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TOMO I : 1973-1978

Compilado por A. E. Fernández Jilberto

The first volume of the projected 3-volume series of documents from the political opposition to the authoritarian state in Chile covers the period 1973-1978. The 14 documents included present a representative picture of the political thought of the parties in opposition. They have previously only been available in mimeo form as internal reports; only small fragments of a few have been published for a wider public.

In the introduction an attempt is made to situate these declarations and analyses against the constantly shifting background of the alliances and rifts of the parties involved. In particular, the problem of periodisation is assigned a central place.

The origin and rise of authoritarianism in Latin America have been the subject of various studies. This collection provides some of the materials for the study of authoritarianism in decline.

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## Household Labour and Self-Help Housing in Querétaro, Mexico

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## INTRODUCTION

Over a third of the population of Querétaro live in irregular settlements around the edge of the city. These areas are characterised by precarious housing and poor servicing, both of which cause problems in daily domestic life. Most irregular settlements grow up on inhospitable terrain because it is the land that nobody wants, either for urban development or for farming. Moreover, rough topography and poor environmental conditions add pressure to existing difficulties. These problems do not only cause a considerable amount of work for people, but also create health hazards when domestic labour is not attended to thoroughly.

There is a strict division of labour between the sexes in these and other low-income neighbourhoods, which means that housework is almost exclusively the domain of women. Furthermore, in many cases it is one woman alone who bears the responsibility for all household chores within a particular family. It is suggested in the present research that sharing these domestic tasks amongst family members is beneficial not only to the principal household worker, but also to the rest of the family, in the sense that domestic labour is carried out more efficiently. It is found that the incidence and extent of work-sharing displays a strong correlation with family structure.

The aim of this paper is threefold. Firstly, it attempts to explain why domestic labour is women's work in Querétaro's low-income settlements; secondly, it attempts to clarify the problems arising from the lack of basic services and poor housing standards, and to identify the strategies which women adopt to overcome those problems; and finally, it aims to examine the role of family structure in the organisation of housework, and to assess the extent to which sharing domestic chores in various types of family helps to alleviate the workloads of individuals and to ensure higher standards of hygiene. It is suggested that the organisation of the domestic unit has a mediating effect on structural problems of poverty in low-income areas.<sup>1</sup>

## THE CITY OF QUERETARO

Before we discuss the main themes of this research in more detail, we must take a brief look at the context of the study. Querétaro is located about 200 kms north of Mexico City on the edge of the *Bajío* which is the most fertile farming region in the central highlands of Mexico. It is an industrial satellite of the overcrowded capital with

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on fieldwork in Mexico carried out between June 1982 and June 1983. It was financed by the Social Science Research Council of Great Britain, under the supervision of Dr. A.G. Gilbert and Dr. P.M. Ward, in connection with their research project financed by the Overseas Development Administration on 'Public Intervention, Housing and Land Use in Latin American Cities'.

a population that has grown five times in 20 years to a total of around 350,000 inhabitants in 1982. Although only the 29th largest city in the Republic in 1980,<sup>2</sup> it was the fifth most important in terms of capital invested in industry.<sup>3</sup> One quarter of the city's population are migrants, and in-migration was undoubtedly a response to employment opportunities offered by the industrial structure. The rapid growth in population outstripped the housing supply, and in the absence of official alternatives, the poor were forced to occupy land at the edge of the city. It is estimated that 37.5 per cent of the urban population of Querétaro live in peripheral low-income neighbourhoods.<sup>4</sup> These settlements are irregular in the sense that from the outset, there was no legal title to land, and that presently, they offend planning regulations by not complying with minimum standards of housing and servicing.

The fieldwork in the settlements, which began in September 1982, was coincident with rapid economic decline in Mexico. Overborrowing and overspending by the government, in addition to mismanagement of funds and corruption, plunged the Republic into a financial collapse of unprecedented proportions. The subsequent nationalisation of the private banks, devaluation of the Mexican peso and stringent exchange controls, brought industrial production to a virtual standstill. Querétaro's economy was seriously affected. By December 1982, one daily newspaper argued that industry was working at only 20 per cent of its installed capacity.<sup>5</sup> One quarter of the workforce had lost their jobs, and many more were struggling with a drop in real wage levels, a reduced working week or long enforced holidays on low pay. There were obvious multiplier effects on other sectors of the economy, and the city's rate of unemployment and under-employment rose from 25 to around 50 per cent. Wage increases were far outstripped by price rises as subsidies and price controls on 5,000 goods were relaxed to stimulate business. Competition for low-paid part-time jobs in the informal sector was intensified.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, massive cuts in government spending accompanied the recession, under the auspices of the 'Austerity Programme' of the new president, Miguel de la Madrid. These conditions have exacerbated the problems faced by the families living in irregular settlements, whose chances for aid and services seem more remote than ever.

## THE STUDY SETTLEMENTS

Three settlements were selected for the study on the basis of age, origin and service levels. In total, 250 questionnaires were carried out in those settlements and a further 47 semi-structured interviews were conducted to follow up points that could not be handled satisfactorily in the initial survey.<sup>7</sup> The interviews were held with randomly

2 Querétaro was 29th out of 60 Mexican cities in terms of population in 1980. Source : Nacional Financiera (1981), *La Economía Mexicana en Cifras*, México DF, pp.12-13, Cuadro 1.6.

3 Data from the National Chamber of Manufacturing Industry, Querétaro, Investment Record.

4 Secretaría de Asentamientos Humanos y Obras Públicas (1980), *Plan Director de Desarrollo Urbano de la Ciudad de Querétaro*. Qro., p.109.

5 *El Diario de Querétaro*, 6 Dec. 1982, pp.1a and 6a, 'La industria local opera al 20 por ciento de su capacidad'.

6 *Mexico City The News*, vol.33, no.181, Jan. 1983, 'The Rude '83 Awakening'.

7 The questionnaire survey dealt with general aspects of life in low-income neighbourhoods. It fell into 8 sections : migration, family structure, paid and unpaid work, family budgets, lot characteristics, house improvement, community politics and problems of *barrio* life. The semi-structured interviews followed up some of these areas in more detail, and in addition explored family case histories and attitudes towards aspects of housing, the family, male-female relations and decision-making, etc.

selected owners, as the study was also concerned with house-building and improvement and it was felt that many of the relevant questions would not, therefore, apply to renters. In contrast to many previous studies of low-income settlements, the interview sample was made up of household females.<sup>8</sup> It was anticipated that women would know more about the living conditions in the settlements than men as they were more involved in housework and family life. As Fagen and Tuohy (1972:72) point out, women suffer more from the domestic side of life, while men '.... experience the difficulties and humiliation of the labour market'. It should be mentioned that while there was no well developed rental submarket in the settlements (only 4, 7 and 2 per cent respectively of the total population of the three survey settlements were renters), female heads of household were disproportionately represented in this category. Although they made up a relatively small proportion of the renting population, there was a distinct tendency for female heads of households to rent rather than own, compared with the males. For example, 20 per cent (N = 17) of the total population of female-headed families were in rented accommodation in one settlement, whereas this figure was only 6 per cent (N = 22) in the male-headed households. This point should be borne in mind when we consider women's work later in the text. It is likely that female renters work even longer days than female owners. They tend to be poorer and less likely to have the opportunity of incorporating relatives into their households.

## Bolaños

Bolaños is one of the oldest shanty towns in Querétaro. It was one of the first four settlements to develop on *ejido* land on the city's periphery in the early 1970s.<sup>9</sup> This settlement has a population of around 3,000 people, has won legal land tenure, but is very badly off in terms of services. It is on a hillside to the north east of the city (see Fig. 1). The land surface is rough, rocky and scattered with broken glass, tin cans and decomposing rubbish. 'Streets' are dirt tracks and in some cases the slope gradient is so steep that women have to make detours of several metres to negotiate a journey up and down the hill, often accompanied by children or carrying washing or heavy shopping.

