ties and ideological links to national and transnational environmental, indigenous, and women's movements. This theme has important implications for how social movements might converge at local, national, and transnational levels. Thus, future research might address this topic, and examine how the goals, values, and strategies of various social movements overlap, in order to identify shared points of interest that might facilitate the development of alliances and/or coalitions between movements.

Finally, much more research is needed on women's involvement in environmental organizations in general. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, women of all races and classes play important roles in local, national, and transnational environmental movements. While their work has been acknowledged by a number of

important multilateral institutions, including the UN, the FAO, and WEDO, academics have been slow to study this area (Banarjee and Bell 2007; Eaton and Lorentzen 2003). It is important when conducting this research that academics remain attentive to the ways in which intersections of gender, race, and class inform women's environmental activism. It is also important that researchers situate the local within the global, as Chandra Mohanty (2003) reminds us, so that we can understand how women's everyday experiences of environmental degradation, and their local environmental activism may inform larger social movements. As Mohanty argues, it is important that

Activists and scholars...identify and reenvision forms of collective resistance that women, especially, in their different communities enact in their everyday lives. It is their particular exploitation at this time, their potential epistemic privilege, as well as their particular forms of solidarity that can be the basis for reimagining a collective liberatory politics for the start of this century (2003:236).

In this dissertation, I have highlighted the narratives of indigenous Guatemalan women in order to show how the gendered, racialized, and classed dimensions of environmental degradation shape their day-to-day lives. I have also drawn from the narratives of indigenous women and their allies to explore how the women are mobilizing across borders to build solidarity in a "collective resistance" against the environmental degradation that threatens their families and communities. As the women of *Mujeres Unidas* attest, environmental degradation is both a local and global problem; thus, working to protect *la Madre Tierra* for future generations is truly "a shared responsibility." Through a locally-focused, globally-situated study of indigenous women's environmental activism in Guatemala, this dissertation offers contributions to both feminist and ecofeminist scholarship, as well as practical advice for activist and policy work. In this respect, this dissertation represents one step on the road to understanding how the environmental activism of women around the world might

contribute to a collective envisioning of a socially and environmentally conscious
“liberatory politics” in the 21st century.

APPENDIX A
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH)

1. First of all, can you tell me if you are from here (Itzapa)? Have you always lived here, or did you come here from another place? (*if another place, ask her: from where? Why did you decide to come to Itzapa?*)
2. Can you tell me a little about your childhood? Can you recount a typical day for me from that time (for example, at what time did you wake up, what type of responsibilities did you have in your house or in the field, your experience in school, etc.)?
3. Returning to the here and how, could you describe how a normal day is for you (for example, at what time do you get up, what responsibilities do you have in the house and in the field? Do you have children? Do they help you (*how?*)? Do you have a husband? Does he help you (*how?*)? Do you work outside the house (for a salary)? What type of work do you do? When did you begin this work and why? DO you work a lot in the field? What type of work do you do in the field? How many days each week do you work in the field? How many hours each day? When did you start this work and why?
4. Now, I would like to ask you about your community and the environment. Can you tell me how the environment in and around Itzapa has changed since your childhood? When did you realize that there were environmental problems in your community? What were these problems? Which problems worried you the most? In what ways did these problems affect you? Your work? Your responsibilities? In what ways were other people in your family and community affected by these problems?
5. When did you decide to join the group Mujeres Unidas por Amor a la Vida? What motivated you to join this group? Was there a specific event that motivated you to join this group? What type of work does the group do? In your words, can you describe the goals of Mujeres Unidas, and how the group achieves these goals?
6. Do you believe that it is important for indigenous women to work together in Guatemala? Why? Do you feel that environmental problems affect indigenous communities in Guatemala? How? Do you feel that indigenous women suffer from discrimination, and in what ways? You know that the majority of the groups that work with AIR are made up of indigenous women. Why do you think this is the case?
7. Why did your group (Mujeres Unidas) decide to work with AIR? Can you describe to me the beginning of the alliance between your group, Mujeres Unidas, and AIR (for example, who were the group members that decided to contact AIR? How did you all recruit more women in your community to help you? How did the tecnicos help you to establish a tree nursery?)? Has your group obtained any benefits from working with AIR? What are the benefits?

