Poor women's activities and politics in urban Brazil.

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POOR WOMEN'S ACTIVITIES AND POLITICS IN URBAN BRAZIL

by

Amy K. Soulliere

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1996

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the everyday lives of poor women in urban Brazil through an analysis of their narratives found in existing documents. The fundamental question for this thesis is whether or not their activities can be considered political and to what extent these women can be considered influential political actors who challenge existing social relations.

The analysis, which puts women’s voices at the centre of the research is done within the theoretical framework of new social movement theory and women’s movement literature. Because these theories prove to be valuable for only certain aspects of this project, Conger Lind’s theory on the politicization of basic needs is utilized in an attempt to better understand the activities of poor women.

In order to facilitate the analysis, poor women are subcategorized into two groups named "no-income women" and "working women". What becomes apparent is that no-income women have refused to accept the middle class view of their lives and have politically negotiated a space to permit a construction of reality based on their own experiences. No-income women are found to be political actors, however, not influential ones. The possibility of them challenging social relations, however, does exist and may become evident if power relations in Brazil shift.

The analysis found that neighbouring working women often participate in borrowing and lending in order to find a temporary solution to their economic problems. However, given the external constraints on these women (gaining access to food, water and shelter, husbands forbidding their participation in groups and police take-overs of meeting spaces), the environment within Brazil is not very conducive to the successful development of viable neighbourhood associations or women’s groups. These working women can therefore be seen as potentially more influential as political actors than no-income women, but it should be noted that it is still extremely difficult for these women to transform their identities into strategies that will constituted significant political power.
Many people have helped me over the last several years in order to complete this thesis. I would like to thank my committee for their patience and contributions to this project. I would especially like to thank Dr. Lynne Phillips for all of her assistance. By constantly challenging me to re-examine my old ideas as the research process continued, Lynne showed me that this project did contribute to a new understanding at times when I felt I had "nothing" to contribute. Undoubtedly, without her support and understanding, this thesis may never have been completed.

I would also like to thank my parents whose unfailing support and encouragement made completion of this thesis easier. My father worked, without complaint, for years in his office amongst piles of my books and papers surrounding him and my mother proved to be a valuable editor. Special thanks is due to my mother for going above and beyond the encouragement needed by a mom. She read every book and journal article I used in this research project in order to give me feedback which led to a better understand my research question. There were many late nights and early mornings reading all of my drafts so her contribution can not go unnoticed.

And finally, to my husband Michael, who often gave me the extra little push to keep going and who has proven to be a
constant source of love, support and motivation. In perhaps the busiest time of our lives, he took responsibility for many of the things that needed to be done in order for me to write. His own personal sacrifices that he made in order to see this project completed should not be overlooked and I will always be grateful for his inspiration.
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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

"I've been thinking that if this diary ever gets published, it's going to make a lot of people angry. (Carolina Maria de Jesus 1962, 87)"

1. The Problem

Through an analysis of published documents, this thesis examines the everyday lives of poor women in urban Brazil. Since the defeat of the military government in 1985, Brazil has been in a slow transition period which has seen the implementation of democratic reforms. This transition is called abertura by Brazilians, meaning a democratic opening and political awakening (Scheppe-Hughes 1992, 15). The fundamental question for this thesis is whether poor women's activities in urban Brazil can be considered (or have become) political in this context. This question is important for two reasons: 1) we can assess the role that such activities may play in the democratization of Brazil and 2) we can explore how poor women's activities relate to feminist projects. I argue in this thesis that by adopting a more inclusive definition of the "political", women's practical interests do not have to be "transformed" (as researchers such as Molyneux (1985) and Alvarez (1990) would not have to be "transformed" (as researchers such as Molyneux (1985) and Alvarez (1990) would

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1 The term poor will be used interchangeably throughout the first four chapters of this thesis with the phrase "low-income" to describe the women being studied. The term "poor" is problematic because of the cultural and social connotations attached to its meaning (i.e. being pitiful). In Chapter Five I make a further distinction between the women I initially call "poor" or "low-income" women.
have it) in order to constitute a feminist political practice. Typically the term "political" is used to refer to formal organization, that is, referring to one's concern with government or one's allegiance to a political party. In this thesis however, a definition of "political" that refers to informal activities will be utilized, one that allows me to view poor women's lives as important politically because of the ability of their activities to influence and change poor women's lives.