Eight years after its first demand for electricity, it received street lighting and the offer of private installation to the houses. It has a kindergarten and primary school, a bus service and a mobile market which visits the community once a week.<sup>10</sup> The inhabitants lack a piped water supply, drainage and sewerage networks and many other amenities. Water tankers fill the oil drums provided by the residents, but it is unsafe to drink. As the roads are often temporarily or permanently impassable, many women live some distance from their containers and have to carry water in buckets and *aguantadores* (wooden yokes with a bucket attached to each end). Housing is either completely or partly self-built and is the responsibility of individual families. Bolaños has a mixture of shacks and roughly built redbrick houses with concrete floors and roofs.

8 These interviews covered six broad areas : domestic labour, community politics and role-play, task allocation and decision-making, attitudes towards relations between the sexes, attitudes towards the structures of the family and attitudes towards self-help housing. There was also a special section for female heads on the difficulties of being a single parent in Mexico.

9 An *ejido* is an area of land handed over by the state to a specific agricultural community. This land may not be sold or in any other way alienated. Despite that, however, many ejidal communities sell off lots illegally. Legal title does not pass into the hands of the settlers until a presidential decree makes possible expropriation and regularisation in favour of the settlers.

10 Mobile markets (*mercados sobre ruedas*) are organised by the municipal government. The market that visited Bolaños once a week went to one or two other peripheral communities in the city.

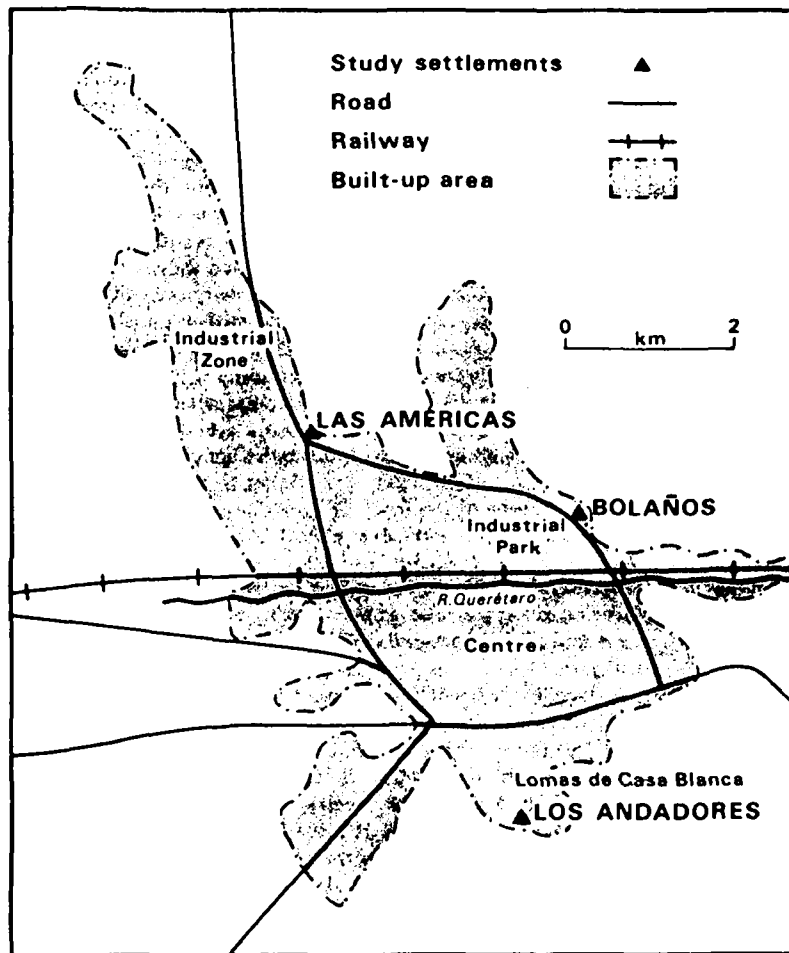


Fig.1. QUERETARO: LOCATION OF THE STUDY SETTLEMENTS.

#### Los Andadores

The second settlement studied, Los Andadores, was formed later, but is structurally more consolidated than Bolaños. It dates from 1976 and was the result of a fraudulent sale by various politicians and government officials. Located in the south of the city, it forms part of the largest *colonia popular* in Querétaro – Lomas de Casa Blanca. It developed on a reserved area of land within the settlement destined for services and held by a state agency – the Commission for the Regularisation of Land Tenure (CORETT). Its sub-division and sale was apparently legal as far as the settlers were concerned, but officials were abusing their power for private gain. Roughly 3,500 people live in the settlement and enjoy the services of rubbish collection (albeit irregular), levelled streets, pavements, kerbs, and schools, a market and a health centre which belong to Lomas. It has the networks for sewerage and water, but these still do not function and residents continue to depend on latrines and water delivered by tanker lorries. Los Andadores was chosen as an example of a fairly well laid out settlement and this is likely to be the trend in the future now that strict supervision of the growth and development of human settlements is being enforced. It also provides a good contrast to the unserved neighbourhoods. Because there is little privacy in this densely populated settlement, lots are often surrounded by high brick walls and metal gates. Sometimes these walls harbour shacks behind them, but the great majority of houses are built of red brick.

#### Las Américas

The third settlement, Las Américas, is in the north east of the city at the edge of the Industrial Zone. Like Bolaños, it grew out of the illegal sale of *ejidal* lands but still does not have legal tenure. Most people arrived in the settlement in 1980, and it is one of the most recent neighbourhoods in the city. The population is small at 1,800 people, and only 74 per cent of lots are currently occupied.

While an electricity line was installed in the *colonia* in 1982, around 50 per cent of the families do not have a supply to their houses.<sup>11</sup> Street lights and water pipes are, coincidentally, installed outside the houses of key committee members in the lower part of the settlement. Las Américas has an inadequate bus service and little else in the way of services. The landscape is steep, rocky and covered with cactus – very similar to Bolaños – and in the absence of rubbish collection, the community is scattered with debris.

#### THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

Before we discuss the implications of poor housing and servicing for women's labour, we must consider briefly the reasons why domestic labour falls on the shoulders of females in Mexican irregular settlements. In low-income neighbourhoods throughout Latin America, there is a marked division of labour between the sexes (Arizpe, 1978; Gutierrez, 1976; Lomnitz, 1975, 1977; MacDonald, 1979; Peattie, 1968; Safa, 1980). Indeed, 68 per cent of household women in the three settlements were full-time housewives, and if we include those who were in paid employment, a total of 88 per cent were in charge of housework and childcare. There tends to be a strict division between

<sup>11</sup> The settlement committee had asked for a large amount of money to cover water standpipes and the school as well as electricity, and therefore many *colonos* have not yet collaborated.

the 'public' world of men and the 'private' world of women (Safa, 1980), and the philosophy of *cada uno en su lugar* (each one in his place) dictates that the men are for the 'streets' and the women are for the home in Mexico (de Barbieri, 1982).

This division of labour cannot be adequately explained by the line of argument that women are better suited to motherhood, or that as men's economic production is not broken by periods of childbirth and childcare, they are better equipped to adopt the role of breadwinner. It is both cultural and economic. Under capitalism, as a precondition of the free movement and recruitment of wage labour, production needs to be removed from the household (Briskin, 1980). A separation of home and work naturally results, although certain functions are retained in the household, which capitalism cannot or will not provide (Seccombe, 1980). The responsibilities of domestic 'production' are basically threefold: the first concerns the biological reproduction of the labour force; the second concerns the maintenance of the labour force through housework; and the third involves the provision of 'emotional' services such as 'tension-managing' in order to make people feel calm after a hard day's work, to provide them with refuge and support (Briskin, 1980: 137).