8. You know that the AIR team is very diverse: there are women, men, Kaqchikeles, ladinas and ladinos, and North Americans. Do you think there is any difficulty in working with people from other places or other cultures? At any point, have you felt any form of discrimination in your work with AIR? If so, then what happened and how was the situation resolved?
9. Do you have any suggestions or ideas on how AIR can improve its work with community groups, and in particular with indigenous women's groups?
10. I understand that your group, Mujeres Unidas, believes in the importance of women's rights. Do you consider yourself a feminist? What do you think about feminism in general?

I would like to thank you for your time and generosity, and for your work with AIR. Thank you, too, for your patience with my Spanish!

APPENDIX B
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE (SPANISH)

1. Primero que nada, puede decirme si usted es de aquí (Itzapa)? Ha vivido siempre aquí o vino a vivir aquí? (*si otro lugar, preguntala: de donde? Por que decidió venir a Itzapa?*)
2. Puede decirme un poco sobre su niñez? Puede contarme como era un día normal de esa época (por ejemplo, a que hora se levantaba, que tipo de responsabilidades tenia en su casa o en el campo, su experiencia en la escuela, etc.)?
3. Volviendo al aquí y ahora, podria contarme como es un día normal para usted (por ejemplo, a que hora se levanta, que responsabilidades tiene en su casa y en el campo)? Tiene usted niños o niñas? le ayudan (*como?*)? Tiene esposo? El le ayuda (*como?*)? Trabaja usted fuera de su casa (para un salario)? Que tipo de trabajo hace? Cuando empezó este trabajo y porque? Trabaja usted mucho en el campo? Que tipo de trabajo hace en el campo? Cuantos días cada semana trabaja en el campo? Cuantas horas cada día? Cuando empezó este trabajo y porque?
4. Ahora, me gustaría preguntarle sobre su comunidad y el medio ambiente. Puede decirme cómo el medio ambiente en y alrededor Itzapa ha cambiado desde su niñez? Cuando realizó usted que habían problemas de medio ambiente en su comunidad? Cuales eran estos problemas? Qué problemas le preocupaban más? De que forma éstos problemas le han afectado a usted? Su trabajo? Sus responsabilidades? De que manera otras personas en su familia y en su comunidad fueron afectadas por estos problemas?
5. Cuando decidió usted formar parte del grupo Mujeres Unidas por Amor a la Vida? Que le motivó formar parte de este grupo? Pasó algún evento específico que le motivó a formar parte del grupo? Que tipo de trabajo hace el grupo? En sus palabras, me podría describir las metas de Mujeres Unidas, y de que forma el grupo logra estas metas?
6. Cree usted que es importante que mujeres indígenas trabajen juntas en Guatemala? Por qué? Siente usted que los problemas ambientales afectan a las comunidades indígenas, y cómo? Siente usted que las mujeres indígenas sufren de discriminación, y en qué forma? Usted sabe que la mayoría de grupos que trabajan con AIRES son formados por mujeres indígenas. Por que cree que esto es así?
7. Por qué su grupo decidió trabajar con AIRES? Puede describir el comienzo de la alianza entre su grupo, Mujeres Unidas, y AIRES (por ejemplo, quienes eran los miembros de su grupo que decidieron contactar AIRES? Como ustedes reclutaron a mujeres en su comunidad para ayudarles? Como los tecnicos les ayudaron para establecer un vivero?)? Su grupo ha obtenido algunos beneficios de trabajar con AIRES? Cuales son los beneficios?

