Introduction to the Revised Edition

When I first went to San Pedro Sacatepéquez, I wasn't planning to write about Mayan women. I arrived in the town with my advisor, Waldemar (Richard) Smith. During the 1960s Smith had spent three years in San Pedro with his wife, Linda, researching the impact of development on this commercially viable community (W. R. Smith 1975, 1977). My dissertation proposal, assiduously prepared for months before leaving for fieldwork in Guatemala, was titled "The Value of Children in the Family Productive System." It was December 1976. Richard introduced me to his informants, found me a place to live, and, with our spouses in tow, we celebrated the new year with his *Sampedrano* friends. During that first overwhelming week in Guatemala, Richard turned to me and, in an offhand way, said, "You seem to be getting along so well with the women. Why don't you change your topic to the impact development has had on them?" In a trice, I did exactly that.

The vigorous jump start Richard Smith gave to my work on gender is doubly ironic when considered against the backdrop of Smith's own conclusions on modernization in San Pedro. Smith's reputation as an anthropologist emerges from his assessment of San Pedro Sacatepéquez as one of the most productive and entrepreneurial "boom" economies in all of Guatemala. Before other ethnographers (e.g., C. Smith 1977, Goldin 1986) described the rich markets and economic potential of a number of highland productive systems like Almolonga or Totonicapán, San Pedro seemed almost anomalous in the ability of this Indian town to take advantage of rapidly expanding market opportunities. In light of this groundbreaking research on development, it is dismaying to see how much Smith had overlooked by never

1. The author and Waldemar (Richard) Smith with San Pedro friends.

considering women in his enthusiastic embrace of this "pattern of economic progress."

In the first edition of *Silent Looms,* I demonstrated that an expanding, modernizing base of production destroyed women's traditional work, transforming them into a dependent and exploitable rural proletariat competing for scarce economic opportunities. In fact, where development had been effective, it hadn't benefited women as much as it had benefited men, as benefits were often at the expense of their wives, daughters, and mothers. Richard Smith never realized that while development may have been an overall boon in San Pedro, it was a major socioeconomic catastrophe where women's production and independence were concerned. For example, in his book, Smith celebrates the "completely new machine-knitting industry" that had sprung up since the 1950s as yet another example of "real economic advance." Clearly, he did not appreciate that what drove the knitting machine industry and afforded its owners considerable wealth was its exploitation of women knitting piecework at home or being paid sweatshop salaries in urban factories. Although he visited factories, he never realized that the apprenticeship system he applauded fooled workers into believing they needed a year without pay to learn to knit.

Smith's case study of "Anselmo Orozco" further illustrates my point.[1] He describes Anselmo as running a soap business with his wife. But Anselmo realized the handmade soap business was a dead end given the stiff competition of industrially produced soaps like Fab, so he took his savings (from the business that he had shared with his wife), bought a truck, and got rich in transport. We never learn from Smith what happened to Anselmo's wife. Did she go on to become "wealthy and modern" too? When I tracked her down, I found that her life had changed, but not in the same way that Anselmo's had. She continued in the marginally profitable soap business in order to generate whatever small earnings she could to support her children. While they had a new house and educated sons symbolizing their father's newfound status, wife and children lived a precarious existence. Anselmo's trucking profits went into his own pocket and into the *huipil* of any one of a string of girlfriends he now supported. Household budgetary responsibilities fell to the wife who found herself dependent and abused in the house of this newly rich and modern San Pedro entrepreneur. In short, what Richard Smith painted as an optimistically entrepreneurial town looked very different to me when I included women.[2]

Two Decades of San Pedro Fieldwork

After my initial year of fieldwork in San Pedro, I, like most other Guatemalanists, stayed away from the region. As members of a solidarity group called the Guatemalan Scholars Network, most ethnographers agreed that our presence could endanger the lives of our friends and informants during the terror and violence of the early 1980s. Accordingly, my work came to a halt until the election of Vinicio Cerezo as President of Guatemala in 1985. Cerezo's victory signaled (falsely, as it turned out) a return to democracy and thus the reopening of ethnographic research in the highlands.

In those years, I turned my attention to San Antonio Palopó, a more traditional Mayan community on the shores of Lake Atitlán. I again examined gender as a critical variable in the move toward an expanded economy and the search for a less impoverished way of life (Ehlers 1991, 1993). But in almost every field season, I would make the all-day bus trip from the lake to visit the *Sampedrano* families I now considered my friends.

And so it went until 1997, when I decided that San Pedro merited a second, more serious ethnographic look. I could not see *Sampedranas* encased like bugs in amber within a cultural explanation that might no longer fit. They were not static, inert case studies, but real people in a dynamic reality that

might defy many of the predictions that emerged from *Silent Looms.* Intimate knowledge of two very different Indian communities has caused me to re-think many of my early assumptions.

METHODS

Aided by a travel grant from the University of Denver, where I teach, I spent much of my 1997 summer in San Pedro Sacatepéquez. I lived with the same people I had stayed with in the 1970s, the Fuentes family. I made the same morning treks to San José Caben to visit weavers and did my rounds in the marketplace where many old friends still sold on Thursdays and Sundays. Although I had been back for briefer visits, there were many people I had not seen again. Happily, grown women I had only known as little girls welcomed me as a long-lost relative. Old friends had my photo with their families on their mantles, and stories were told about me that I, of course, had long forgotten. I brought photos of them in their youth and an album of my family in Boulder. Fortunately, almost no one among my informants or friends had died or disappeared or left town. Only Juana (my original guide to Guatemalan love and marriage) had gone to live on the coast, forced out of town after one too many ventures involving stolen car parts.

In my first San Pedro fieldwork, I ate *almuerzo,* the main meal of the day, with the Fuentes family, but I was adamant about having my evenings alone in my little apartment where I made a sandwich and read novels to escape. To a certain extent, I felt more like a boarder than a guest or member of the family. The Fuentes daughters had their boyfriends, their parents were busy, and their brothers were off limits. Only the elderly maiden aunt, Violeta, was around enough for serious heart-to-heart chats, and they were mostly about her. Twenty years later, beyond the few minutes I needed every day for organizing my field notes, I couldn't imagine being by myself. I allowed and encouraged the Fuentes family to take care of me. We were all older and wiser now. They had become my best friends and most trusted associates. I found myself making the rounds of their offices and shops just to check in every day. While previously they devoted hours and hours to watching the newfangled TV they had bought, now we were all too involved with our nighttime discussions and gossip to even turn it on.

Where the Fuentes family was concerned, I confess to no longer maintaining the orthodox anthropological distance, or hiding my routines and habits so as to fit in better. I introduced my *comadre,* Liliana, to power walking, for example. Every morning at six, we were off for an hour's brisk hike. Then we'd linger over breakfast while she filled me in on the family's stories

and the town's developments. Although I had always believed an anthropologist should eat everything and anything so as not to offend, after twenty years, I was over seeking entry.[3] And I have to watch my fat intake! So my breakfast was cereal and skim milk yogurt (one of the blessings of development), while Liliana ate her daily scrambled egg and white buttered toast. At lunch I was inserted into the family of what was now twenty-five adults and children. Everyone knew I was a vegetarian of sorts, so they made sure I had enough of the squash and corn when everyone else was eating pork. Basically, the 1997 field trip was like going home. We laughed a lot. We made up jokes that we still giggle about on the phone. We worried together about a friend's health, compared notes on our own bodily functions, and went out drinking, dancing, and visiting. In short, I stopped being outside the culture. I had found a comfortable vantage point, and I nestled in for a good look.

SAN PEDRO TWENTY YEARS LATER

After my original research, the people of San Pedro lived through the extremely difficult and frightening *violencia* of the 1980s. Everyone has a story of a friend, neighbor, local official, or teacher who was assassinated or kidnapped by death squads, the paramilitary, or hired thugs. The army had established itself at a military base in neighboring San Marcos, a fact which occasioned considerable numbers of rapes, drunken brawls, and beatings in both towns.[4] Highway robberies at gunpoint were common fare, as was the presence of the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA) guerrillas who lived in the surrounding mountains or in the lowland region, and who made trips to town for supplies and propaganda purposes.

While the implementation of peace accords has brought an end to much of the institutionalized violence, the community, the highlands, and the country continue to confront lawlessness, corruption, and civil mayhem almost on a daily basis.[5] This social anarchy seriously undermines the progressive image being carefully developed by the national administration. Television ads show runners—one male and one female—traversing the country while the voice-over says "Guatemala—We Are Changing." Billboards announcing new roads proclaim, "Work. Not just words." New road safety laws bespeak this modern orientation of the country, e.g., they forbid cell phones or headsets while driving and seatbelts are now mandatory. At the same time, however, Guatemala ranks fourth in the world in kidnappings, usually the kind where ransoms are paid (twice in some cases) and the victims killed anyway. Analysts look at kidnapping almost as an entrepreneurial opportunity for an increasingly desperate tide of unemployed people.

Rising social inequality means more Guatemalans continue to live wretched, impoverished lives. In a recent essay, ex-president de León Carpio pointed out that during 36 years of war 150,000 people died due to war and repression. At the same time, 450,000 children under five years old died from malnutrition, poor health care, and social injustice. As support he notes that in an analysis of human development indicators among its 185 member nations, the UN now puts Guatemala as a lowly number 117, down from number 112 the year before (de León Carpio 1997).