Jaquette (1994,3) argues that the notion that there are women's movements and feminist movements in Latin America which need to be recognized and respected in their own terms, remains foreign to most feminists in advanced countries. In order to avoid the pitfall of ethnocentrism, an understanding of Brazil's low-income women as political actors is sought through an analysis of their experiences, accessed through their narratives (see Methodology section in Chapter 1), to determine whether they challenge existing social relations. This analysis, which puts these women's voices at the centre of the research, is done within the theoretical framework of new social movement theory (below) and the women's movement literature (Chapter Four). These theories prove to be valuable for only certain aspects of this project, therefore, Conger Lind's theory (1992) on the politicization of basic needs is utilized in an attempt to better understand the activities of poor women.
2. New Social Movement Literature

There is now a considerable literature on "new social movements" (Adam 1993; Calderon, Piscitelli, and Reyna 1992; Escobar 1992; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Evers 1985). Escobar and Alvarez (1992) maintain that what is "new" about new social movement approaches is the recognition that societies are shaped by the plurality of struggles. What we have, states Escobar (1992,65), is:

a landscape of identities, the "illiterate," the "landless peasants," "women bypassed by development," the "hungry and malnourished," "those belonging to the informal sector," "urban marginals," and so forth -- all of them created by the development discourse and catalogued among the many abnormalities that development would treat and reform through appropriate "interventions."

New social movement theory encompasses a broad range of actors: from squatters to ecological groups, from popular kitchens in poor neighbourhoods to socialist feminist groups, from human rights to gay and lesbian coalitions (Escobar and Alvarez 1992,2). Habermas (cited in Adam 1993,321) claims that the purpose of new social movement mobilization is primarily one of defining and restoring endangered ways of life, namely addressing issues of quality of life, equal rights, individual self-realization, participation, and human rights.

What is also valuable in the social movement's argument, for my purposes, is the consideration of social
actors' relations to the state. What new social movement theory provides for, in the examination of Brazilian low-income women's activities, is the recognition that people can be political without being directly involved with political parties or the state, and new types of political activity can be observed. Escobar and Alvarez (1992,10) maintain that the emphasis is on the autonomy of new social actors vis-a-vis more conventional political arenas, such as political parties and the state, and this therefore allows one to explore new ways of viewing women's activities in contrast to older class definitions revolving primarily around economic dimensions and state restructuring (such as Marxism's distinction between those who own the means of production, the bourgeoisie, and those who do not, the proletariat).

This is not to say that there is no relationship between these social actors and political structures. Adam (1993,326) states that:

new social movements do address political economy and the state. These movements act toward the state both defensively -- in protesting police violence, fending off state intervention in community affairs and asserting the right to control one's own body, and offensively in demanding human rights' guarantees, social benefits, domestic partners' rights, wheelchair accessibility or environmental regulations.

My position is that new social movement theory, when used as a tool of analysis, needs to be situated within the
political economy of the state. It is for this reason that Chapter Two of this thesis focuses on the political economy of Brazil.

Although it is critical to examine a given political economy, it is also important to determine how some social actors may experience the polity differently than others. By combining the arguments of Escobar and Alvarez (1992) and Adam (1993), I hope to contribute to an understanding of low-income women’s place and articulation in social movements, by considering both the political economy and the autonomy of social actors.

One reason that various groups may experience politics differently is because of variations in the realm of everyday life. Many authors contend that it is from the terrain of daily life that many of today’s forms of protest emerge; it is in everyday life that people exert their action and influence (Escobar and Alvarez 1992,4). This argument complements the attempts by new social movements’ theorists to redefine or broaden what "political" means, particularly with Latin American case studies. Evers (1985,46) points out:

The efforts of the military dictatorships to suppress politics, closing down on the traditional channels of political articulation had the counterproductive effect of politicising the primary expressions of social life such as housing, consumption, popular culture and religion.
New social movement theory's emphasis on the everyday life as political allows me to study the political nature of poor women's activities in urban Brazil. In this sense, examining how these women's activities on a grassroots level are articulated with or challenge the Brazilian state contributes to our understanding of the political potential of these women's activities. What appears to be lacking in new social movement theory, for my purposes, are the fine instruments needed to analyze these poor women's activities. Therefore I also find it important to employ an additional theory, provided by Molyneux (1985).