The reason that domestic labour is performed by women is probably a combination of three factors. Firstly, the aforementioned argument has some relevance in that women bear the children, and therefore should, at least for a period of time, be in the home. As there is little legislative economic provision for maternity leave in dependent capitalist economies, it makes economic sense that the man devotes himself to earning the principal wage. Continuity of his work means that earning is not disrupted by pregnancy and childbirth. Furthermore, given that men usually stand a better chance in the Mexican job market, it follows that women, rather than men, should stay in the home (Selby *et al.*, 1981). In addition, there is much evidence to show that wages earned outside the home by females are in many cases considerably less than those earned by men (Arizpe, 1982; Lomnitz, 1977; Smith, 1981). In nuclear families, therefore, with only two adult members to attend to all needs, housework becomes 'women's work' and wage labour becomes 'men's work'.

Secondly, there are strong cultural reasons for a sexual division of labour tied up with 'machismo'. This is a Latin term which is an expression of the patriarchal system, and '... consists in establishing a certain superiority of men over women' (LACWE, 1980: 78). Men are supposed to be 'manly', aggressive, independent, strong and dominant — a set of attitudes which leads to most functions being sexually determined. Machismo has to be proved continually in the sexual and reproductive spheres as the hallmark of masculinity (Goode, 1964). The machismo of the shanty town man, with the power and authority which that implies, is widespread in Latin America (Gissi, 1980; Lloyd, 1979; Perlman, 1976; Safa, 1980), and is common when men have little opportunity of rising in the occupational sphere (Gissi, 1980; Goode, 1964).

Thirdly, and related to the last point, Marxian writers claim that capitalism and patriarchy are intimately linked, that there is a '... mutually reinforcing dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structure' (Eisenstein, 1979: 5). The authoritarian nuclear family becomes a necessary structural component of capitalist society, in the sense that it is only because the working class man has the power and authority to dictate the nature of labour and labour conditions of a group of people, (his family), that he is prepared to sell his labour power and subordinate himself to the capitalist (Gardiner, 1979). In the conjugal or nuclear family, the husband represents the capitalist, and his wife the proletariat (Engels, 1972). The 'verticality' in society is reproduced in miniature in the family, and appears to permit the smooth running of relationships of power and domination (Engels, 1972; Gissi, 1980; Jacqueline, 1980).

There are theoretical problems with each of these explanations. For example,

machismo also exists at higher social levels in Latin America, and indeed in most other countries of the world, where patriarchy has been handed down over several generations despite changes in the economic order. This point will not be developed here, but it seems likely that a combination of the cultural and economic phenomena discussed above condition the domestic role of women. However, it is important to bear in mind that the sexual division of labour imposes a greater workload on women in the specific context of irregular settlement. Often, women in Querétaro's *colonias populares* work a day that is 40 per cent longer than that of their menfolk, but do not receive help to reduce the workload. This asymmetry of time budgets is less efficient than if the work was divided up equally. Although biologically men are stronger and women bear children, there is little other justification for a division of labour between the sexes (Goode, 1964). Under capitalism, a man discharges the obligation to his wife and children by bringing home his wage packet. He comes to treat the house as a leisure unit (Seccombe, 1980).<sup>12</sup> So the 'ideological' reasons stemming from capitalism and patriarchy are key factors in dividing up the tasks into 'men's work' and 'women's work', causing little overlap between the 'private' and 'public' spheres and little mutual support and understanding.

The sexual division of labour is most marked in nuclear families and responds to structural conditions in the cultural and economic order of society. At the household level, as we shall observe below, alternative family patterns may have a significant effect by reducing the burden for women implied in domestic labour. They may also go some way towards mitigating other aspects of machismo such as wife-beating and male-imposed penury: where men retain a large proportion of their earnings while their families live at subsistence level.

#### DOMESTIC LABOUR IN IRREGULAR SETTLEMENT

Domestic labour is a vital part of survival in any society, but under capitalism '... procreation necessarily takes the form of the creation and recreation of a wage labour force' (Briskin, 1980: 143). Therefore, it has been retained in capitalist economies, although unlike other aspects of the economy, it is in a non-specialised and non-commodity form. As Safa (1980) suggests, it has been retained at its pre-market stage of development. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that capitalism, paradoxically perhaps, requires a certain amount of non-commodity functions, such as motherhood or emotion, which cannot be provided by capital (Briskin, 1980; Rowbotham, 1973). The second is that domestic labour carried out on a private basis by individual households actually cheapens the cost of the reproduction of the labour force (Blumenfeld and Mann, 1979; Cockcroft, 1983; Seccombe, 1980). This argument is analogous to that of self-help housing cheapening the cost of the reproduction of the labour force (Burgess, 1978, 1982; Connolly, 1982a; Harms, 1982; Ward, 1982), or that of the 'informal' sector being beneficial to capital through reducing open unemployment and providing cheap services (Connolly, 1981, 1982b; Moser, 1978). It also individualises discontent and impedes collective action (Harms, 1982; Safa, 1980). There is little doubt that women provide cheap services under capitalism; there is no control over their work conditions and they provide a socially necessary service in privatised circum-

<sup>12</sup> While the self-building of houses in Mexican shanty towns does tend to prolong the working day of both men and women, when construction work is not in progress, men are said by their wives 'to go to their work, come back, eat what is prepared for them, watch television and go to bed'.

stances. Inadequate housing heightens health risks for low-income households, which adds pressure to low budgets. Poor servicing at the community level puts the responsibility for providing basic services on the individual family. This takes up time, energy and increases workloads for individual women.

Various writers have mentioned how, at specific junctures such as wars or recessions, women have to work harder in the home to combat the loss of real income or to substitute for absent commodities (Briskin, 1980; Gardiner, 1979). This 'specific' intensification implied in women's labour may be found stretching over periods of years in irregular settlements in Mexico, where goods and services normally provided by the public sector fall on the shoulders of private individuals (Ward, 1982). Moreover, under conditions of economic deterioration and rising unemployment, declining minimum or sub-minimum wages have to be stretched to cover the family's basic subsistence. In these circumstances, women may be forced to take badly paid domestic out-work in order to make ends meet — that is, if their husbands allow.

The following section attempts to identify some of the factors that increase the workload of women and affect its nature in *colonias populares*, and to discuss the strategies adopted by the female population to overcome serious deficiencies in housing and servicing.

#### *The effect of housing on women's work*

There are a great variety of housing standards in the irregular settlements of Querétaro. Around 27 per cent of families in these settlements live in shacks — houses with flimsy walls and roofs made of provisional materials, with dirt floors. A further 27 per cent live in a house that is a mixture of brick and board, and only one half have homes comprising brick walls, concrete roofs and floors, often without finishes such as varnish, glass in the window-frames, or paint or plaster on the walls. Most families began their residential occupation in a shack. Consolidation is a long and expensive process. Excluding roof and foundations, other things being equal, it takes an average of three years to build a brick wall and concrete floor dwelling (Chant, 1984).