Today, the town has recovered from the fear and paranoia that separated neighbor from neighbor but remains divided, in part, by growing class distinctions made even more complicated by religious factions begun in the 1970s and crystallized during the 1980s. In 20 years, the number of evangelical churches in the town center of San Pedro grew from only two to twenty-five, and at least one such temple exists in each of the seventeen *aldeas.*[6] Although these new churches are distinct in their origins and orthodoxy, they tend to share a sense of cultural separateness and a suspicion of nonbelievers that is unsettling and seriously off-putting to the majority Catholics.[7] The Catholic Church, seriously dispirited by the political assaults of the 1980s, has been further demoralized by this new competition. At the same time, robberies and attacks at various neighborhood chapels have given Catholic parishioners a strange sense of being besieged. Who, they wonder, would steal the statue of the Niño de Atocha, the patron saint of my own San Pedro parish?

This sense of vulnerability seems to be occasioned by the new atmosphere of rootlessness, alienation, and uncertainty in the town. Partly, this is a result of population growth, but due as well to a huge spurt in immigration. In my original fieldwork, I often took walks with Violeta Miranda and she could greet by name (or identify and avoid) nearly everyone we passed. That does not happen anymore. People complain that the strong *Sampedrano* identity and shared sense of community described by W. R. Smith (1977) is being undermined by the number and diversity of newcomers who now live and work in the town.

Indeed, it is true that population has grown far beyond what normal reproductive patterns would have suggested. Immigrants from all over the country now compete with locals in hundreds of easily capitalized plaza businesses. Not only have they brought in businesses previously unheard of in the plaza (e.g., ice cream cones, fresh-killed chickens, Pepsi in cans, etc.), but they compete side-by-side with longtime traders selling the same products for the standard, and invariably higher, price. Who are these strangers? They are the thousands of people attracted by the opportunities for entrepreneur-

ship, investment, a quick buck, or a route through Mexico to the United States, who have flooded the town in the last few years. Some come only for the market, but many have relocated for a longer stay. They are from all over Guatemala, Central America, and even places as far away as South America.

I took a walk through one rather tawdry example of this commercial influx, the red-light district that has evolved near the old bus station behind the church. In *Silent Looms,* I wrote about the one whorehouse in town, a dingy cantina with a jukebox out in the cornfields. Then, the working girls were bored *ladinas* (non-Indians) who shared a table and their conversation with the three local women (teachers, it turned out) who had recently inherited the business. Now, the prostitutes are indigenous teenagers as young as thirteen, brought in from the *altiplano* still in their *huipiles* and speaking Quiché. They behave like preteenagers, giggling and doing each other's hair while waiting for clients. Their pimps are unsavory, secretive men who direct their charges and their clients to the many open storefronts with only a flimsy screen to hide the bed.

Seemingly without exception, locals blame deviance and delinquency not on their own children, but on the aforementioned immigrant population. I was repeatedly told that these were the people, especially those from the coast, who were stealing money from plaza merchants, hanging out at the disco, dealing drugs, getting pregnant, and generally debasing the traditional values of the town. One variation on this theme of "the other" is to blame teens from the neighboring *ladino* town of San Marcos for all these problems. This was more common among teenagers themselves who found an easy target in their rivals and enemies from across the tracks.

I knew that immigrant influx only explained a small part of the 1990s version of San Pedro Sacatepéquez. One Sunday, eager to have another look at the changing local scene, I decided to stand outside the Catholic church after mass. Among the usual *Sampedranos* in *traje* (indigenous costumes) or worn dresses and pants, I saw men in expensive leather jackets sporting ponytails and earrings, and women with French-braided hair and high heels. Their sons looked like suburban skateboarders with baggy clothes and swoosh caps worn backwards, while their gum-snapping, heavily made-up daughters might have just wandered over from the nearest shopping mall.

Who were these people exhibiting such affluence? I knew they were locals, because I actually remembered some or recognized family members of others. When I asked around, people told me that locals or not, they were, without any doubt, drug dealers. While this suspicious finger-pointing may be true for a few of these people, it cannot explain what is indeed a marked trend to a pervasively upscale, Westernized affect in San Pedro. I believe that

influenced by television, by travel, by visits to relatives in the United States, and by their college-educated children, many middle-class *Sampedranos* have adopted a "look" that expresses their desire for social mobility. To some people, such conspicuous consumption is grounds for suspicion—thus the drug-dealer analysis. To others, it is easy to understand. Their mothers and grandmothers eschewed the traditional clothes that they believed would mark them as backwards, rural *"inditos."* They opted for the clothes local *ladinos* wore as a sign of their being modern. Today, they and their more sophisticated offspring have selected a novel identity, one found in Miami or even Guatemala City, but until recently, not in San Pedro Sacatepéquez. I couldn't help wondering if what I was witnessing was the simple conscious adoption of Western styles, or a more serious choice, i.e., the abandonment of the entire indigenous culture package.

In short, I think it is fair to say that although drug dealers or invaders from elsewhere are partially responsible for the kinds of changes associated with rapid urbanization, it is development that has destroyed the very heart of the town. Money and affluence have caused the collapse of the nuclear family and to some extent have reshaped the values that have sustained the community for centuries. Disposable income accumulated since the 1970s has meant that family members are free to do things other than work night and day. Fathers no longer insist that their children carry on the family business. Instead, they demonstrate their own success and newfound status by investing in the education of their offspring. This movement has been so pervasive that this newly modernized Indian town has more professionals than its state capitol neighbor, San Marcos.

Since parents may no longer expect children to be working by the side of their mother or father, television, video games, and roughhousing on the streets take up the free time many young *Sampedranos* have after school or in the evenings. Teenage girls are conspicuous shoppers and media addicts who have adopted the *ladino* custom of greeting each other (and every adult they encounter) with a cheek kiss. Elaborate parties are held for children's birthdays with expensive gifts, piñatas, cake, Cokes, and specially made favors for guests. Bikinis have replaced *huipiles* in local beauty pageants, and several youth-oriented radio stations have opened, sponsored by national brands of junk food, clothing, and cosmetics.

Looking at these teenagers wandering around the town in packs, I was reminded of a story I often tell from my first fieldwork in San Pedro. Arriving in San José Caben after a 30-minute uphill trek, I realized that I had forgotten my notebook. "No trouble," said Don Carlos Fuentes, whom I had come to visit. "Manuelito will run to your house to fetch it." And before I could

say a word, off went his nine-year-old son, eager to do his father's bidding. There, I thought, is a well-adjusted boy, confident of his value to his family, even if that day it consisted of running a silly errand. Here is a lesson about the value of work. When I tell this story, I always contrast this poor, rural family with that of the wealthy Velasquezes, Norma and Juan Carlos, the owners of the town's hotel and movie theater. Their son, Vinicio, was a bored, pampered, diffident little boy who always seemed to be rattling around his big house with nothing to do. In spite of having every comfort, a life of affluence did not provide him with more than disquiet about who he was, where he fit in, or what his purpose was in life.

This bit of amateur psychology has long been my guide to understanding middle-class angst and the value of work, Guatemalan or otherwise. And now it seems an apt model for explaining the seemingly pointless existence of a growing group of *Sampedrano* teenagers. Like Vinicio, they seemed to have a lot of spare time to hang out, party, and get into trouble.[8] Sadly, one of the costs of this modernizing economy has been that young *Sampedranos* were now being schooled beyond their usefulness to family businesses, and, to a certain extent, to themselves.

Work Today to Eat Tomorrow: Stasis and Change in San Pedro

I learned several basic lessons about San Pedro during that summer fieldwork. First, things had stayed the same in terms of the "all business, all the time" nature of the community. As I had anticipated, people of all ages and financial situations worked as obsessively as ever. *Sampedranos* seem to have internalized their own reputation as hardworking, clever businesspeople. They know they are energetic and skilled, and many of them, especially those with educations, are constantly coming up with new ideas and new businesses. Thus, the commercial sector was, at least to look at it, booming with activity. The streets were clogged with cars, buses, and trucks moving goods and people into the market from all over the region. There seemed to be a photocopy store on every corner, and even the corner drugstore used a computer to keep track of bills and inventory. Fast, modern self-service bakeries had been introduced by educated children of traditional bakers who had patronized such places in Guatemala City. Film could be developed in an hour across the street from where I lived. There were more doctors than I could count, and more than a dozen development agencies had offices employing local college graduates to implement projects targeting the rural poor.

Most people, especially women, still worked several jobs, or combined commerce with a job or perhaps two jobs. My friend Ana Miranda taught first grade, managed a clothing store, oversaw her husband's auto parts store, and, in her spare time, made decorated Styrofoam crosses for funerals. If I could convince Ana to put down her work for a coffee and a chat on a Sunday afternoon, I considered myself lucky.

THOSE WHO MADE GOOD

As one would expect, over a twenty-year period, the lives of individuals had evolved in both predictable and surprising directions. Gloria, the young woman whose baby had died in 1977, never did marry and now has a Ph.D. in education. I had imagined that César and Ana Gabriela, the teenagers who were forced to get married when her pregnancy was discovered, would be miserable together quite soon after they were wed. As it turned out, however, they went on to become successful and happy with three daughters and

2. Inside a new supermarket.

more than a dozen profitable businesses and investments. Mari, a seemingly poor soap maker from Chamac, had built, with her husband, a large, comfortable house and had two children in college. Doña Angélica was still doing a little weaving two decades after we met, but her investment in the education of her eldest son had paid off. He had become a highly placed executive with Aviateca, the Guatemalan airline, and made a sizeable salary. He provided his family with the economic security they had never had, as well as five TVs, two stereo systems, and a pickup truck.