8. Sabe usted que el equipo AIRES es muy diverso: hay mujeres, hombres, Kaqchikeles, ladinas y ladinos, y norteamericanas. Piensa usted que hay alguna dificultad en trabajar con personas de otros lugares o de otras culturas? En alguna ocasión ha sentido usted alguna forma de discriminación en su trabajo con AIRES? Si ha sucedido, que pasó y como resolvió la situación?
9. Nos gustaría, y nos serviría mucho para mejorar nuestro trabajo, que nos diera algunas sugerencias o ideas de como AIRES puede mejorar nuestro trabajo con los grupos, principalmente con grupos de mujeres indígenas?
10. Yo creo que su grupo, Mujeres Unidas, cree en la importancia de los derechos de la mujer. Se considera usted defensora de la equidad de género, y por que? Que piensa usted sobre el tema de feminismo?

Me gustaría agradecerle por su tiempo y generosidad, y por su trabajo con AIRES. Muchas gracias tambien por su paciencia con mi español!

APPENDIX C
AIR STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH)

1. First of all, when did you begin working with AIR?
2. How did you get involved with the organization?
3. Why did you decide to work with AIR?
4. What are your responsibilities with AIR?
5. In your words, could you describe the goals of AIR, and how the organization works to realize these goals?
6. The majority of the people who work in AIR's reforestation projects are indigenous women. In your opinion, why do you think this is? Do you believe that AIR has a gender consciousness? If so, when did this consciousness develop and why?
7. The AIR team is a team of much diversity. We are formed of men, women, ladinos, ladinas, Kaqchikeles, North Americans, etc. Do you think there is any difficulty in working with people of other cultures, races, or of the other gender? Why or why not?
8. Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination in your work with AIR? In what ways? *(If yes, ask: How did you resolve the problem?)*
9. In your opinion, how might AIR improve its work?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your time and generosity, and for your work with AIR!

APPENDIX D
AIR STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE (SPANISH)

1. Primero que nada, cuando empezó a trabajar con AIRES?
2. Como se involucró con la organizacion?
3. Por que razones decidió trabajar para AIRES?
4. Cuales son sus responsabilidades con AIRES?
5. En sus palabras me podría describir las metas de AIRES y de que forma la organizacion realiza estas metas?
6. La mayoría de las personas que trabajan en los grupos de reforestacion con AIRES son mujeres indígenas. En su opinion, por que piensa que esto es así? Cree que AIRES tiene un conocimiento de género? Sí si, cuando desarrolló este conocimiento y por que?
7. El equipo de AIRES es un equipo de mucha diversidad. Estamos formado por hombres, mujeres, ladinos, ladinas, Kaqchikeles, norteamericanas, etc. Piensa que hay alguna dificultad en trabajar con personas de otras culturas o razas, o de otra género? Por que o por que no?
8. Ha usted experimentado algún tipo de discriminacion en su trabajo con AIRES? De que forma? *(Si si, preguntale: Como resuelve el problema?)*
9. En su opinion, de que manera puede AIRES mejorar su trabajo?
10. Algo más que quiere añadir?

Muchas gracias por su tiempo y generosidad, y por su trabajo con AIRES!

APPENDIX E
GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH)

1. In your opinion, and with your experience, what are the major environmental problems in the Guatemalan highlands?
2. In what ways has the advance of economic development (for example, through CAFTA) affected the environment in Guatemala (specifically in highland areas)?
3. In what ways do environmental problems impact rural populations in Guatemala? How might these problems impact the work and way of life of small-scale farmers in Guatemala?
4. Currently, what are the major obstacles to sustainable development in Guatemala?
5. In what ways is the Guatemalan government working to solve environmental problems, particularly problems of deforestation? Do you think these programs/policies are sufficient? Which programs have had the most success and why?
6. Many people (including academics, public officials, etc.) believe that it is important to consider the needs and realities of rural indigenous populations in the design of conservation and reforestation projects. Do you think this is done in Guatemala? If so, how does the government manage multiculturalism in these areas?
7. There are also many academics who believe that it is equally important to consider the needs and realities of indigenous and rural women in the design of conservation projects. How does the government manage the theme of gender in the design of conservation and reforestation programs?
8. What are the priorities that need to be addressed in order to resolve environmental problems in Guatemala?
9. Would you like to add anything more about what we have discussed?