3. Politicization of Basic Needs

Maxine Molyneux (1985) argues, that a distinction must be made between women's "strategic gender interests" and "practical gender interests" in Latin America. Strategic gender interests, she argues, are those which arise from an analysis of women's subordination and challenge gender subordination. The latter, arise out of women's concrete circumstances and they do not challenge gender subordination. These "practical gender interests" must be transformed to be politically effective (see Chapter Four). Using this framework, it would appear that poor women in Brazil, have only "practical gender interests". To the degree to which they collectively mobilize around the basic
needs that they have identified such as food and water, their groups and organizations would also be characterized by Alvarez (1990) as "feminine groups" rather than feminist groups. Feminist groups, according to Alvarez, focus on issues specific to the female condition rather than on basic needs. Such an approach implies that until these women generate "strategic gender interests" they are effectively not political. By dividing women's interests into the two exclusive groups of "practical gender interests" and "strategic gender interests", Molyneux denies that activities revolving around the basic needs of subsistence can be political activities. Are basic needs political or is it necessary to transform women’s practical interests into strategic ones? As seen in Chapter 4, the theory provided by Molyneux (1985) is not very helpful for my purposes and therefore I use Conger Lind's theoretical framework as a guide to explore this question when considering the activities of Brazil's low-income women.

Conger Lind (1992) attempted to use Molyneux's (1985) theory on strategic and practical gender interests in order to understand the activities of poor women in Ecuador. What she found, however, is that the distinctions made by Molyneux were not adequate when trying to understand the political nature of these activities. As a result, Conger Lind developed a theoretical framework that examines activities as political practices which challenge existing
social relations.

Conger Lind’s (1992) theoretical framework is most helpful when utilized as a series of questions about the activities of low-income women and whether these activities ultimately challenge existing social relations. For my purposes, I schematized these questions (see Diagram 1) to allow for ease when trying to analyze the women’s narratives found in Chapter 5. Her inquiries encompass the concerns of collective reproductive work; organizing to alleviate burdens; consciousness-raising groups; and whether or not poor women have critical perspectives of the world in which they live. Conger Lind’s argument is that if the activities of women include the collectivization of work and/or organizing around basic needs, then these activities can be examined as a kind of political practice which may influence their lives.

Conger Lind (1992, 135) outlines the importance of collectivization of reproductive work and claims that power relations are manifested in the everyday sphere. She argues that it is through the collectivization of reproductive work, at the neighbourhood level, that women can become further politicized on issues pertaining to gender identity and subjectivity. Conger Lind contends that poor women in urban areas often base their politics on a certain set of "needs" derived from their perceived reproductive roles and that as women discover inequalities in their living
DIAGRAM 1
Conger Lind's Theoretical Framework

Is there collectivization of reproductive work?

↓ No                               ↓ No
why not                           why not

↓ Yes                               ↓ Yes
how does it look                    what ways

Do women organize to alleviate their burdens?

↓ No                               ↓ No
why not                           why not

↓ Yes                               ↓ Yes
what does it look like             what does it look like

Do women participate in consciousness raising groups?

↓ No                               ↓ No
why not                           why not

↓ Yes                               ↓ Yes

Do these women have critical perspectives on the world in which they live?

↓ No                               ↓ No
why not                           why not

↓ Yes                               ↓ Yes
a) Does this include reflection on political authorities?

↓ No                               ↓ No

↓ Yes                               ↓ Yes
b) Do their ideas coincide with middle class women but articulated differently?

→ CHALLENGING SOCIAL RELATIONS
situations they choose to organize with other women to:

1. Alleviate their burdens as women, mothers and providers for the families.
2. Gain strength in numbers thereby becoming an influential political group.

Conger Lind argues that the politicization of "basic needs" demonstrates the ways in which such "needs" can become much more than just the desire for bread and water and can challenge dominant representations of gender; a critical appraisal of these representations can be incorporated into their politics (1992,144). The consequence is that the women, while alleviating their burdens, create a new identity for themselves and this affects the subsequent organizing strategies used. She further argues that the new ways of organizing themselves, based around women's "basic needs", ultimately present a challenge to the social organization of society.