The children of my closest informants and friends had been educated as professionals. After high school some of them found jobs as teachers, usually with the help of a considerable bribe to the right officials. The pay is poor and the commute to distant *aldeas* or rural communities long, but it is a job. Few of the growing hordes of high school graduates actually work in their chosen fields. Doña Yolanda's parents, for instance, wanted to provide their children with the means to better themselves. Accordingly, Yolanda and her siblings acquired degrees in teaching, nursing, accountancy, and technology. Their current jobs are as a sweater maker, shoemaker, tailor, candy seller, and shopkeeper.

Those who had been able to afford the time and money for college returned to San Pedro as dentists, architects, doctors, lawyers, and engineers. Like their *compañeros* with lesser degrees, however, very few of them have work in their professions. If they do practice, they make little money as their clients are usually too poor to pay more than a pittance for the service. Thus, young professionals are often obligated to open shops or work in their family businesses to make ends meet. Eve, for example, is a doctor's daughter and has a dental degree from the University of San Carlos. But local *técnicos* with minimal training can do much of the routine dental work for far less money than she would charge just to maintain her office. Thus, she has opted for a more traditional female role. She works in her clinic two days a week, but she helps out in her husband's store much of the rest of the week. In addition, all the nurturing of their two children falls to her.

As the discussion of *Pacas* will illustrate, educated *Sampedranos* have been able to infuse the economy with dynamic organizational models, innovative products and services, and confident business leadership, bringing a new, sophisticated emphasis to San Pedro commerce. It seems that young adults prefer doing business in their hometown to practicing their professions in Guatemala City, where they might have a better chance to succeed. I found this to be true for both college-educated men and women. For example, Manuela Miranda was wooed back from her job as an educational administrator in Totonicapán by the offer of a partnership and leadership role in her family's chicken business. Instead of having her weekends free for excursions and par-

ties with her colleagues, Angélica now lives at home where she works seven days a week managing the business and considering what improvements she might introduce.

In short, many *Sampedranos* have made good. Deeply embedded in a growth mode in their town, the middle class has ridden the economic wave toward affluence and has arrived there with financial security, educated children, and a sense of accomplishment. For most, the secret to their success has been the loyalty to their families and to their town. While the promise of more money lured other Guatemalans to Texas or California or Miami, very few *Sampedranos* have moved away. Always there is the potential of the marketplace, the promise of an income from the vibrant San Pedro economy, and the ability to apply oneself to making a living.

THOSE WHO DIDN'T MAKE GOOD

At the same time that the town's growing middle class can look back proudly on its accomplishments, the majority of *Sampedranos* still struggle to survive. There simply isn't enough profit to go around. Crowded out of the market by competition, comparatively weak business skills and networks, or a simple lack of opportunity, many people's pocketbooks are empty. These people fall into two camps.

First, there are those for whom the town's abundant opportunities have been irrelevant, i.e., they had never had the resources to take advantage of the market or the schools or the jobs in any real sense. Doña Tomisina, for instance, has never been able to afford her own house. Twenty years ago she cooked at a makeshift fire on the fringes of her in-laws' home, and today she lives with her son's family. Still landless and desperately malnourished, Tomisina and her husband are barely subsisting on the Q15 ($2.50) a day each makes, he as a day worker and she washing clothes for the Fuentes family. Strategizing around poverty has not changed either. Doña Tomisina's son, Chepe, allows his sons to study, but has pulled his daughters from school after three years (in spite of their good grades and eagerness to learn) so that they might produce some kind of income.

Clearly, Chepe learned this strategy from his father, who similarly denied education to his daughters. In *Silent Looms,* I talked about Doña Tomisina's granddaughter María Dolores, who as a five-year-old was considered valuable to the female family business because she could already wash dishes. Obviously, helping her mother with domestic tasks was the only skill she was ever encouraged to develop. Today, she describes her life in these words: "I have always suffered." Pregnant at eighteen, now with four children, her husband beats her and rarely gives her enough money. She only has the *gasto*

(minimal household budget or allowance) from selling the vegetables her husband grows on their little piece of ground. On the day I sat with her in the market, María Dolores had brought only a few lettuces and bunches of cilantro, and in the first two hours had only sold about Q20 ($3.33) worth.

This picture of a battered, struggling young woman is all too normal in bustling downtown San Pedro. Everywhere I saw women scraping together meager profits from the sale of marginal products. I counted several hundred young women like María Dolores entering the commercial arena with just a few bunches of flowers or radishes in the plaza but with no means for investing in a more sizeable inventory. Most established plaza businesses had not changed at all since my first visit years ago. Women were running the same stalls, selling the same products their mothers and grandmothers had, without any expansion into more profitable items or capital improvements. When queried about their futures given rapidly diminishing sales, they shrugged and suggested it was all in God's hands. This part of the story of women's production has remained remarkably constant.

MANY SILENT LOOMS

The second group of hard-pressed *Sampedranos* are those who had done well during the 1970s and 1980s, but who have been caught in the maelstrom of the economic transformation confronting the town and Guatemala in the 1990s. Hard times are erasing their progress. Previously, I wrote that Rosario and Edulina Ramirez had built a fine house in town with the profits from ten years of plaza business in soap and comestibles. They had been able to afford to educate all three of their daughters, whose labor was only minimally integral to the running of the store, the plaza stall, or any of a half dozen other moneymaking activities. In the last year, however, serious competition, both locally and from Mexico, means their business has dropped more than seventy percent. They've had to rent out rooms, and Rosario, desperately searching for income, quizzed me about the possibility of work in the States. This was not an unusual request. On this trip I had daily inquiries about jobs and salaries and routes to the United States, something that had never happened to me before in San Pedro.

The *Típica* Weaving Business

In *Silent Looms,* I wrote about the male-driven *tipica* business taking over looms from women when their traditional weaving businesses collapsed in the move toward modernization. During the 1960s and 1970s, many people

from town and the near *aldeas* made their fortunes by selling yard goods of Maya-based textiles to wholesalers and exporters in Guatemala City and Xela. For instance, Gumercindo Miranda, one of the dozen or so weavers who founded what seemed at the time a rather modest textile cooperative in San José Caben, now owns a house in Guatemala City and a square block of real estate in downtown San Pedro.

Today, these wildly successful *típica* operations are no more. U.S. interest in importing Guatemalan textiles has waned. Of the two dozen businesses that once provided work for several hundred men in San José Caben, only two remain. One is owned by Florinda, Doña Angélica's daughter, and her husband, Roberto. The couple's business is handled by four in-house looms and sixty people (half of them women) weaving out of their homes. I was initially surprised that women had entered this male domain in such force, but the explanation was understandably familiar. Florinda and Roberto said that they would prefer to use men since their experience has shown that, given female reproductive responsibilities, a woman working at home can only manage half of what a man can do. The economy of the town is so dynamic, however, that they cannot find enough male weavers! Young men eschew work at a loom, preferring to study or to earn more money in town as cab drivers. So, although they only can make about Q220 a month (approximately $36), women are lining up for this work.

In terms of *traje típico* (the traditional indigenous costume), the weaving of wearable textiles is almost completely dead as a source of women's income. Twenty years ago, I saw that *de traje* women were fewer, and that *huipiles* and *cortes* grew dusty in shops when no one could afford to buy them. What I hadn't envisioned was that even the best and busiest weavers (who still had their wealthy older clients) could not meet the demands of the increasingly higher cost of living and were abandoning their looms. Among the older women, a fortunate few are allowing their successful children to support them. Many are working with their husbands, selling the vegetables he raises in the market. Others, particularly the young mothers, are actively investing in enterprises with more economic potential, such as opening *Pacas* or carrying contraband from Tapachula.

This does not mean that women in the region no longer weave. Female weavers of the poorer, more traditional *aldea,* Santa Teresa, have inherited the bulk of the *corte* and *huipil* business. They produce for local traders to sell on the streets or on order for rural women who are still *de traje.* These women have more customers who wear *traje* and fewer demands on their income as their children are less educated, their houses more basic, their diets simpler.[9]

To get another angle on the transformation of the *traje* business, I visited Lucinda Orozco in her *mercado* clothing store. Lucinda reflects the town's evolution toward middle-class female autonomy in her status as a single, professional woman who, over the years, has had a long sequence of half-serious boyfriends. Addicted to business and determined to be self-supporting, she keeps up her mother's shop during the day while teaching school in Chamac at night.

Lucinda inherited this business from her mother, Doña Celestina, the *típica* dealer who had first taken me along on her route to Totonicapán and Palestina in the 1970s. Lucinda still buys from Toto weavers, but her San Pedro locale is decidedly slow. In fact, after sitting there all day without a sale, I wondered why Lucinda came in at all.[10] In reality, she lamented, her profit margin has been dropping steadily. She has had to pay more to keep regular weavers, but she has lost more than two-thirds of them because they cannot make any profit even at the higher rates. Now she finds herself competing with freelancing Santa Teresa weavers who sell to her and then sell on the street for the same price. So while Lucinda has to mark up a Q125 *huipil* to Q150 just to cover her overhead (rent, taxes, salaries, and electricity), the weaver's lower street price means a sale lost.