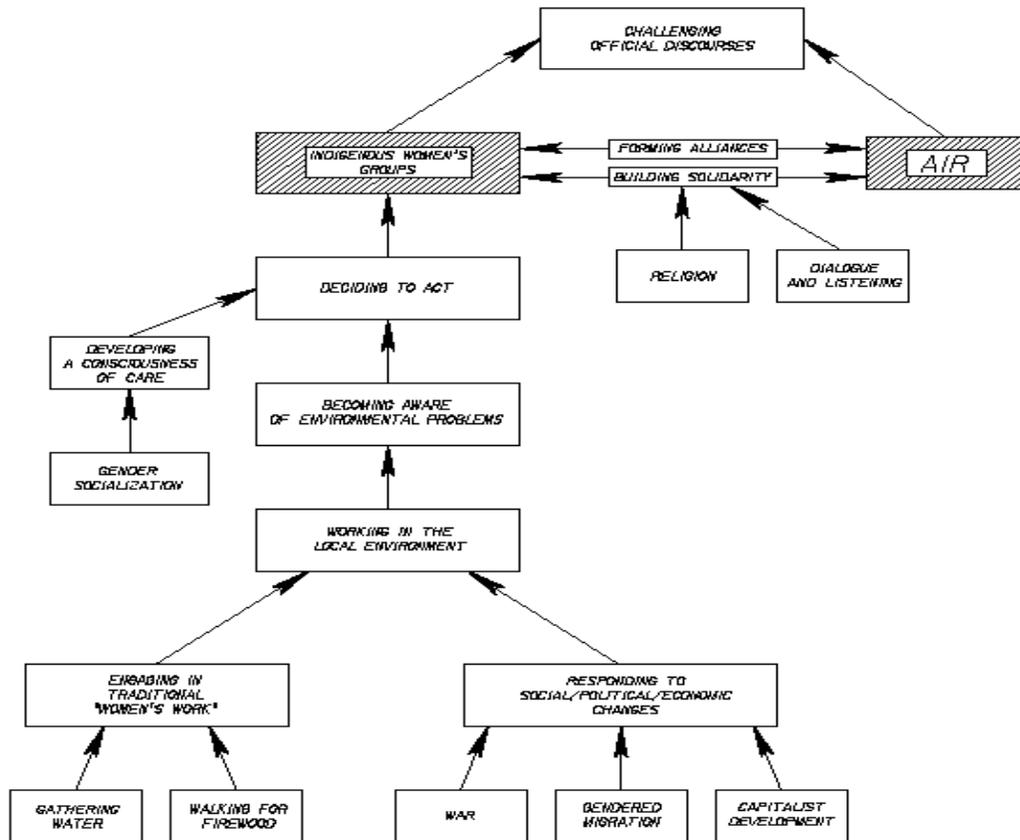
Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX F
GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE (SPANISH)

1. En su opinión, y con su experiencia, cuales son los problemas ambientales mas importantes existentes en el altiplano occidental de Guatemala?
2. De que manera el avance del desarrollo económico (a traves del TLC, por ejemplo) ha afectado al medio ambiente en Guatemala (especificament el altiplano)?
3. De que manera los problemas ambientales afectan la población rural en Guatemala? De que forma considera usted se ha afectado el trabajo y la forma de vida de los agricultores y agricultoras?
4. Actualmente, cuales son los mayores retos para lograr el desarrollo sostenible en Guatemala?
5. De que forma el Gobierno de Guatemala trabaja para lograr solucionar los problemas ambientales, principalmente los forestales? Cuales son los programas que han logrado mayor éxito y por qué? (*preguntala/o sobre PINFOR y PINPEP*)
6. Mucha gente (como los academicas/os, los oficiales públicos) cree que es importante considerar las necesidades y realidad de las poblaciones rurales indígenas al diseñar los proyectos y programas de reforestación y de conservación. Piensa usted que esto es hecho en Guatemala? Como manejan la multiculturalidad en estos asuntos?
7. Tambien muchas academicas/os creen que es igual de importante considerar las necesidades y realidad de mujeres indígenas al diseñar los proyectos de conservación. Como maneja el gobierno el tema de género en el diseño de programas de conservacion y reforestacion?
8. Que factores considera usted prioritarios para resolver los problemas ambientales en Guatemala?
9. Quisiera añadir algo mas sobre lo discutido?