Housework in a shack is not satisfying, and the common response from the female shack dwellers was to tell me that 'the housework is never finished'. While it has often been pointed out that 'a woman's work is never done' (Rowbotham, 1973 : Ch.5), in the *colonias populares* of Querétaro, those women who lived in serviceless conditions and poor quality housing stressed how housework assumed never ending proportions, and that in a shack, the feeling of interminable work is aggravated by the fact that the results are barely perceptible. As the quality of the house improved, so too did satisfaction with housework, and less time was taken. This is a qualitative judgement, derived from the in-depth interview work. Of the thirty respondents who now lived in consolidated houses, twenty five said that work had been harder in a shack. Seven women who lived in houses that comprised one brick room and one or more unconsolidated rooms, all confirmed that there was more housework to be done in the latter. And of the ten interviewees who lived in shacks, eight imagined that the time spent on housework would be reduced once their home was better furnished.

The lack of a concrete floor poses many difficulties. A clean floor is fundamental to several other aspects of housework and hygiene. Different types of parasite, especially hookworms and tapeworms, may be contracted by children playing in the house — an infection which leads to malnutrition, emaciation and loss of energy. A dirt floor may also be a breeding ground for other dangerous insects (MacDonald, 1979). An earth floor presents different problems according to changes in the weather. In the dry season (October-April), women have to sprinkle water on the floor to stop the dust from rising, while in the rainy season (May-September), when rains are sporadic and torrential, the

house may be converted into a mudbath. Josefina, one of the interviewees, had to rewash all the crockery and family's clothes after a thunderstorm had left the interior of the house 10cm deep in mud. The difficulties are compounded when the dirt floor is accompanied (as it usually is) by flimsy walls and roofs. Building materials usually comprise corrugated cardboard which tears easily and may be destroyed in wet weather.

Lack of space is another problem in shanty housing. Generally people live in one-roomed shacks while they save their money to consolidate a bigger and better house. The mixture of domestic functions, where a whole family sleeps, eats, washes and lives in one room is both unhygienic and inefficient. Women's days are made up of the constant rearrangement of furniture and domestic items, the unfolding or packing away of bedding at morning and night, the reorganisation of space for cooking and eating at mealtimes and the task of supervising the indoor play of young children.

In most cases, women felt, or had felt when they lived in shacks, that they got no satisfaction out of their work. They complained that cleaning did not last, that it was time-consuming, and that the children were constantly ill. Indeed, it seems that disease is a permanent condition of slum housing (Abrams and Dean, 1959). Flimsy houses may also produce two kinds of insecurity for women. The first is *physical* in the sense that precarious housing is very vulnerable, both to the weather, particularly thunderstorms and high winds, as well as to criminals. A woman alone in a shack was an easy target for rape or robbery. The second is an *emotional* insecurity resulting from the fact that many of the husbands living in hovels prefer to spend their time out of the house with friends. This is not to suggest that women enjoyed those conditions, but with children to look after, they *had* to be there. Through in-depth interviews it transpired that many husbands spent more time in the home after house consolidation. But this may also be explained by the fact that those households who had consolidated usually enjoyed greater domestic harmony in the first place. Certainly, precarious housing may do much to make the marriage tenuous. In the shanty towns of Puerto Rico, for example, Safa (1980 : 77) found that there was '.... no strong conjugal bond to hold a man and wife together in the face of economic adversity .... no investment in property, no status to uphold, no deep emotional tie'.

#### *The lack of water*

Inadequate or absent services also add a considerable amount of time and inconvenience to domestic labour. Undoubtedly the most problematic feature is the absence of a piped water supply, reflected in the fact that over 90 per cent of the female respondents in each settlement said that it was the service from which they would gain most benefit. Bolaños is the worst off settlement in this respect, as the tankers can only pass through three streets, and many housewives live at considerable distances from their water containers. This means that they have to carry water over long distances up and down the hillside. Another method of transporting water is by hose. However, this is not a feasible solution for those who live upslope from their source, and besides, there are major health risks. To syphon water onto one's lot involves sucking through a break in the hosepipe, and apart from the fact that all kinds of dirt may get inside the hosepipe, in an environment where 50 per cent of the population go to the lavatory out of doors, the possibilities of contracting illness by oral contact with objects left outside are quite high. If fetching water in buckets, or bringing it down by hose is not possible, women may take their washing and washing implements, such as scrubbing boards, to the oil-drums. Whatever method is used, it is hard and inconvenient.

In Los Andadores, all the roads are passable and the containers were placed just in front of people's houses. But in Las Américas, the seven standpipes for 256 families cause almost as many problems as the oil-drums. As all the standpipes are in the lowest

streets of the settlement, those people living further up the hillside have to negotiate a steep slope when carrying water. There is usually a queue at the pipe and for those who live 500 metres away at the top of the hill, a journey for sufficient water to wash twelve items of clothing may take up to an hour and a half. For this reason, many women who live in the roads accessible to the tankers prefer to spend more money and use the water provided by the lorries, rather than to fetch it from the tap.

Apart from the physical problems related to carrying water, there are others which relate to cost, health and unreliability. The price of the inferior quality water delivered by the tankers is so high that women have to be very careful not to spill it on their journeys or while washing. In October 1982, domestic piped water cost 40 pesos per 10 cubic metres, whereas tanker water cost 100 pesos for only one cubic metre – approximately 25 times more.<sup>13</sup> In Bolaños, when it cost 20 pesos for a container holding 200 litres in October-December 1982, a total of 170 pesos a week was spent on water. In Los Andadores in January 1982, 200 litres cost 25 pesos and the weekly sum was 180 pesos. In Las Américas residents spent an average of 150 pesos a week – a slightly lower sum, because cooking and drinking water tended to be collected from the standpipe, which was much cheaper. Purified water may be bought at 25 pesos per 20 litres. The glass containers are delivered in lorries to some settlements. All together around 7 per cent of the average earnings of a 'typical' household are spent on water alone.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, most of this water cannot be used for cooking and drinking. It needs to be boiled for at least twenty minutes before it is drinkable. The water, usually from rivers, is impure in a variety of ways. It is opaque and smells unpleasant; chemically it contains an excess of salts, notably those of sodium and potassium which affect the kidneys and can ultimately cause renal malfunction; biologically, it has a range of micro-organisms, primarily viral, bacterial and protozoan. The most common diseases related to drinking this water are gastro-enteritic infections such as amoebic colitis and Hepatitis 'A'. These cause fatigue, an inability to absorb food properly, and can spread infection when faecal material is not hygienically disposed of, as of course it is not in the absence of latrines and sewerage.

Similarly, the oil drum containers are usually covered by a wooden plank, which means that water is subject to further contamination. In Bolaños, I came across at least two cases of deliberate contamination: the first was when someone wanted to kill someone else and put rat poison in their container; and the second was when feuding in-laws hired 'sorcerers' to put curses on each other. In one instance, *polvo de panteón* ('pantheon dust' – a powder from skeletons) was slipped into the oil drum. Fortunately, in both cases it was spotted, but it indicates the risk involved each time the residents come into contact with water and the care that women must take to ensure its safety.

Another problem stems from the fact that the tankers are often unreliable, especially during dry spells. In earlier days, all settlements had sometimes gone for up to ten days without a delivery. Some tankers are municipal and some are private. Even if they turn up, they do so without advance warning so that if a woman is out she misses the chance of replenishing her supply. Often the tankers do not have sufficient water to provide for the needs of the entire settlement. For this reason women often have to anticipate the lorry and persuade the driver to go first to their drums (usually by paying a bribe).

When the tankers do not come, the women need to have a reserve set of strategies. Often it is not possible to leave dirty clothes or washing up because of the lack of space, the smell and the attraction of flies. Few people have more than one set of plates and

cutlery, or more than two or three changes of clothes, and once the grime is hardened it is more difficult to remove. So alternatives may include packing a bag full of washing and going to the house of a relative or friend in the centre, or going to a stream or to an industrial tank. Other strategies may include using fewer cups and plates, or paper cups and plates, or wiping with just a damp or dry dish-cloth, which is less hygienic. In desperate situations, they beg water from neighbours, or from the residents of richer neighbourhoods nearby, which is embarrassing and humiliating.