Yes, says Lucinda, there are still *de corte* women in the far *aldeas,* and rural women from other parts of the state come to buy when they have money after working the harvests on the coast.[11] But as the population grows, they are putting their daughters into skirts and blouses. Then, too, these are poor people who cannot buy the big-ticket items like hand-embroidered *huipiles* or silk *cortes* on which Lucinda might make a decent profit.

Gender Relations—The Same Old Story

Parallel to this category of struggling businesswomen, I want to include a new group—the female working poor. In the San Pedro of the '90s, girls and women have options outside cottage industry or the plaza for income potential. The town's size and the movement of commerce and people through its center translate into growing retail and service sectors, and thus a considerable opportunity for wage work. For example, while in the 1970s and 1980s there were few cafes or bars, fast-food restaurants are now opening (and closing) all the time. Unfortunately, working women cannot command very much money, and most of them complain about their small salaries. These money problems are complicated by the fact that many workers are

single mothers. Time spent with women from this sector assured me that gender relations had changed little since the 1970s.

For example, I interviewed six waitresses at a local restaurant, all of them in their twenties. Each had a familiar story: they came from poor *aldea* families, and at first, most were being educated with the hope of a job and a decent income. Then each of these young women was seduced and abandoned. Juana, for example, had sex with her boyfriend three times before she realized she was expecting a baby. She says she knew nothing about her body, menstruation, or pregnancy. He left her when the baby was two months old. Santa was an orphan of fifteen, raising her two brothers, when she met her boyfriend. She became pregnant; he promised to recognize the child, but he never did. Instead, he married somebody else, left for Guatemala City, and has never seen his daughter.

The other stories are similar. Scorned by their families as *putas,* and with a child to care for, one waitress after another told of having to scrounge for whatever kind of job she could get. One worked in a sweater factory from 3 AM to 10 AM, making less than Q40 a week. Another sold *atolito de elote* (corn drink) from a jug she carried around on her head. From this work, she made so little money that there were whole days when neither she nor her baby ate. She lived like that for two years and lost thirty pounds as a result. Finally, she found a waitress job where she was required to work seven days a week. She made no money there either, but, she says, at least she wasn't carrying around the baby on her back and her livelihood on her head! Their current work at the restaurant pays a decent wage with fair benefits, but even so, by the end of the month, none of these women has enough money left to feed their children.

The same tales of struggling women and violent, irresponsible men kept coming up. In Chamac, I visited with Julieta, the daughter of Doña María Luz, the soap maker. She is now thirty, has three children, and lives with her parents. Fourteen years before, she had married Geraldo, the driver of the minibus that dropped us off at her house. Geraldo wouldn't let Julieta work in the plaza with her mother. He made her stay home to care for their cows. He beat her. He had other women. He drank. Finally, after a decade of abuse, her family helped her to leave him. She filled up a truck with her meager possessions and moved out. Luckily, he gives her Q200 a month, an extremely rare occurrence in Guatemala.

Machismo isn't limited to poor men. On this visit, Liliana told me a story about her uncle Daniel that certainly outdoes all other tales of machismo in San Pedro. It seems Uncle Daniel had women all over the country. While he traveled around visiting them, his wife, Corina, ran his business. Corina was

dedicated to Daniel in spite of all his girlfriends and lovers. Her devotion was so extreme that during Semana Santa, she would prepare his favorite *tamales de carne* and send them to all his *novias* so he wouldn't miss this traditional food from home while he was away!

These stories are only a few examples of the constant soap opera of household gender relations. Unfortunately, while a few middle-class *Sampedranas* have opted out of this drama with good jobs, family support, and their own money, most women (rich or poor) are still victimized by the unreliable men in their lives. Some men cherish their families and treat their wives with love and respect, but the theme of dissatisfaction with men and marital dissolution remains. Women still expect to be mistreated by their spouses, and this brief revisit suggested their expectations often came true.

In previous work (Ehlers 1991) I have written that this imbalance of power is based on women's economic vulnerability, that women must put up with abusive and irresponsible men because their own productive efforts are so minimally rewarding. I still believe this to be true. Even where women have benefited from education and job opportunities, they are still expected to combine income production with domestic responsibilities, an extremely challenging task.

Female Entrepreneurship and the Family Productive System

Since writing *Silent Looms,* my understanding of household gender relations and women's economic vulnerability has been influenced by the work of other social scientists and feminist academics (Bruce 1989, Jiggins 1989, and others) writing about men's and women's distinctly separate productive and reproductive agendas. This literature, and my own research done in the interim (Ehlers 1998), has caused me to rethink the nature of household production in San Pedro—even to the point of arguing that a true family productive system does not exist. I no longer consider, as W. R. Smith did, that San Pedro has thrived because all members of the family work together pooling their energies and income for household consumption purposes. Instead, I now appreciate that it is women who are primarily responsible for meeting the basic needs of their children, not only in terms of reproduction, but also in income generation. I think of women not only as providers, but also as the providers of last resort. If men cannot or will not contribute to the household budget to ensure survival, women must pick up the slack however they can. It is true in San Pedro Sacatepéquez that women and men see

the care and feeding of children to be the woman's job. Men's priorities lie elsewhere. *Sampedranos* in general are expected to provide basics like corn and firewood for their wives, but women must provide everything else. This may not be the rule, but, to some extent, it is the common expectation.

As Bruce (1989) and others have found elsewhere in the Third World, I believe that San Pedro, too, has two distinct production/consumption agendas in the household, one male and one female, and these agendas, while sometimes complementary, can also compete for scarce resources. Instead of Richard Smith's smooth system of cooperating family production, I see separate survival strategies and considerable tension over the allocation of money. Most women feed their children based upon what they can convince their husbands to give them, supplemented by their own small incomes. Even where women work for their husbands as day-to-day managers of stores or home businesses (the classic family production system), they are expected to turn over all the monies to their spouses. It is his decision how much allowance they receive from the receipts for household expenses. The only arena where women can be sure of controlling money is in female family businesses, and these, as we have seen, create extremely minimal returns. In short, in their role as nurturer/provider of last resort, women are coping with one economic crisis after another, with far fewer resources than their husbands.

Meanwhile, men are often living in nonfamilial worlds to which a considerable part of their earnings are directed. As in Smith's Anselmo case (and in the dozens like it that I have documented), men have their own uses for their wages or commercial income. In general, men do give their wives money, but retain the lion's share of their cash for purposes other than household consumption. Some men may drink it up, while others gamble it away or give it to other women with whom they are having extramarital relationships. In other words, they spend it on themselves. With or without these bad habits, men normally reinvest their profits in their businesses or in the conspicuous consumption of televisions, boom-box stereos, and the like.

Not surprisingly, women's consumption agenda is very different from their husbands'. Most women use their daily receipts to buy food for the household. They rarely have money to spend on themselves, nor can they keep aside cash needed for food or school uniforms to better capitalize their small businesses. Business profits directly fuel household budgetary needs instead of being used as investment for growth. With such a built-in short circuit of the rules of business, it is no wonder women's enterprises seldom thrive.

Given these parallel agendas, the real-life implications for business com-

petitiveness and success are compelling. Imagine a woman's tomato business right next door to a man's tomato business. For the moment, we'll assume all things are equal in terms of business experience, access to credit, etc. (although we know they most likely are not). They've both just started in business. At the end of the first day, the tomatoes are gone and they've each got their Q10 of profit in their hands. The man assumes his wife will have dinner on the table and doesn't worry about food. Thus, he can put some of his Q10 into savings. Maybe he will even drink a beer or two before going home. Meanwhile, the woman puts aside her capital for tomorrow's crate of tomatoes, takes what money she has left to her neighbor's stall where she applies the rest of her profit toward the purchase of a half-pound of chicken, some noodles, and a few vegetables. Next market day, the man dips into his reserve to buy two crates of tomatoes. The woman can only buy the one. Two weeks later, he has three crates; she still has the one. Next market day, he has three crates of tomatoes and has expanded into the sale of onions. She still has only the one crate of tomatoes. The following year, no change for her, but his business has taken off.

What have we learned from this rather simplistic example of market economics? Men are buoyed by their wives' small but secure businesses which cover household expenses they don't meet. They can thus take full advantage of the marketplace, reinvesting profits and expanding their businesses. They are entrepreneurial, but their wives are definitely not.

SMALL BUSINESSWOMEN ARE NOT ENTREPRENEURS

I first understood the misappropriation of the term "entrepreneur" one day in San Antonio Palopó when I asked the mayor of the town for a list of the women he considered entrepreneurial. He quickly dismissed the notion of a female entrepreneur as misguided, saying that although they might have small businesses, women lacked the necessary talent, interest, time, and capital to be truly entrepreneurial. Besides, he snorted, women were not supposed to devote themselves to developing commercial enterprises; their work was taking care of the home.