Conger Lind also considers women's participation in consciousness raising groups and looks at the participation in these groups as a possibility for how women do challenge existing social relations (regardless of whether or not they are involved in the collectivization of work). For example, if women are found to be attending arts and crafts workshops to develop a skill and, during these meetings discuss their lives as women, wives and mothers, the division between practical and strategic interests collapses.

Another way poor women challenge social relations,
according to Conger Lind, is through their expression of critical perspectives on the world in which they live, perspectives which may include reflection on political authorities. It is also helpful when considering whether poor women critically view their world to see if their ideas coincide with middle class women and are simply articulated differently. Conger Lind argues that although poor women in Ecuador may articulate their views differently, when examined more closely, these women are in harmony with middle class women’s views on issues such as reproduction, domestic work, wage employment and formal politics.

Throughout Conger Lind’s theoretical framework, one finds the use of concepts such as women’s "groups" and "organizations" which may lead one to envision large numbers of women within a membership that is organized in a formal way. This is not the case, however. For example, Conger Lind (1992,146) states that the Centro Femenino 8 de Marzo has helped to organize three other local groups, all of which are small groups (four to ten women) that hold discussions and sometimes arts and crafts workshops. Therefore, the number of women within a group organizing to alleviate burdens does not have to be large in order to challenge the social relations at home and in society. Conger Lind’s framework is considered a useful one for this thesis and will be applied in the analysis of women’s narratives in Chapter Six.
4. Abertura: A Kind of Democracy Within Brazil

The shift to democracy within Latin America has been given considerable weight by social scientists. But one must question whether or not the end of the military rule has meant the end of oppressive political strategies in Brazil. There is some concern that a narrow concept of democracy is being promoted which does not hold much hope for large segments of the population (Phillips 1992). More specifically, consideration about whether the shift to democracy is parliamentary or participatory democracy challenges researchers to take a more critical view of abertura within Brazil. This debate is important for our analysis of the kinds of constraints still shaping poor women's activities in Brazil.

Schepers-Hughes (1992,226) suggests that a different notion of democracy exists in Brazil:

We tend to think of the Western political traditions and concepts of democracy, citizenship and the modern state, as well as the necessary preconditions for their existence as universally shared among modern nations. But the concepts of democracy, equality, and civil society may have very specific and different cultural and historical referents. In Brazil, the political traditions of republican democracy and equality have always been mediated by traditional notions of hierarchy and change.

Democratic reforms are ostensibly being made in Brazil that
bring about change but the history of a long military rule still haunts it.

Alvarez (1990,14) argues that it depends on one’s perspective whether or not radical change will occur. Most analyses of the processes of democratization focus on the shifting alliances among those sectors of the ruling classes represented within the military authoritarian regimes and the emergence of a hegemonic moderate opposition (usually elite-based) among the forces within political society that challenged authoritarianism during the 1970s and early 1980s. However, she argues that these foci are not adequate. One needs to look to other forms of collective behaviour that could lead to significant change. Alvarez claims that the existence of social groups, including women, the poor, and people of colour, which were quintessentially excluded from the pact of domination under authoritarian rule, provided the elite opposition with an organizational base that could be mobilized in favour of democracy (1990,14-5).

Given this pattern, researchers such as Alvarez (1990), Scheper-Hughes (1992) and Gay (1990) argue for a redefinition of democracy and politics within Brazil. More specifically Gay (1990,458) claims:

There is evidence that new forms of collective organization will make an important contribution to the shaping of the political consciousness of the popular classes, not solely in terms of the more radical working class, or intellectual middle
class movements associated with the PT (Worker Party). For example, neighbourhood associations have become successful in severing the association between politics and patronage, between the resolution of personal or local issues and votes.

Schepers-Hughes also looks to the history of collective associations in Brazil, as a possibility of mobilizing a new form of collective action in Brazil other than reliance on the Workers Party. She says (1992,221) that:

The Brazilian state has been thrown into considerable turmoil in recent years by the democratic awakenings of previously excluded and alienated populations to new forms of political praxis and mobilization in the proliferation of highly politicized shantytown associations, mother clubs, squatters unions, rural workers defense leagues and so on.