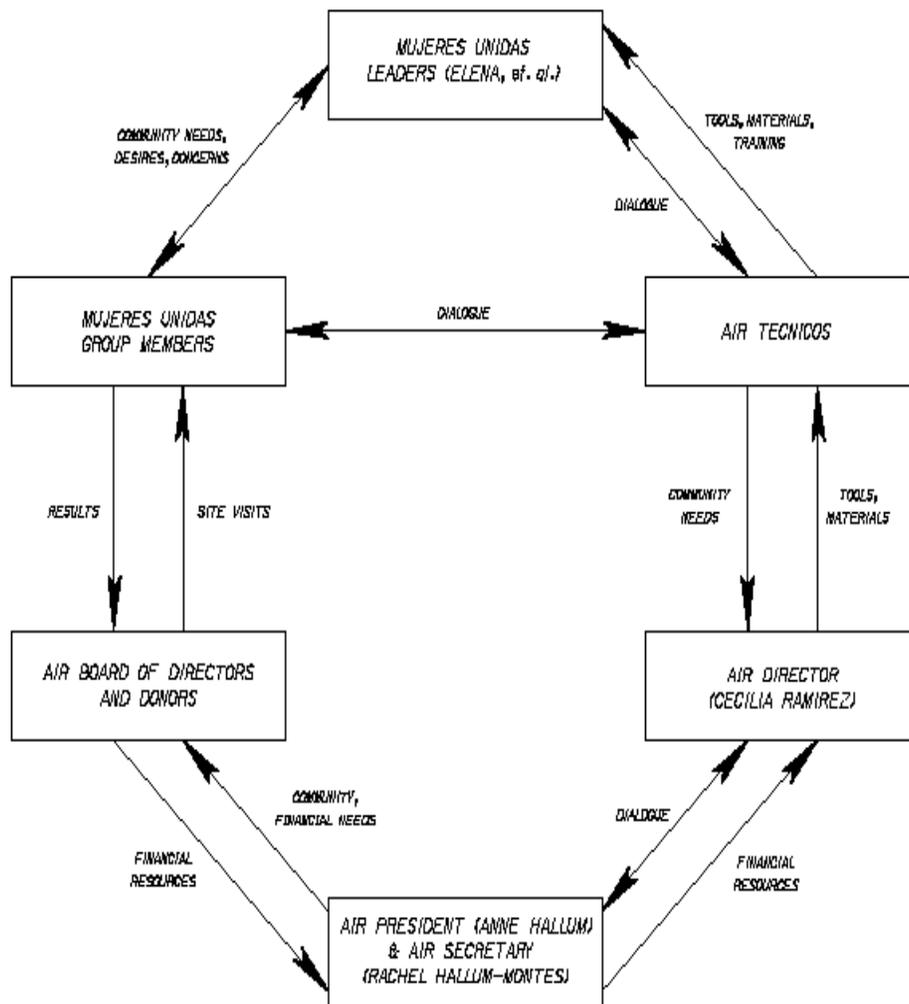
Gracias por su tiempo!

APPENDIX G
SIMPLIFIED NETWORK VIEW SHOWING LINKS BETWEEN CODE FAMILIES AND
THEORETICAL CODES



Smaller boxes (located at the base of the diagram) represent codes and code families. They are grouped under the larger boxes which represent theoretical codes. The shaded boxes represent the groups of participants to whom the codes pertain. Please note that this is a simplified diagram designed only to give the reader a visual understanding of how the codes are linked, and how codes and code families informed theoretical codes.

APPENDIX H
 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY GROUPS, AIR, AND AIR'S DONORS



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