I thought over the mayor's comment not only in terms of San Antonio, but in the more general context of highland women running the tiny domestically based enterprises I have called "female family businesses." I realized that for years I had mistakenly thought "entrepreneurial" applied equally to men and women. Now I began to understand that gender constraints impact women and their businesses in such a way that they ought to be considered an entirely separate category of productive endeavor. I have realized

that being a woman in highland Guatemala means there are a great number of gender variables at work determining the kinds of businesses women choose, the way they do business, their goals, the skills they could apply, their access to resources, etc. The result is a kind of parallel business universe in which women do business very differently from men.

My point is that women's small businesses cannot afford to be entrepreneurial. Certainly, among the hundreds of women I have encountered in the highlands these past twenty years, there are some genuinely entrepreneurial women who exhibit the risk-taking, creative, hardworking behavior associated with the word "entrepreneur," but they are decidedly few. As elsewhere, when women work in the informal sector in the highlands, their businesses tend to be tiny, severely undercapitalized extensions of the domestic routine. Thus women's businesses feature skills expected in a housewife: they weave, sew, knit, cook, and sell food. These informal sector businesses provide ease of access and a certain flexibility that they believe allows for the efficient combining of productive and reproductive responsibilities. They are operations which afford immediate cash payment for services rendered. Women combine them to maximize their benefits: piecework sewing at night and a spot in the marketplace on Thursdays and Sundays.

The economically vulnerable women running these businesses cannot afford the luxury of long-term planning nor the risks necessary to grow a business. In place of the growth orientation common to men, *Sampedranas* adopt careful, conservative measures that they believe translate into the survival of their business even if this means maintaining it on a very low, stable level. The result is a fragile, barely profitable day-to-day operation. In short, *Sampedranas* work today in order to eat tomorrow.

SECOND FLOOR SHOP LADIES

An example of this strategy is found among the Second Floor Shop Ladies of the old *mercado*. Along one wall are eight small grocery stalls. The women who own these shops (most are in their 50s and 60s) are carrying on the businesses founded by their mothers and grandmothers. These women are relatives and friends who all sell pretty much the same household items (candles, rice, soups, oleo, oil, sugar, etc.) at the same prices. No one undersells anyone else or tries to woo the rare new customer walking down the aisle. In fact, instead of competing, they tend to cooperate and help each other out. Each woman has her regular patrons, but they are becoming fewer and fewer. In fact, the women agree that they are now making about one-third of last year's profit. What with the growing competition in the plaza and the illegal goods from Tapachula, some months they can barely meet their overhead.

3. Second Floor Shop Lady.

On a typical Thursday, each woman sells about Q400 ($66) in goods, but only Q20 ($3.33) of that is pure profit. On nonmarket days, they make only about Q5 (less than a dollar).

These women confirm my suspicions about female entrepreneurship. Business growth and the bottom line are not of concern to the Second Floor Shop Ladies. With or without husbands, what's important to them is that they do enough business to extract food for their tables out of the inventory. If they make a little extra, well, God has blessed them that day. Even with business declining almost to nothing, these women are content running their businesses in this way. They have made some changes when new products have become available to them, but none of them has sought out a more profitable specialty or approach to business that wasn't taught to her by her mother. They agree they will maintain this traditional management style always. The watchword of the Second Floor Shop Ladies is "status quo." They are very frank in saying they cannot afford to take risks. Sometimes, they admit, if you want more, you fail. It is more advisable just to maintain.

New Commercial Options for *Sampedranas*

During the summer of 1997, I spent a considerable amount of time researching two new businesses that have serious implications for women in San Pe-

4. Bayunquera *with Mexican contraband.*

dro. First, there were the women who smuggled consumer products into Guatemala from nearby Mexico. These goods (mostly groceries and household goods like toilet paper, Pepsi, rice, soap, etc.) are purchased at lower prices in Tapachula, Mexico, just two hours away from San Pedro. Bribing a series of border guards as they go, *bayunqueras* bring these items into the country illegally and sell them throughout the region for prices well under the going rate.[12] This allows the smugglers to make a profit on each trip, but normal businesswomen, especially those in the plaza, are dismayed at the devastation it causes to their profit margins.

The other new industry is the retail sale of second-hand clothes, a commercial venture that has offered several hundred locals a real opportunity to get rich. As they have been for years in other Third World countries, cast-off garments from the United States are now the rage in San Pedro. Stores

have opened all over town, some specializing in jackets or shoes, others offering an assortment of clothes and household items. Whatever they sell, these *"Pacas"* have become part of the cultural scene, not only in terms of the clothes, but also in the encouragement of a particularly Western behavior known as "shopping."

Both of these businesses have a certain cachet not characteristic of more traditional women's enterprises. This makes them far better topics of conversation than the price of tomatoes or how to string a loom. Informants couldn't tell me enough about their trips to Mexico or the treasures they had found at the neighborhood *Paca.* At the same time, however, the *bayunqueras* and the *Paca* dealers reflect new, broader socioeconomic threats to women's businesses and their roles as providers in San Pedro. Although they offer some women exciting and challenging income-producing opportunities, each undermines long-standing relations of production and economic expectations developed over the years I have been working in the town.

TAPACHULA: THE BUSINESS OF SMUGGLING

When I first heard that the most popular new female business was smuggling, I imagined Indian women working as drug "mules" stashing cocaine or heroin (opium poppies are grown locally) into their expansive *huipiles* as they crossed over the Mexican border. The truth turned out to be far more mundane. Local women are indeed bringing illicit cargo across the border, but it is back *into* Guatemala from Mexico, and the goods are cases of ordinary household products. The smuggling part comes from the fact that they are not paying the taxes on their purchases, but are bribing the *Guardia de la Hacienda* (border guards) to allow them to slip through border checkpoints with hidden packages.

All this began four years ago when the value of the Mexican peso hit a new low against the Guatemalan quetzal. Until then small amounts of contraband were considered normal, especially in medicines which were far cheaper in Mexico. But now, while some goods are still less expensive in Mexico, it's the currency exchange that makes the difference. In 1997, five hundred quetzales were equal to 650 pesos, while before they were approximately equal. *Sampedranos* quickly exploited the potential for business in nearby Tapachula. The development of local *contrabandistas* was aided by the status of residents of the border state of San Marcos as *fronterisos.* Other Guatemalans need a visa or a passport, which takes more bureaucracy, more time, and more bribes, but *Sampedranos* don't need more than their identity cards to enter Mexico.

This business is not isolated to a few daring entrepreneurial women with

the nerve to take such a risk. In fact, dozens of women travel back and forth from San Pedro to Tapachula on a regular, even daily, basis, and hundreds more make the occasional foray. It's a route to "easy money" for those who know their way around the *Guardia*'s demand for *la mordida.* How much people make depends upon their bankroll, their luck, and their markets once they return. This strategy has evolved quickly in a very few years, so that there are many different ways to be a *bayunquera.* The following addresses only the most common approaches.

First, there are acknowledged, professional, full-time smugglers, some of whom will take orders for wholesale or retail merchandise like clothes, cameras, or machinery. These women live in San Pedro, but many do not even stop there on their way out of Mexico, heading for more lucrative markets elsewhere in the highlands or Guatemala City.

Next are the wholesale food distributors who buy goods to resell to smaller female merchants in the huge San Pedro markets on Thursdays and Sundays. Many of these women go to Tapachula with vegetables to sell there, and come back with such rarities as cases of Pepsi in cans (Pepsi only comes in returnable bottles in Guatemala), or such ordinary Mexican goods as rice, soap, cooking oil, toilet paper, or cookies. People claim that these *bayunqueras* make a Q11,000 (nearly $2000) profit on every trip. Whether this is an exaggeration or not, such a considerable return is likely limited to a handful of women. It is true that there is a huge trade in contraband in the Thursday market. Some plaza women make the trip themselves, but those who do are largely from coastal cities. Locals claim that a *Sampedrana* wouldn't waste her time sitting all day with contraband in the market. Instead, she would resell it quickly in bulk elsewhere and head back to Tapachula for more.

Slightly apart from these resellers are merchants who are stocking their own stores. Ana Miranda, for example, went to Tapachula three times last year to prepare for Christmas business in her children's clothing store. While she thinks it is sad that Guatemala loses this money, she cannot afford to forfeit the profit. In addition, she says it is very difficult and terribly dangerous to go to Guatemala City to purchase inventory. Case in point: last year Ana was coming back from the capital with Q7000 ($1166) worth of merchandise piled in her car. She and her husband stopped briefly on the Interamerican Highway for a Coke, and when they went back to the car, all their goods had been stolen. I asked if they had gone to the police. "No," she responded, "we figured the thieves were probably the police anyway."

Then there are the ordinary citizens or businesspeople who want to make some money during a seasonal lull in their operations or need extra income in a hurry. These are the *Sampedranas* for whom smuggling is an economic

safety valve: better-capitalized folks using their own money for goods and expenses, going back and forth to Tapachula once or twice a week. Determined businesspeople with money to invest can make a 10 percent profit on every trip.[13] Typically, a Q3000 bankroll ($500), handled properly, will yield a Q300 ($50) profit. Clearly, these people are not attempting large-scale hauls, but bring in many small, easy to hide packages. One San José Caben couple made twenty-four trips in three months during their slow season, netting Q7200 ($1200) in the sale of sweaters. They reinvested their profit in a minivan, running a shuttle service to San Pedro.