Therefore there seem to be numerous places to look for a new understanding of the type of democracy Brazil seems to be developing.

On the other hand, one cannot help but question how these new forms of collective organization can exist given the existing oppressive conditions and continued state terrorism. Is there really a new political consciousness of the popular classes? Although this question is not explicitly addressed in this thesis, the skepticism it reflects is an issue which may relate to the extent poor women are willing to explicitly criticize the state.
5. Poor Women in Urban Brazil

My central question for this thesis focuses on the activities of poor, urban women. Poor women are part of a constituency often referred to as the "invisible" or "marginal" population (Kirby and McKenna 1989; Berger Gluck and Patai 1991; Patai 1988, 1993; Schepet-Hughes 1992) and this study contributes to an understanding of this marginal population.

For poor populations, the majority of economic activities women perform are directly related to satisfying family consumption and reproductive needs (Merrick and Schmink 1983, 245). It is important to see how poor, urban women of Brazil get access to adequate shelter, food and water, or what may be called the basic needs of subsistence. Because of the amount of time and energy it takes these women to simply fulfil the needs of subsistence, many of them do not work within the formal market economy (Fonseca 1986; Merrick and Schmink 1983; Schmink 1984).

Also related to an analysis of the woman's activities is whether they live in a male-headed household. Women who are the head of their households tend not to have access to the main government-sponsored health programs, do not enrol their children in school, and are forced to rely on unpredictable sources of incomes from as many members of the family as possible (Merrick and Schmink 1984).
In this study the everyday lives of these women are examined in terms of their attempts to provide shelter, food and water. We see that the scope of these women's activities is different depending on whether they are the heads of their households or not. How these women themselves problematize their needs is of primary interest to me. I expected to classify women’s narratives based on how they problematize their survival strategies and originally thought that there would be two main ways that these women would account for their lack of access to necessary resources. One orientation would be to attribute their problems to external sources, such as development models, multi-national corporations, the state, or employers. By blaming some external source, these women would be making a political statement in so far as they would not be blaming themselves for either not working hard enough or not deserving access to resources. Personalizing blame or internalized blame is the second way I expected these women to problematize their daily lives. As the narratives in Chapter 5 demonstrate, this second orientation was never evident, mostly likely because the extreme poverty these women face results in the use all of their resources such as time and energy to meet the needs of subsistence. Therefore, these women perhaps would respond that they are doing all within their power to improve their conditions.

Since all of the women included in this study pointed
to some external "other" for their problems, I attempted to discern instead, through the women's narratives, what solutions they put forth to alleviate their burdens. Does a gap exist between the solutions these women put forth and the actions they did take in order to challenge those they felt were responsible for their problems?

In order to analyze the narratives of low-income, urban women in Brazil, I first consider whether there are any needs or problems arising from their daily activities. How these women problematize their needs by blaming external sources is then determined. I find that these women do in fact politicize their needs and it is important to understand this point if we are to assess whether actions being taken by these women might challenge or pressure the sources of their problems or even stretch the parameters for a new democratic Brazil.

6. Methodology

My chosen methodology of a qualitative analysis of existing documents permits me to explore the activities of Brazil's low-income women in relation to new social movement and political economy research, and to synthesize the prevailing arguments with what the subjects of the research themselves are saying.

Listening to what low-income Brazilian women say about
their experiences is crucial in order for the analysis of their activities to be meaningful. Borland (1991) points out the dilemma of "authority" and claims:

On one hand we seek to empower the women we work with by revaluing their perspectives, their lives and their art in a world that has systematically ignored or trivialized women’s culture. On the other, we hold an explicitly political vision that our field collaborators, many of whom do not consider themselves feminists, may not recognize as valid.

Borland’s declaration has implications for my thesis because it is possible that my interpretation of what these women are saying may be different than what they "actually" meant. This certainly raises methodological questions.

By relying on existing research, I am forced to work within the parameters already established by other researchers. Not only am I analysing the women’s narratives, but I am doing so from narratives already edited to some degree by initial analysts.

What becomes problematic therefore is whether my initial sources took measures to reflect the women’s voices as accurately as possible. Even though the importance of incorporating women’s words is sometimes overshadowed by the way those words were collected, edited and then presented, one can not overlook the contribution of life stories in research. Phillips (1990, 100) argues that when life stories are gathered in a self-critical way, such stories can be an
excellent vehicle for highlighting the tension between how
the research and the researched order their daily lives,
thus compelling researchers to confront and question their
own assumptions.