In order to plan effectively, and sometimes to save money, many women go outside the settlement to wash their clothes. This adds time and trouble to domestic labour, and tends to be related to the unreliability of the water supply and the distance from the source within the settlement. In Los Andadores, where the containers are right in front of the houses, women spend an average of nine hours washing clothes a week; in Las Américas, where the standpipe provides an alternative if the tankers do not arrive, the weekly time is 10.2 hours; while in Bolaños, where the population is entirely dependent on the lorries and where three quarters of the families live at some distance from their containers, the weekly total is 11.1 hours. From this breakdown of the problems surrounding water in irregular settlements, it may be seen that women have to spend a great deal of time and go to a great deal of trouble to ensure that their needs are met, even if inadequately. If water cannot be found, or a household worker has not got the time to fetch it or boil it, people go thirsty, personal hygiene suffers and there is a greater risk of becoming ill. Water is vital to daily survival and most women work long days to compensate for the lack of a reliable domestic supply.

#### *The lack of sewerage*

Lack of sewerage system is another serious problem. None of the settlements which were studied has a functioning network and the people therefore have two options. The first, used by about 50 per cent of the families in Bolaños and Las Américas, and in nearly all the cases in Los Andadores, is a latrine. This is an underground pit (generally measuring 12m<sup>3</sup>, which lasts three years for an average family size of 6-7). The toilet is placed over the pit and is usually located as far away from the house as possible. Although pits smell strongly and attract insects, at least they are private. The second option is to go to the toilet in the open air. This is uncomfortable, embarrassing and unhygienic, especially for women during menstruation. People have to walk some distance to the edge of the settlement, where they crouch down amongst grass and shrubs and risk being spied upon by other people. Men have been known to proposition the women, or frighten the children, so mothers spend a lot of time accompanying their young ones to suitable spots and supervising them. For if they defecate on the lot, there is the problem of removal. In Los Andadores, which is on flat land, and which only has an exposed rubbish tip for use as a toilet, some women let the family use the lot for ablutions and later collect it up in plastic bags to leave for rubbish collection.

Open air lavatory practice is very unhygienic. It is one of the main reasons behind the spread and transmission of diseases such as parasitic colitis, hepatitis 'A' and poliomyelitis (Kearney, 1972). Poliomyelitis is an entero-virus which may be spread by flies and insects which feed on faecal material and then walk on food. Although in the majority of instances infection by polio virus only affects the alimentary tract, causing sickness and diarrhoea, in a relatively small number of cases it may affect the nervous system, causing irreversible and incurable paralysis. Also, as people do not wash their hands straight afterwards, they increase the chance of spread of these and other bacterial and viral pathogens by the oral-faecal route. The risks to health may be reduced by strict supervision of mothers over their children, including the carrying of water in a container to the 'toilet', so that they wash their hands afterwards. This is inconvenient,

13 Data from the director of the State Water Authority (Junta Federal de Agua Potable de Querétaro).

14 The average weekly income of families was 2500 pesos in the three settlements.

time-consuming and costly, but at least helps to ward off potentially fatal diseases. So while conventional lavatories remain a luxury, at least diligence, patience and supervision of children in their toilet practice may provide a reasonable substitute. It is certainly more feasible when more than one person takes on a responsible, contributory role in the domestic sphere.

#### *The lack of physical infrastructure*

The lack of urbanised streets presents another set of difficulties. Pathways are steep, rocky and covered with decomposing rubbish and broken glass in two of the settlements studied. They are hard to negotiate, with or without children, sacks of washing, buckets of water or heavy shopping. In the upper part of Bolaños, it can take a full half hour to get down to the lower part of the slope, and about three quarters of an hour to climb up. Levelling and paving streets would probably cut the time by half. The broken glass and tin cans that litter the hillside are an obvious danger for children playing, especially when some go barefoot. They also present problems of cleanliness. When roads are unpaved and dusty, clothes and shoes get dirty in no time and dirt is carried into the house. Los Andadores has paved roads, and while not always to the satisfaction of the residents, they reduced the average weekly time spent dusting and sweeping the house. Here the mean number of hours a week spent on this chore was only 6.4, compared with 7.5 in Las Américas and 8.4 in Bolaños. In the latter two settlements, women often have to sweep away dust four times a day. The problem is compounded if the house is built of flimsy material and does not have a proper door or glass in the window-frames.

#### *The lack of rubbish collection*

In Los Andadores rubbish is collected, albeit irregularly, by municipal dust carts, but residents of Bolaños and Las Américas have no such service. This leaves them two options. First and most hygienic is to burn it, but this is problematic. Some rubbish, like glass and tin, will not break down in this way, while burning the rest on the lot presents a major fire hazard given the provisional nature of many shacks. The alternative is to wait until nightfall to dump it out of the sight of the neighbours. Often the dumping grounds are on the edge of the settlements where the lavatory facilities are also located. It is dangerous to stumble along unlit dirt tracks at night, and the residents who live on the perimeter in front of the rubbish tips complain about the smell, the cockroaches, the danger and the degradation of the natural environment.

Like faeces, decomposing food and waste materials are attractive to vectors such as flies and dogs and are substrates for micro-organisms. Apart from the intestinal diseases such as poliomyelitis already discussed, proximity to putrefying rubbish may cause skin infections such as dermatitis and impetigo, or infestation by parasites such as lice and fleas. The best method is to burn the rubbish in an isolated spot and to keep watch over it until the fire dies out. As far as the non-degradable litter is concerned, disposal may consist of collecting it up in bags and taking it to the municipal rubbish dump. However, this costs time and money and is compounded by other difficulties which result from the lack of private transport. Where women are helped by other family members, at least they have more scope for burning the worst disease carriers as one woman can be put in charge of the children while the other goes up onto the hillside to guard the bonfire, but no amount of hard work can satisfactorily substitute for formal rubbish collection.

#### *The lack of commercial facilities*

With respect to amenities, Bolaños and Las Américas are very poorly off in terms of secondary schools, health centres and shopping facilities. There are few shops in either settlement. Each has the vital *tortillería*, where the staple flat maize pancake can be bought fresh several times daily, but the rest of the shops are *misceláneas* which, as the name suggests, sell a variety of basic products such as matches, cooking oil, beans and soap. They are often poorly stocked if the streets are impassable and delivery is not possible, or if their week's takings have been in the form of credit. These shops charge more for their products because there is little competition within the neighbourhood and the only alternative is to take an hour's return bus ride into the centre. Housewives try to stock up at their trips to the central markets in order to avoid having to pay more at the corner shop, as it often works out less expensive to make frequent trips to the centre, even with the bus fare included.

In the case of Las Américas, women spend 4.4 hours a week travelling by bus to the city centre or walking to the government housing project in the Industrial Zone to do their shopping. In Bolaños, the only option is to go to the centre, and over a week they spend an average of 3 hours travelling back and forth. In Los Andadores the residents have access to the well-stocked market of Lomas de Casa Blanca, and only spend an hour a week going to the centre for special items such as clothing or furniture. In Las Américas, where over half the population still does not have electricity at home, shopping needs to be done on a daily basis because of the problems of keeping food fresh in a hot climate. The same applies to those people in all the settlements who do not possess or have access to a fridge. This implies a necessity for meticulous planning to avoid wastage, and is just one more aspect of the responsibilities that constitute 'women's work' in Querétaro's low-income neighbourhoods.

#### THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE ORGANISATION OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

From this outline of domestic conditions in irregular settlement, which is by no means exhaustive, it may be seen that women are burdened with tasks that are heavy, dirty and for the most part unsatisfying. There is a definite tendency for domestic labour to increase in the specific circumstances of Querétaro's shanty towns, and a similar trend has also been mentioned for the *suburbios* of Guayaquil, Ecuador (Moser, 1982).<sup>15</sup> The larger the number of small children, the greater the work to be done; the fewer the number of consumer goods, the lower the standards of hygiene. The lower the wage, the more difficult it is to attend carefully to all the household chores discussed in the previous sections, let alone to feed the family and try to maintain a varied and healthy diet on a low budget.

In the absence of major shifts in the political and economic structure, conditions of poverty in Querétaro are unlikely to change in the years to come. Housing problems will persist and so too, with the present austerity measures, will a lack of finance for improving poor settlements on an adequate scale. Efficient and thorough domestic labour is vital to the health and wellbeing of many low-income families. When the burden

<sup>15</sup> In Ecuador, the term *suburbio* denotes that which *colonia popular* describes in Mexico, i.e. a shanty town or irregular low-income settlement. Incidentally, the *suburbios* of Guayaquil are built on precarious, reclaimed swampland, which makes health conditions even more hazardous than those of Querétaro.



of keeping the family as free as possible from the health risks associated with substandard living conditions falls on one person alone, it may prove counterproductive. That person will, firstly, probably not manage to do all that is required of her, and, secondly, she will impair her own health and quite possibly that of others if she undergoes undue strain during pregnancy. Fatigue caused by overwork will also cause the standard of women's work to falter (Land, 1977).

#### *Family structure and work-sharing*

In the absence of major improvement in the general living conditions of irregular settlements in Querétaro, there is one mechanism which may ameliorate the lack of efficiency and the overwork suffered by the principal domestic labourer. This is task-sharing, which appears to display a strong relationship with family structure. In certain types of family, household chores are divided up amongst the members. This section attempts to discover why, and to what extent, family structure acts to reduce a woman's workload.

Three types of family were selected in the questionnaire and interview samples in the settlements. These were nuclear families (husband, wife and their children); single parent families (abandoned or unmarried mother with her children); and extended families (nucleus of nuclear or single parent family who had additional relatives living with them). The male-headed nuclear families represented 68 per cent of the interview sample. The prevalence of this structure meant that about one third of women living in these low-income neighbourhoods, predominantly from nuclear families, did their housework single-handed.<sup>16</sup>

It was found that in nuclear families, 43 per cent of the women had no help at all with their housework, even from daughters, compared with 4 per cent in the single parent families, 9 per cent in the male-headed extended families and none in the case of female-headed extended families. The breakdown of the percentage of chores shared according to family structure indicates that in extended structures, the additional relatives share housework, that is, if they do not take a paid job (see Table 1). Generally it is normal for a migrant or new arrival to take on some role within the family, be it domestic, economic or a combination of the two. A person is rarely allowed to continue as an addition to a household if he or she does not pull their weight. Therefore, in extended families the help of additional members will tend to reduce housework burdens for individual housewives.

Usually helpers in the various types of family tend to be women; for example, in the case of nuclear families, housewives were helped by their daughters, as was also found in a study of low-income households in Mexico City (de Barbieri, 1982). This pattern also tends to overspill to the extended families, where women were aided by other women, not necessarily daughters, but daughters-in-law, sisters, aunts, mothers, etc. It is only in the single parent families that a considerable proportion of women are helped by their sons. Here, in 36 per cent of cases, boys take an active part in household labour, although the majority of female heads are aided by their daughters (45 per cent). Sometimes this is because there are no daughters, but in most cases it is probably because sexual stereotyping is inculcated to a lesser degree when the woman assumes both roles.

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, *famulus*, the Latin root of 'family', is a term for a domestic slave. A *familia* is a group of slaves belonging to one man. In the modern individual family where domestic functions are reduced to a minimum and a man's work takes him out of the home, the wife's status becomes reduced to that of a 'head-servant' (Engels, 1972). This seems an appropriate description of many wives who were forced into working an 11-hour day doing menial tasks on their own.

Table 1 : Percentage of tasks shared according to family structure

	Percentage shared					
	0	1-24	25-49	50-74	75-99	100
Male-headed nuclear (167)	42.5	15.5	17.4	14.4	7.2	3.0
Single parent (22)	4.5	0	2.1	45.4	20.1	27.9
Male-headed extended (44)	9.1	0	4.5	9.1	20.5	56.8
Female-headed extended (11)	0	0	0	18.2	27.3	54.5

Note : Women were asked to identify the person(s) who helped them with eight different household tasks : fetching water, laying the table and/or washing up, washing clothes, attending to the garden or patio, childminding, shopping, cooking and cleaning.

While this contribution of both males and females to domestic work has a positive aspect, the work that is demanded of them may sometimes prove too time-consuming. In single parent families, children's schooling stands greater risk of being jeopardised as they are often required to assist their mothers in a variety of ways. Older sons and daughters, especially, may be vested with a considerable amount of responsibility at a young age. However, where females extend their families in order to create more security (by increasing income) and flexibility (by balancing out responsibility), workloads of individual members may be reduced significantly (Tienda and Ortega, 1982). In the Querétaro settlements, the pattern of extending the family, often with this aim in mind, was higher amongst females than males. One third of all female-headed families had relatives living with them on a permanent basis, compared with only one fifth of the male-headed households.

Each nuclear family has an average of 1.9 people with whom to share housework; there are 2.6 in each single parent family, 2.4 in male-headed extended families and 3 in each female-headed extended household. This is not a result of the 'parasitism' discussed by Lomnitz (1977), MacDonald (1979) and Peattie (1968) whereby nuclear units are seen to be 'weighed down' by the arrival of dependent relatives who move in because they have nowhere else to go or are unemployed. In fact, the worker-dependent ratio, as far as economic participation is concerned, was highest in the nuclear structure. The average number of people economically dependent per person was 5.1 in the nuclear structure, 3.4 in the single parent family, 3.7 in the female-headed extended and only 3.3 in the male-headed extended. Family extension, therefore, is often beneficial. A study of poor migrants to Mexico City reached similar conclusions : 'Generally, the arrival of a new member benefits the established group; the migrants do not take up too much space and when they find work they may contribute to the domestic budget ....' (Arizpe, 1978 : 161). Elsewhere she notes : 'Domestic chores, such as cooking, washing and cleaning are done by all the women together, sometimes taking it in turns ....' (*Ibid.* : 156).

The fact of sharing domestic labour means that the hours laboured per household worker are fewer, whereas the overall number of hours invested in the task is around the same or even greater (see Table 2). This suggests that overwork is less common amongst



Table 2 : Hours spent on washing clothes\* and cleaning house\*\* per week by household and by household worker according to family structure

Family Structure	Work Category			
	total hours p/wk washing clothes	total hours p/wk cleaning house	total hours p/wk washing clothes & cleaning house	hours p/worker washing clothes & cleaning house
Nuclear	9.9	7.5	17.5	11.1
Single parent	7.4	6.2	13.6	5.3
Male-extended	10.7	8.0	18.7	8.2
Female-extended	17.5	6.5	24.0	8.0

\* Washing clothes and folding them afterwards (excluding ironing)

\*\* Daily dusting, sweeping and wiping of the house interior (excluding cleaning domestic utensils, making beds, tidying up)

individuals in an extended family, but that at the same time, given that more hours are invested, the work gets done perhaps even more thoroughly, with less strain. With two or three people to take care of the chores usually undertaken by one woman alone, there is greater likelihood that there will be time to attend more carefully to each task. For example, if one woman is assigned water-fetching and cooking duties in a given day and does not have to bother with accompanying a young child to the toilet, nor with clearing up the rubbish, it is likely that she will be able to follow more methodically and without interruption the vital stages of purifying the water adequately and preparing the cooking utensils. Furthermore, not having one's labour fragmented signifies that there is less probability of cross-infection arising from the mixing of culinary, lavatory and cleaning functions in quick succession.