The most common category of *bayunqueras* are those small scale *comerciantes* from San José Caben who earn about Q1000 ($172) a month for their work, a decent amount locally. During the summer, there are about two dozen women going back and forth on buses, but between October and Christmas, business is so good that the number jumps to eighty or a hundred. These are women who cannot meet their rising expenses by either weaving or selling in the plaza. They supplement whatever home production they have with trips to Mexico. Many women begin by borrowing the cash from a friend or family member (at a standard 10 percent monthly interest), and might initially earn Q70 (not even $12) per trip. Profits generally grow as they learn the ropes.

Of course, ordinary shoppers make the trek to Tapachula to stock up on necessities or just for the fun of a shopping trip. The savings are considerable. For example, beer in San Pedro normally goes for Q22 ($3.65) a six pack or Q19 ($3.15) on sale. In Mexico, the same beer costs 15 pesos (less than $2).

The various investment strategies above are closely tied to a smuggler's mode of transportation. Better capitalized *bayunqueras* drive their own cars, put the goods on the floor or under the children in the backseat, merely honking and waving as they pass *aduanas*. Hired cars or taxis are normally stopped by the *Guardia* to ask what is being brought into the country. The answer is "Only corn flakes and clothes for the kids." One hundred quetzales buys their belief and safe passage.

Those who get the most trouble from the officials are those traders on the Tapachula buses, and this cheap mode of transportation is what local women normally choose. Poorer and more vulnerable than those in cars with husbands or male drivers, they are easy prey for corrupt *Guardia*. Passengers have to answer questions about their goods at least three times on the trip to San Pedro. If they lack the appropriate bribes (average Q75 [$12.50] per trip) for the officials, they lose their purchases. This is especially troubling to women who had to borrow the cash for the trip, but they attempt to make up for their loss by trying again the next day.

Impact of the *Bayunqueras*

Although smuggling can be a source of much-needed income for strapped *Sampedranas* (not to mention the adventure of it all!), it has its downside as well. The impact of the *bayunqueras* has been to seriously threaten the stability of many different kinds of existing businesses in San Pedro. Local shops and stalls selling food, clothes, tools, CDs and tapes, even veterinary supplies, simply cannot compete with the low prices of Mexican goods. Most merchants now understand that they must take part in the hated process just to stay open. They do this by preordering wholesale amounts of goods for their shops or buying individual items in the Thursday plaza for resale in other markets.

Edulina and her family used to live well on the Q3000 ($500) of comestibles (sugar, salt, beans, corn) she sold every day to wholesalers out of the shop. Of that, Q100 was clear profit (3 percent). Now, for the last eight months, she's been selling only Q400 ($67) daily, with only a Q25–30 ($4–5) profit. The main reason for this severe drop is that wholesale buyers are spending their money with *bayunqueras* (e.g., Q60 per hundred pounds vs. Q80 for Guatemalan corn), and Edulina now sells only retail. The profit margin is double that of wholesale, but the Q400 daily volume barely yields a decent income.

In the plaza, it is the same story. Stalls that had been in the same spot for generations have gone under in just the last year or two. Francisca cannot find buyers for her normal wares of rice, beans, noodles, corn, or oil at prices up to Q1 more per pound than any *bayunquera* charges. Furthermore, products that were staples for her can no longer compete, for tastes have changed with the new imported goods. Mexican corn, for example, sells faster than Guatemalan because customers say it has a better flavor. Mexican Mazeca (corn meal) is handier than buying corn in bulk: no firewood, no *nixtamal* (corn boiled in preparation for grinding) to watch, no carrying the corn to the mill, etc. On a typical Thursday in 1997, Francisca sold Q200 ($33) in her plaza stall, down from Q500 a few years before, and a small percentage of her Q1000–1500 Thursday sales in the 1980s.

The government's response to rampant smuggling has not been to catch and punish corrupt border officials, but to attack the small-time *bayunqueras*. The week before I arrived, the *Guardia* teargassed the San Pedro Thursday plaza in order to roust the people selling contraband and seize their products. This terrorized hundreds of innocent residents, shoppers, and *comerciantes,* and did little to discourage determined *controbandistas,* who were back the following Thursday in their same locations.

My sense is that there is little locals can do to stop the Tapachula trade, and most are not really pressing the issue. Although businesspeople are suffering from this wave of clandestine competition, many are adapting by including some of these goods as part of their trading strategy. Indeed, smuggling has proven to be a critical fall-back business for hundreds of women, and consumers certainly benefit. One wonders just what people would do if the government really did crack down on *bayunqueras!*

PACAS: THE SECOND-HAND CLOTHING BUSINESS

In the 1980s, I wrote that modernization and the high price of *traje* were pushing women away from wearing clothes that identified them as old-fashioned, traditional, or indigenous. Instead, they were donning what I've since labeled "Kmart specials," i.e., flimsy polyester or cotton dresses, blouses, and skirts quickly sewn up by local dressmakers. In many ways this was a dismaying transition. It marked the further entry of San Pedro into the global market economy, and at the same time signaled the erosion of the female production base. On a more personal level, I found the new clothing options ordinary, cheap, and unattractive, especially when compared with the gorgeous, delicate handiwork of the *huipil* and *corte.* My investigations had proven that although it cost more initially, *traje* was a better investment (Carlsen 1997). Traditional woven garments lasted longer, especially when clothes were washed with harsh soap on rocks or in cement sinks. So, in terms of work, practicality, and aesthetics, the choice of "Kmart specials" was hard to comprehend. It took me months of fieldwork and years of socio-economic analysis to understand the implications and motives of the turn away from *traje.*

When I returned to San Pedro in 1997, however, the new move to *Paca* clothing was a flagrant, obvious, easy-to-understand fact of life.[14] On any day, mountains of very affordable, well-made used clothes were being moved into stores named after *pacas,* the 1,000-lb. bales in which the goods were packed for shipment. The suppliers of these goods are middle-class (and, from a look at the labels, wealthy) Americans whose cast-offs are exported to Guatemala from the U.S.[15] Since American affluence translates into a constant seasonal turnover in fashions, the supply of last year's garments is steady.

While the finest second-hand clothes (the "A" classification) are not shipped to San Pedro due to their higher price tag, the "B" *pacas* are still full of goodies. In only ten minutes' search through the various piles in one *Paca* I found a bridesmaid dress (dark blue), four Notre Dame sweatshirts, a Har-

ris tweed jacket, Liz Claiborne pants, Polo pullovers, a pair of Levi's with bleach spots, Wranglers for Women, Gap turtlenecks, a practically new sweater from Jones New York, Dockers shorts, a brand new DKNY skirt with the tag still on, a tan Bill Blass jacket, a brightly colored Carole Little silk sweatshirt, two L.L. Bean wool sweaters, a Bloomingdale's pink cotton sweater, a jean jacket with warm pile lining, and a canvas book bag from Doubleday.

The allure of clothes like these (and the hundreds of brands I didn't recognize) is palpable, and hours before shops open a new *paca* bale, hordes of people line up to get into the shops. *Pacas* are omnipresent; they are found on every commercial street in San Pedro, sometimes two or three to a block. Most of them are tiny, dark storefronts on side streets, but successful merchants have expanded into larger and better-situated locations. The buyers are of two kinds: the first is the ordinary shopper, most of whom have a garment or two in mind when they come in. Some go from shop to shop asking, "Do you have any warm jackets?" or, "Are there any children's shoes this week?" These are the retail customers who might spend a dollar or two at a time.

More central to the success of the *Pacas* are the wholesale buyers, the *mayoristas.* They spend several hundred dollars on Thursday market days buying dozens of pieces for resale in rural communities or even in Mexico. Customers tend to be loyal, and it is especially important for *Paca* owners to develop good relationships with their *mayoristas* so that they can count on those large sales every market day.

My personal introduction to *Pacas* came on the first day of my visit when it turned out to be windy and colder than I had remembered for June. I lamented my absentmindedness, as I had lived in this town before and knew there had been nowhere to shop for a warm sweater or a jacket. "Oh, that's easily remedied," replied my friend Angélica. "Let's just go across the street to Doña Nedia's *Paca.*" I was skeptical, but off we went. Sure enough, there in the *Paca* were piles of sweaters and racks of jackets, all with familiar American brands, most in good condition. I fished out a Gap wool sweater quite similar to one in my own closet at home, paid my Q3 (50 cents), and stayed warm for the rest of my fieldwork.

Paca Basics

I quickly learned that *Pacas* were a well-established fact of life in San Pedro. This extremely visible, popular business intrigued me, and I spent time learn-

ing as much about them as I could. It wasn't just the irony of finding my own clothes on the backs of people anthropologists consider exotic "others." I was immediately convinced that embedded in *Pacas* are many of the central socio-economic realities of both the town I had studied before and its newer 1990s incarnation.