The qualitative research method I employ uses an
analysis of existing literature and documents. The
advantage of choosing this method is that it allows me to
gain access to Brazil’s low income women’s voices, and
connect them with new social movement and political economy
research without doing considerable field-research in
Brazil.

In order to examine different women’s experiences, I
use women’s narratives provided by de Jesus (1962), Scheper-
Hughes (1992), Patai (1993) and Pires de Rio Caldeira

Carolina Maria de Jesus’s diary entitled Beyond All
Pity was first published in 1960. This narrative provides,
for my purposes, an historical account of life in a favela
from 1955-1959. In order to keep herself from thinking
about her troubles, Carolina started to write:

"anything and everything, for when I was writing I
was in a golden palace, with crystal windows and
silver chandeliers. My dress was finest satin and
diamonds sat shining in my black hair. Then I put
away my book and the smells came in through the
rotting walls and rats ran over my feet. My satin
turned to rags and the only things shining in my
hair were lice (1962,15)."

Carolina’s diary outlines the horrific conditions under
which she and her children lived. Her daily activities revolve around getting water for the household from a bacteria filled river and scavenging through garbage in the hopes of finding scraps of food or paper to sell.

This diary, composed entirely by Carolina, provides a basis from which other narratives will be examined. The burdens of everyday life in 1955, as demonstrated in Beyond All Pity, will be compared to those of the 1990s to determine whether the same burdens exist.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) has conducted research in Brazil periodically since 1965. Special attention has been given to the "short, violent and hungry lives" (1992,xii) of Brazilian women. In writings resulting from this field research, Scheper-Hughes includes comprehensive quotes and interview selections in an attempt to express and preserve Brazilian voices. Her ethnography Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil provides narratives of many low-income women who comment on life in the favelas in the 1990s.

Daphne Patai (1988,1993), a literary critic, has also conducted years of research in Brazil. For my purposes, Patai's book Brazilian Women Speak: Contemporary Live Stories is helpful for gaining access to interviews that were presented in the women's own words. Patai (1993,3) notes that the purpose of the work was to "put their words into a book."
These sources, in combination with work by Pires de Rio Caldeira (1990) whose work is most helpful when looking at women's organizations and Christian Based Communities (CEBs), are to be used to illustrate what poor women's concerns are in Brazil.

The materials I use are restricted to English only. Much of the research in the area has been translated from Portuguese or Spanish. I did not at any time throughout my research encounter an article that needed to be translated because most were available in both English and Portuguese.

Throughout my research I attempted to exercise tactics outlined by Kirby and McKenna (1989). Methods from the margins are grounded in the following assumptions:

- knowledge is socially constructed
- social interactions form the basis of social knowledge
- different people experience the world differently
- because they have different experiences, people have different knowledge
- differences in power have resulted in the commodification of knowledge and a monopoly on knowledge production. (Kirby and McKenna 1989,65)

It is important for me, as a researcher, to understand and recognize that my own experiences and world view are rooted in my socio-economic background and that this background may influence how I approach the research. The actuality of being a white, university educated, middle-class woman has provided me with a set of biases that are almost impossible
to escape. However, I feel that this problem was minimized because I took some measures to account for these experiences and world view. I re-examined my old ideas as the research progressed -- a process called layering (Kirby and McKenna 1989)\(^2\). By re-examining my old ideas and research processes, I attempted to account for biases that occurred, and at times, this process allowed me to alter how I approached certain questions. In addition, ongoing dialogue with my thesis chair aided in the process of layering and helped me account for my "conceptual baggage".