From the subsample of semi-structured interviews, it appeared that working days of women are longer in nuclear families than in extended families (see Table 3).

Table 3 : Hours spent daily by housewives according to family structure and settlement\*

Family Type	Level of servicing			Mean Hours (family type)
	Highest <i>Los Andadores</i>	..... <i>Las Américas</i>	Lowest <i>Bolaños</i>	
Nuclear	8.6 (7)	10.7 (6)	11.4 (9)	10.2
Extended	8.4 (4)	9.2 (3)	10.1 (4)	9.2
Mean Hours (settlement)	8.5	9.9	10.7	

\* Numbers in brackets refer to number of cases

The information presented in Table 3 is based on the 'typical' day of 47 housewives from different types of household across the settlements. Unlike the information contained in Table 1, it includes cooking, shopping, sewing, ironing and clearing up after meals, etc. It may be seen that the number of hours put in by the principal houseworker is also related to service levels across the settlements. Time spent on domestic labour displays an inverse relationship with the quantity and quality of collective services and the number of household workers. Put simply, the extended family living in Los Andadores will tend to have the lightest workload, and the nuclear family living in Bolaños, the heaviest.

#### Family size and workloads

Family size naturally tends to increase workloads : a similar finding was made in a study of low-income households in Mexico City (García, Muñoz and de Oliveira, 1982a, 1982b). The total time spent on washing and cleaning per week is positively correlated with the number of household members.<sup>17</sup> Mean family size according to structure is as follows : 6.2 (nuclear); 5.4 (single parent); 8.8 (male-headed extended); and 10.6 (female-headed extended). In contrast to our previous findings for economic dependence, it appears that the number of household members dependent on housewives' services is actually smaller in the nuclear family : while nuclear housewives have 3.2 people dependent on their services, women in extended families have an average of 3.5 people dependent on them in the home. Women in extended families, by having to support a greater number of household members through their domestic chores, might be considered to be worse off in this respect than their counterparts in nuclear households. However, it should be remembered that the incidence of housework-sharing is actually very low in the nuclear families. Only just over half the wives in nuclear structures get help from their children and husbands, whereas in the other categories, not only do 95 per cent of the women receive help with domestic chores, but they also get help in more aspects of housework on a more regular basis.

#### The advantages of shared labour

In the first place, apart from reducing the number of hours per person in domestic work, one effect of sharing is to even out unequal time budgets between men and women. If one assumes that the working day in formal employment is 7 hours long,<sup>18</sup> and we refer back to Table 2, we find that although women still put more time into their work, the difference is reduced in the extended structure. While women on average work 10.2 hours a day in the nuclear families constituting a day that is 45 per cent longer than that of their husbands, in the extended household, a woman's day is only 31 per cent longer than a man's. Men tend to participate more in household chores in extended

17 Family size and the amount of time spent washing clothes and cleaning the house were strongly correlated with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.192 (sample size 244), significant at the 1 per cent level.

18 A 7-hour day of work is the norm in formal employment, such as factory work, construction, transport and public sector services. These branches of activity employ around 70 per cent of the male population in the study settlements. The figure does not include travel time to and from work. Clearly many men also work as tradesmen and as itinerant salesmen or shopkeepers. Informal sector work usually entails a longer working day for less money. The selection of the 'formal' average as a baseline for the men's working day was made on the grounds that most of the population were not independent workers - it should not be taken to represent the entire population.

families, partly because in these cases more women tend to work in the labour market, and partly because of an ethic of shared responsibilities in the extended household. In the subsample of interviews, it transpired that in 6 out of 11 cases of male-headed extended families, men would occasionally help the women to fetch the water or dump the rubbish. In male-headed nuclear families, men's participation was lower, with only 5 out of 22 husbands helping their wives in some way – in two cases where the women worked fulltime and earned more than their husbands. The economic interdependence among members in extended families appears to encourage a greater sense of duty and responsibility in its individual members, but on the whole, men do very little housework. If they do help in the home, their 'chores' tend to be sex-specific and carried out irregularly, for example, mending utensils, wiring plugs, attending to the garden or making simple furniture like shelves, as and when the need arises.

In addition to reducing women's workloads, the sharing of domestic labour may also be said to be more efficient. Some of the work needs two pairs of hands, such as bringing water down by hose. Furthermore, when the tasks are simpler, it means that two chores may be carried out simultaneously. Some lighter tasks such as cooking and childminding are done on a rota basis so that work varies from day to day and there is also greater satisfaction in being able to concentrate fully on one dimension of the housework. Sharing also makes the work safer. Heavy work carried out single-handed by women may cause problems ranging from curvature of the spine to miscarriages or health risks to unborn children. Finally, sharing appears to make people happier. Part of the reason for the 'hollowness', 'thanklessness' and 'invisibility' of domestic labour is that it is carried out in alienated and isolated conditions (Rowbotham, 1973). Women tend to have greater self-respect when the work is shared. They are not only responsible to a wider group of people than their immediate dependents, but other people are also responsible to them. What they do in the home is more appreciated when other people have experience of what the work entails, and it is not taken for granted. It has been suggested that in precapitalist society, there was far greater prestige attached to household 'production' when it was executed by several people within the extended family or kin group and was a 'social industry' rather than a 'private service', and when the distinction between work and domesticity hardly existed (Engels, 1972; Farmer, 1979; Huston, 1979; Hutter, 1981).

The reduced time spent on housework per worker in the extended household, in addition to the greater freedom that there seems to be to make demands on other family members, has the tendency of enabling women to participate more actively in the labour market than the housewives of nuclear structures.<sup>19</sup> However, women's reduced time spent on domestic labour may also be a response to the fact that they are less in the home and therefore cannot dedicate the same amount of time to domestic work. The answer probably lies somewhere between the two interpretations, although it should be noted that women who had gone to work after the arrival of relatives in the household had persuaded their husbands to let them do so by using the argument that there was no need for them to be in the home so much because the work was getting finished more quickly. Conversely, in the nuclear families, women said that the housework and children combined in making the biggest barrier to their leaving the house and entering the labour market. Their husbands had told them that they did not want to

19 Age is also important in determining female entry into the labour force. The lowest rates of economic participation in the study settlements were in the 15-30 age group, when women are most likely to have young children. Similarly at this stage in the family life cycle, there is least likelihood of other relatives living in the household. These points are explored in much greater depth in Chant (1984 : Ch.4) for details of female employment, and Ch.6 for the effects of family structure on the entry of women into the labour market.

leave their children with anyone else and that they could not afford to hire a domestic servant, so that until the women could suggest a reasonable alternative, or the children were older, they could forget the idea of taking a job. In some respects, and indeed in the minds of many housewives, involvement in the labour market is regarded very positively, but at the same time, it often means that their working days become even more extended.

*The 'double day' of labour*

In nuclear families, 32 per cent of female spouses had some kind of paid employment, and this figure was 44 per cent in the extended households. At least one third of these women had part-time earnings from sewing, knitting or some other domestic activity carried out on an irregular basis in the home. The classic disadvantages of taking responsibility for both economic and domestic functions under capitalism result from the dual burden of women, where their increase in labour force participation is not marked by a concomitant increase of men's involvement in domestic work. The 'double day' of labour is particularly marked in the case of female heads (see Table 4). However, at the same time, earning money is highly valued by the women and extra-domestic work is an important source of power and prestige for women who live in societies characterised by a strict sexual division of labour (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974). The man's supremacy in the family is largely based on economic power, and when women have a measure of economic independence, they tend to play a greater part in decision-making.