In the first place, *Pacas* fit into my restudy because more than half the town's *Paca* owners are female, and women also manage many of the *Pacas* held by their spouses. Most of these women are young, high-school educated locals. *Pacas* have become a very clear expression of how educated *Sampedranas* have redirected their professional goals toward the town's signature economy—commerce. Many chose the *Paca* route when they could not find jobs with degrees as teachers, accountants, or nurses. Others worked at those jobs for a while, but found the salaries or the distant rural assignments unsatisfactory. They did not opt for plaza sales or market stalls even though most of them learned those businesses at their mothers' sides as children. Instead, they leveraged their own budding entrepreneurism, putting it together with their parents' confidence in them, and financed this new, modern business mostly with family money. Clearly, investment in a *Paca* is an accepted avenue for a young, educated woman, and it had the cachet of being American, modern, and quickly profitable.[16]

While *Pacas* seem very "cutting edge," in many ways they represent the persistence of a decidedly female way of doing business. Doña Yolanda, for example, defers to her husband on business decisions although they work in side-by-side storefront *Pacas,* each doing the same retail routine all day long. Like most female *comerciantes,* every day Yolanda extracts what she needs from her cash drawer to buy food, but little else. While this expense money might be considered Yolanda's salary, it is strictly dedicated to household expenses. She has no other money of her own, and at the end of each day, she gives her husband the money which he takes to the bank. She explains this by saying she's just "helping" her husband, despite the fact that the *Paca* had been started and then shared by the two of them.

At the other extreme of this model of female conservatism are the female *Paca* owners who, while not making much money, are independent and mobile businesswomen. Doña Julieta is a legendary entrepreneur who owns two of her own *Pacas* in San Pedro and two in coastal towns. She buys thirty *pacas* a week in Guatemala City, selling six in her shops and wholesaling the rest. I believe that one of the secrets of Doña Julieta's success is that she is unmarried. There is no need for her to oversee a household, and, in fact, constant business travel means she is seldom at home. She has hired help to run her San Pedro stores and to cover all the childcare needs of her newborn

5. *Owner of a* "Paca" *used clothing store.*

baby. In short, being unencumbered by a demanding spouse means Doña Julieta can completely devote herself to making money.

A few *Pacas* opened for business about ten years ago, but beginning in 1991 the number of stores began to mushroom. Today, there are more than fifty full-time *Pacas,* plus a number of them which come and go in the plaza on any Thursday. The basics of the business are fairly standard. The *pacas* (bundles of clothes) weigh about one thousand pounds and cost about Q4000 ($666) each. Shop owners open one *paca* every Thursday when they know that customers will be pouring into town for the weekly market. Most owners purchase their *pacas* from one of three local wholesalers who buy dozens of bales in Guatemala City, then truck them to San Pedro. Each *paca* contains two to three thousand pieces. The prices are consistent, and no allowance is made for brand names or fashion. All skirts go for Q6, for example. By the

following Tuesday, the inventory has been picked over. The *saldos,* or left-overs, are sold to one of a handful of men from Xela who pay about Q800 ($135) for what usually amounts to half a *paca.*

Pacas started out being very profitable, but as more and more second-hand clothing shops have opened, owners are making less. In a normal month, the sale of one *paca* a week nets about Q1600 profit ($265), a figure that compares quite favorably to monthly salaries of Q290 for a nurse or Q800 for a beginning teacher. In fact, the *Paca* bottom line of about Q400 per *paca* looks even better for women when you take into account that it represents a 10 percent net profit (after rent, utilities, workers, and even the *gasto* is taken out of the *Paca* cash box).

The *Paca* Impact

Over the last few years, *pacas* have seriously undermined women's clothing businesses already vulnerable to the inroads of modernization and tighter budgets. Weavers have lost many of their few remaining *Sampedrana* and *aldea* customers as women abandon their *huipiles* for much cheaper *Paca* blouses. *Cortes* are still worn by traditional women, but more and more they prefer combining them with *Paca* tops, t-shirts, and blouses. Even machine-embroidered *blusas,* a popular alternative to *huipiles* in the '80s, are expensive (approximately $20) compared to the cost of less than a dollar for a blouse from the *Paca.*

But it is not only the traditional operations that are impacted by inexpensive used clothes from America. Machine sweater-makers report that their home businesses, already on the wane because they couldn't compete with sweater factories, are now completely dead due to *Pacas.* Retail stores specializing in baby's and children's clothes have lost half their business where nearly new outfits for kids arrive in the *pacas* at a fraction of the cost. Women who sell fabric for clothes ("Kmart specials") are hanging on by a thread only because of customers who sew their own dresses or blouses, but seamstresses can barely afford to keep their doors open.[17] I originally described these *costureras* as a growth industry that was taking off as women switched from *huipiles* to cheap dresses, but now even their comparatively affordable prices are less attractive.

Paca Customers

It seems that everyone in town shops at the *Pacas.* Shoppers know what they want. Teenagers are regular customers, and their new suburban U.S. look is due in large part to careful consideration of the *Paca*'s brand-name

clothes they recognize from TV and magazines. Well-off and educated locals regularly search the piles for quality merchandise not normally for sale anywhere in Guatemala. In fact, the *Pacas* have become quite a habit for many consumers—mostly women—who might drop in a few times a week just to look. Status-conscious housewives, shop-owners, and businesswomen, however, rarely buy clothes in the *Pacas* because they would be embarrassed to acknowledge that they are buying second-hand. If they are passing by, they might stop in to ask for towels that can be turned into mops, but little else. Meanwhile, when I admired the sweater worn by my good friend, the English-speaking doctor, he proudly announced *"Paca!"* as if to say, "I got such a deal!"

If the *Paca* customer base is variable, there is little doubt that those who have benefited the most from good-quality used clothes are not the wealthy doctors, but the poor *campesinos.* Rural people can now purchase clothes that make work and day-to-day life easier and more comfortable. For the first time in their history, geographically isolated highland Indians can take advantage of the textile industry's scientific innovations, even utilitarian space-age garments. A young *aldeaño* shopper told me his prize possession was his L.L. Bean Polartec vest which he wore against the winter chill at 9,000 feet. Yes, it was somewhat ratty when he bought it at the *Paca* for $2, but it certainly did the trick in a household without a fireplace, where even blankets are scarce.

I counted ten Mam-speaking men in one *Paca* buying jeans or shirts for themselves and baby clothes for their children. They were from several far *aldeas* and had come to town—without their wives—to buy and sell in the market. Each one had some items in mind when he came in and knew what he could afford to spend. Clearly, they had been in *Pacas* before. One young man carried a *Jurassic Park* canvas bag, and another sported a fashionable mauve Polo t-shirt.

I was fascinated by a toothless old man whose pants had been mended many times before. Over and over, he examined a pair of Levi's, measuring the waistband around his neck to approximate his size. These pants—hardly worn—were of such sturdy denim that I thought they would likely last the rest of his life. Finally, he approached the owner and began to negotiate in earnest for the jeans. She had a price in mind and stuck to it for a minute or two, seemingly ignoring his efforts to bargain. In the end, she took his money with a grin when he quietly asked if he could please have them for Q7 ($1.25), because at that price he would still have his bus fare home.

Although many traditional women have taken to wearing modern *Paca* clothes in combination with *cortes,* some have abandoned *traje* entirely for

American garments. I could identify these women as Maya because even in their western garb, like most Indian women, they still wear their hair in one long braid and carry their babies in papooselike sheets on their backs. In that sense, they are maintaining the outward signs of their ethnicity. Their clothes, however, express none of that history. Again, I wondered, does this decision to abandon *traje* emerge from economic exigencies and the availability of alternative clothing? Or is it a more complicated turn away from an indigenous way of life?

A few hard-learned rules of clothing and ornament still apply. For example, most poor women *de traje* have two, or at the most, three *huipiles:* one for work, one for church or fiestas. Although *Paca* clothes are cheap, *aldea* women still only own one or two blouses which they wear until they disintegrate in the washing. Thus, you will see a woman in the same clothes day after day. Some women still own *huipiles,* but they only put them on for special occasions.

Women may occasionally buy *Paca* blouses or sweaters for themselves, but their children's clothing needs are far more pressing. Indian women spend a long time going through the piles of children's shirts, pants, dresses, and shoes. Maybe they will only purchase one item after a twenty-minute search, but the effort suggests the importance of the choosing. Clearly, theirs are children for whom indigenous clothing is not to be.

In sum, my observation of the *Paca* phenomenon demonstrates that as far as dress is concerned, the inroads of modernization and the pressures of stretching one's income have finally reached beyond the changing town to San Pedro's far *aldeas.* Until quite recently, indigenous identity and traditional rural way of life had been the crucial determinants of their dress. Now, I watched as women dressed themselves and their daughters in western clothes whose meaning was derivative and foreign. Pushed away from *huipiles* by the high prices and pulled into the *Pacas* by the low cost and high quality of the product, they were abandoning *traje* before my very eyes.

A Last Word

In this revised edition of *Silent Looms,* I want to welcome old and new readers to San Pedro Sacatepéquez, San Marcos, Guatemala. Looking back on what I have observed over twenty years, I am confident that what I wrote in the first edition of the book applies equally to women in the 1970s and to women today. Although specific economic scenarios have been somewhat transformed, I believe that *Silent Looms* continues to be an honest assessment

of the problems women face when development undermines traditional productive and reproductive strategies or adaptations.

The last paragraph of *Silent Looms* is an optimistic scan of San Pedro's future where I suggested that women could be incorporated into the development process if they were more integrated into profitable external markets and businesses. This has not happened, and I was naïve to think that somehow it might. Unequal gender relations have persisted, denying most women a chance to benefit from the possibilities of modernization. The traditional foothold of female family businesses has ended in San Pedro, replaced with little more than minimally sustainable jobs or commercial ventures. Daughters who once supported women's enterprises by their labor are in school or struggling on their own to make a living in so-called modern occupations. Thus, women of all ages continue to find themselves on the margins of change, working on their own but without the skills, opportunity, or time to engage in potentially beneficial endeavors. Although new businesses like *Pacas* or Tapachula smuggling may appear to have promise as income-producing opportunities for some women, we have seen how both have far broader and potentially serious negative repercussions.

Since 1977, I have personally examined issues of gender and development not only in San Pedro Sacatepéquez, but also in San Antonio Palopó, Guatemala, San José, Costa Rica, and in Denver, Colorado. In each setting, I have focused on women whose productive efforts are circumscribed by their relegation to the domestic arena which severely constrains them as potential players in the wider business world. It is a daunting challenge for women to try to juggle production and reproduction, and although more and more women are participating in income-producing jobs and businesses, domestic responsibility means few realize the economic benefits accruing to men. As such, female participation in decision-making at the household and community levels is seriously diminished, thereby cutting short any attempt at establishing gender equality.

In the end, the question that emerges from this research is whether "women's work" must, by definition, be merely dead-end, labor-intensive extensions of housework. What kind of economic transformation would have to occur for *Sampedranas* to be pulled and/or pushed out of the house in significant numbers? I am not necessarily advocating the introduction of *maquilas,* where job opportunity is usually translated into exploitative labor conditions. Instead, I am wondering whether there is anything inherently valuable about "traditional" female businesses. New work and new relations of production can emerge that better serve women's needs. The challenge is to

change the structure of production and the sexual division of labor so as to afford women the chance to take advantage of these new activities.

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May 1999

Notes

1. All names used in this introduction are pseudonyms.

2. Although Richard Smith and I approach women and development from quite different perspectives, I clearly remain in his debt for first turning me in that direction.

3. Guided by this philosophy, in 1983 I gained sixteen pounds in eight months of fieldwork in Iowa where I was studying female farmers.

4. In 1987, I paid a visit to the military base in San Marcos to announce my presence in the town. The presidency of Vinicio Cerezo provided a façade of peace, but the army was still a force to be reckoned with. Although anthropologists were returning to Guatemala, we had to consider the safety of informants. In my case, I did not want to arouse any suspicion about my purposes, so I decided to be perfectly straightforward with the military as to why I was in town, a plan my *Sampedrano* friends thought would be advisable. I went to the base to present my credentials from the University of Denver, the City of Denver, and (via my representative, David Skaggs) the Congress of the United States. I confess to being nervous around so many guns, but mostly I was frightened of confronting the reality of the military presence. The experience ended up being a model of my own gender analysis of Guatemala. The *comandante* interviewed me in a room filled with personal souvenirs and photos of him doing active counterinsurgency in the region. But war wasn't on his mind. He used the visible evidence of his own masculinity to ask me to dinner. Meanwhile, I was trying my best to be as inconsequential as possible, explaining that all I was doing there was studying textiles and women weavers. In my nervousness, I forgot my speech about the value of social science in a changing world. Instead, I folded my hands and tried to look like a boring academic. Then, when he stopped talking (and puffing on his cigar) long enough to afford me the opportunity to speak, I made my excuses about dinner, saying I would, of course, be back. Then I got out of his office and off the base as fast as I could.

5. In an amazing series of events, the social chaos of the highlands became all too real to me during this fieldwork. For weeks, stories of lawlessness in the countryside dominated the papers. They had a common thread: despairing of ever finding justice or even a fair hearing for their complaints, citizens of small Mayan communities had taken the law into their own hands. Suspected trespassers, criminals, and thieves were being handcuffed, flogged, and even executed. Towns were demanding legal sovereignty (i.e., their own courts) for indigenous conflicts and crimes, a concept that confounded the chaotic, corrupt Guatemalan justice system. The odd word *"linchamiento"* told the whole story.

The shocking account of such an action in San Antonio Palopó (my second field site) awakened me to the urgency of these appeals.

The first TV news story said that three thieves had been caught by the locals about midnight. They had handcuffed them, but two ran away. A crowd gathered and set the last one on fire by pouring gasoline on him and striking a match. The next day, I saw the photo of the charred cadaver on the front page of the *Prensa* and realized, much to my horror and surprise, that the thief was a local! He was wearing the Tuneco *traje!* I recognized many faces standing around this victim of the *linchamiento.* They had burned alive one of their own.

It turned out the "thieves" were just drunken teenagers who had fallen from their barstools into the neighbor's patio below. Apparently, the resident had a long-standing grudge against these boys whom he suspected of robbing him earlier. In fact, the town had drawn up a list of local incorrigibles for the state authorities, and these young men were on it. Nothing had been done to stem the alarming tide of juvenile insubordination and crime. Angry and alarmed by this, the crowd made an example out of this wayward teen. They knew the police weren't going to do anything. Not only were there too few officers to cover petty crimes like theft, but criminals could escape punishment by paying off authorities anywhere along the line. People were frustrated enough to take the law into their own hands.

6. But these municipal figures underestimate the growth of fundamentalism considering that evangelical churches often spring up around self-proclaimed pastors who hold worship services in their homes without specifically signifying them as "churches."

7. My own attempts to even meet with a pastor (to whom I had an introduction from his sister) were stonewalled by his secretary. After grilling me about my own religious affiliation, she kept me waiting for more than an hour and then, without explanation, abruptly cancelled the meeting.

8. This troublesome trend toward indulgent middle-class status is clearly not applicable to everyone in the *municipalidad,* since only a third of the total population of approximately 73,000 lives in the city. Survival strategies that were true almost everywhere twenty years ago persist in the *aldeas.* For example, a 1996 study done by the city shows that, on the average, *aldea* children start working at age nine. Even thirty minutes from town, fifty percent of kitchens have dirt floors, eighty percent of births take place in the house, and forty-five percent of women over fifteen are illiterate, compared to fifteen percent female illiteracy in the *centro.* Still, forty-one percent of rural people own televisions, and in the three nearest *aldeas,* between fifty and eighty percent of households are viewers.

9. As to whether the *Paca* business (see below) will undermine the Santa Teresa weaving endeavors, we shall have to wait to determine.

10. Actually, Lucinda must be in her store to buy product. When her busy season begins in November, she must have at least one thousand *cortes* in inventory, so she needed to be available to weavers delivering their goods.

11. Lucinda's term for these rural women was *"amarillos,"* a term I found somewhat disparaging. She was referring to their traditionally yellow *cortes,* but I had never heard this word used to describe rural Indians. My sense of a class-based prejudice against those still living a traditional life was strong in this store as well as in other shops run by

educated people two generations or less from *traje.* For example, one afternoon I witnessed Lucinda's helper taunting a poor old woman interested in buying a simple cotton *corte.* The helper started by calling the woman *"abuelita,"* a personal diminutive term, to which the woman responded, "I'm *not* your grandmother! In fact, I'm a señorita and I don't have any children!" This made the young woman howl with laughter and only increased her delight in tormenting this customer. Oblivious, the woman asked to see some other *cortes,* but she was not to be accommodated. Only this one was right for her! This disrespect continued as the helper and a nearby friend teased the woman about the quality of the prospective purchase, insisting it was silk, when clearly it was not. The woman finally got fed up and fled, followed down the aisle by the mean-spirited laughter of the two young women.

12. My best information on the origin of this word is that it has been associated with low-status *comerciantes* or businessmen from El Salvador.

13. Good businesses in San Pedro can normally turn a profit of between eight and twelve percent. However, women's businesses are used to making quite a bit less, e.g., three percent. Thus, it is easy to understand the lure of the *frontera* and its easy money.

14. The term *"paca"* has two references. One is the bale of clothing itself *(paca).* The other is the store where the clothes are sold *(Paca).*

15. According to a *Los Angeles Times* report (Wilson 1997), there are more than one hundred used clothing dealers in U.S. port cities who have created a multimillion-dollar business exporting discarded or slightly damaged garments. Up to sixty percent of clothes donated to agencies like the Salvation Army and Goodwill are, in fact, sold to these middlemen who in 1996 sent 481 million pounds of second-hand clothes to Third World countries. In some areas, used clothes account for more than one-third of all clothing purchased (Haggblade 1990), and the trade is growing. The total value of used clothes traded internationally has risen from $229 million in 1984 to $782 million in 1993 (Bigsten and Wicks 1996), seventy percent of which takes place in Third World countries. According to Wilson's figures, Guatemala ranks tenth in the world in amount spent in the used-clothing trade ($1.53 million), and fifth in the world in metric tons of clothes imported.

16. One unanswered question about *Pacas* is why, in this overwhelmingly Catholic town, about half the owners are members of evangelical churches. Other scholars have written of the affinity of Guatemalan *evangélicos* for business (Annis 1987), but I believe the explanation lies neither in the Protestant work ethic nor in a new moral order, but in social status and word of mouth. *Pacas* are clearly an entrepreneurial niche that satisfies the search of many evangelicals for an economic expression of the social mobility suggested by their church membership. *Paca* ownership has spread to fellow church members through mutual support networks. In many ways, it is the same kind of pattern that explains why fifty percent of *Paca* owners have relatives in the same business.

17. The same is true of *sastres,* or tailors. Pants from the *Paca* cost about Q7 ($1.25) plus some small alteration, versus Q15–30 ($2.50–5.00) a yard for fabric and Q25 ($4.15) for labor at the tailor's shop.

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