When questioned about their economic activities, 'working' wives constantly referred to how 'lucky' they were to have a husband who understood them, who did not suspect them of infidelity when they went out to work, and who let them spend their own money (although the female's wage often went to buying household items). At the same time, many working women in nuclear structures had to face housework after a day's paid labour. One fifth of the working total are domestic servants, and in the case of Piedad in Bolaños, her working day was 14 hours long, divided between washing, cooking and cleaning in her own home and doing exactly the same in someone else's.

Table 4 : Total daily work hours of women who work both at home and in the labour market according to family structure\*

	<i>Los Andadores</i>	<i>Las Américas</i>	<i>Bolaños</i>	average no. of hours per day
Nuclear	12.9 (3)	8.5 (1)	11.6 (4)	10.9 (8)
Extended	10.5 (3)	9.0 (2)	11.4 (3)	10.3 (8)
Single Parent	12.1 (4)	10.3 (2)	12.1 (4)	11.5 (10)

\* Numbers in brackets refer to number of cases

## CONCLUSION

The sexual division of labour is common in all capitalist societies where men have greater power in the public sphere. This is especially true of the developing ones, where women do not have the same opportunities in the labour market as their counterparts in advanced industrial nations. The superiority of one sex over another has its roots in the cultural and economic order of Mexican society and tends to mean that while women often work very hard in the home, there is little prestige accorded to them or to the labour that they do. The oppression of women in the home, where domestic labour is reduced to a menial, privatised and undervalued service, is very much a product of the rise of capitalism and the age of the nuclear family.

'... in primitive communal society the distinction did not exist between a public world of men's work and a private world of women's household service. The large collective household was the community and within it both sexes worked to produce the goods necessary for livelihood.'

(Leacock, 1972 : 33, her emphasis).

It cannot be disputed that women continue to undertake very important and socially necessary labour, and the discussion of housework and living conditions in Querétaro enables us to pinpoint some of the areas where women's labour helps to mitigate the hardship engendered by poverty and the lack of services. Housewives take on board a range of additional responsibilities in the course of their work to shield their families from discomfort, health risks and otherwise unpleasant surroundings, not to mention attempting to maintain feelings of security in the face of economic adversity (Guzman, 1982). However, their work is underestimated and undervalued (at least explicitly), both in Mexican society and within the communities themselves, reflected in the fact that they are unaided. The lack of attention paid to improving conditions for the poor is common in dependent capitalist societies and is a class issue, but in practical terms it is generally women who suffer most. Men with a low income have at least some choice in the labour market, and the fact of economic power gives them a basis for authority. Women have little choice but to assume responsibility for their children and domestic labour, and are usually wholly dependent on the earnings of their husbands.

For the majority of women in Querétaro's shanty towns, working long hours in the home is standard practice in the battle against potentially harmful living conditions. On the one hand, domestic toil reinforces the servility and powerlessness of women in a male-dominated society, burdens them with excessive workloads, and threatens their health and wellbeing. On the other hand, when housework may not be done single-handed or when there is not the capacity to attend to all the chores necessary, the result will be that the thoroughness of that work falls short of adequate. The public sector could greatly improve this situation by introducing services and upgrading housing, but to date it has directed very little of its resources to the problem. Extended households have an advantage under these exploitative conditions because there are extra adults to share the work. When housework is divided up amongst family members, it lightens the workloads of individuals, reduces the time spent by each person and spreads a sense of collective responsibility. As a result, domestic labour tends to be done more efficiently with greater satisfaction. Women in Mexico have two major problems : that of their position in society and that of their position in the home. Although the individual family unit is limited in its capacity to combat poverty, its structure and organisation may have a significant effect on the work of women within it.

In the absence of major structural change in Mexican society, it seems that a return to a more 'communal' household may provide a valuable aid to low-income women. The sharing of household chores in extended families does go some way to alleviating

heavy workloads and carries with it a possibility that more women may take part in paid labour. Extended families are still a relatively small proportion of the total number of families in the settlements studied (about 23 per cent), although they may well increase over the crisis period, because their advantages appear to extend beyond the fact of improving the quality and organisation of domestic labour, but there is no doubt that for whatever type of family living in the irregular settlements of Querétaro, poverty is a basic fact of life and for the majority, chances to improve their economic conditions are remote. Change from above, in the sense of the government's taking more positive action to upgrade the living conditions of those living in poor neighbourhoods, is unlikely, especially with recent cuts in government spending. This paper has attempted to show what low-income housing in that context implies for women and to indicate the possibilities of improving the situation from below.

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## Luchas colectivas de las obreras peruanas Los motivos de participación y alejamiento

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### INTRODUCCION

En diciembre de 1981 apareció en un periódico peruano un aviso de una fábrica electrónica, en que se pidió *exclusivamente obreros masculinos* para el trabajo de producción. Seis años antes, en agosto de 1973, esa misma empresa pidió su personal de producción solamente de entre *mujeres*. Esto, ya que las mujeres serían más obedientes, fáciles de despedir, más baratas y menos dispuestas a organizarse. Una toma de fábrica de más de dos años ha venido a cambiar profundamente las ideas del empresariado.

Durante los últimos años, en publicaciones que tratan sobre la industria y el trabajo asalariado en los países llamados 'subdesarrollados', se ha dado mucha atención a la creciente selectividad en el pedido de personal.<sup>1</sup> Especialmente las grandes empresas transnacionales prefieren cada vez más a jóvenes solteras, suponiendo que son baratas, obedientes, fáciles de despedir, y que tienen poco interés en sindicalizarse. Esta preferencia para mujeres jóvenes también se ha podido notar en las dos empresas nacionales de que trata esta ponencia. Pero, ¿es verdad que las mujeres son menos militantes y menos dispuestas a organizarse y a luchar colectivamente como lo son los hombres?

Algunos acontecimientos en Lima, Perú, apuntan en otra dirección. Allí, desde 1973 han tenido lugar un número de tomas de fábricas, varias de las cuales duraron meses, y otras años, y que fueron llevadas a cabo mayormente o exclusivamente por mujeres. Mucha publicidad nacional y a veces internacional tuvieron las luchas sindicales en las fábricas Texoro, Tres Estrellas, la Garantía, Lolas, Conel y Lucy. Según algunos dirigentes sindicales entrevistados, las luchas de obreras fueron muchas más.

Las tomas de fábricas tuvieron lugar en una época, en que la situación socioeconómica y política en el Perú dió origen a un creciente número de huelgas.<sup>2</sup> En los años 50 y 60 el acento en la industria peruana que primero recaía en la producción de artículos de consumo luego recayó en el sector de bienes intermedios y capitales. Empresas pequeñas e intermedias en los sectores débiles de la economía se vieron acosadas por problemas. Justamente en estos sectores trabajaron muchas mujeres. Como consecuencia de la crisis económica una década después, se produjeron reducciones de personal y cierres de fábrica. La estrategia de las empresas de remplazar su personal por otro más barato y obediente resultó también en eso.

1 Véase por ejemplo : A. Gunder Frank, *Crisis in the third world*, EE.UU.,1981; O.Gomez, R. Reddock, *Multinationals and female labour and organisation in Colombia*, Den Haag, 1980; H. I. Safa, *Runaway shops and female employment : the search for cheap labor*, *Signs* 7,2, 1981; B. Ehrenreich, A. Fuentes, *Life on the global assembly line*, MS, EE. UU.,1981.

2 D. Sulmont, *El movimiento obrero peruano (1890-1980), reseña histórica*, Lima, 1980, p.204, cuadro XX.