This thesis therefore examines poor women in urban Brazil as potential political actors. To summarize the structure of this thesis, women's various work activities and economic positions are discussed in Chapter Three. The history of Brazilian women's participation in social movements is provided in Chapter Four, a chapter which focuses on how researchers have ignored issues of class and, in fact, have trivialized the activities of poor women. What the everyday life activities of these women include are provided through use of their narratives in Chapter 5, and how they politicize their basic needs is examined in Chapter

\(^2\)Throughout the research process I used the techniques outlined by Kirby and McKenna (1989) but what I found was that the detailed process of layering and attempting to account for myself in the research process became extremely time consuming and really a project unto itself. Also, how to integrate my research with my journals and notes which demonstrate these techniques was problem therefore specific reference to the use of "methods from the margins" is not explicitly stated elsewhere in this thesis even though the methods were valuable for this project.
6. As I have argued, an analysis of the everyday experiences of low-income women in urban Brazil would be incomplete without an understanding of the political economy of Brazil. For this reason, the following chapter, Chapter Two, examines the economic and political history of Brazil.
CHAPTER TWO

The Changing Political Economy of Brazil

"In the first place, I think the military should leave. And the country’s foreign debt should be paid off. Everything should be done to make that possible ... while instead they’re borrowing more money all the time without being able to repay it. That’s why there’s so much hunger. The regime has got to end. I detest the military. They are the most insensitive, gross, stupid people. (Glicia as cited in Patai 1993,162-3)."

In 1995, foreign investors are touting Brazil as a most exciting emerging market, a market that should be heavily invested in to gain, what the Bank of Montreal (1995,29) calls, "superior long-term capital growth". It is not only the Bank of Montreal encouraging such investment. Trimark Mutual Funds, Fidelity Investments Canada and the Toronto Dominion Bank have all recommended that Canadians maximize their investment returns through buying into Emerging Market or Latin American Mutual Funds.

Trimark Mutual Funds boasted of a 16.7% annual rate of return as of September, 1994 for its Americas Fund which invests heavily in Brazilian companies such as Brasmotor and Telecomunicacoes Brasileiras (1994a,11). Trimark states that Brazil is a favourable investment because of its successful debt reduction program and that the fears that investors of the mid-1980s had are gone because restructuring has brought debt to a manageable level (see table 1).
1. Brazil's Economy: Pre World War II

This current advice from Canadian investment firms seems to deny the long history of turmoil that Brazil has witnessed through colonialism, the military regime and the slow transition to democracy that have resulted in perpetual economic crises.

The perception that the current crisis in Latin America is linked to changes since the Second World War, although not inaccurate, does not provide the entire picture. An examination of the events leading up to the industrialization period in Brazil, that is, the economic
model adopted immediately following the declaration of independence from European colonizers, can help one further understand the current crisis.

Clapham (1985,13) argues that what was distinctive about colonialism in the Americas was the brutality with which it destroyed the indigenous Amerindian societies and that this destruction made possible the imposition of European-oriented economies. Like most other Latin American countries colonized by either the Spaniards or Portuguese, Brazil presented a marvellous potential for economic gain. How it differed, however, was through a relatively early declaration of independence in 1822 by Portuguese Prince Pedro I and the particular direction of economic development that followed with subsequent governments.

Two fundamental problems faced the new independent elites of Brazil (Cammack, Pool and Tordoff 1988,31). The first was how to restore order and reassert their authority in the wake of gaining independence and the second was to organize production for export. The elite saw the rapid development of the export economy as the key to prosperity. The organization of production geared to export saw the development of huge sugar plantations (engenhos) and a powerful national alliance of elites from these two sectors.

The approach of adopting an export-based economy was one that Cammack, Pool and Tordoff (1988) claim had serious drawbacks because it condemned the majority of the
population to a level of exploitation which threatened stability in the longer term. In particular, the expansion of Brazil's export economy was accomplished through the destruction of peasant communities. Scheper-Hughes (1992,37) also supports the argument that the export-economy drastically affected the peasant communities and notes that the labour shortage that existed with the creation of the plantations also resulted in the trapping of indigenous Indians for forced service.

By the beginning of the twentieth century in Brazil, the rapid deterioration of land led to the development of new, larger plantations. When an engenho became run down and dilapidated, it was common for its owner to simply abandon that site for a new one (Scheper-Hughes 1992,42). As this transition to new plantations occurred and new lands were feverishly cleared, slave labour slowly gave way to wage labour. Scheper-Hughes (1992,42) notes that most of the large plantations had a large number of poor squatters. These were impoverished freeman (acculturated Indians, mulattos and free blacks) who, in exchange for the right to clear a small piece of land, built a hut, and cultivated a garden or orchard, worked on certain days for the senhor de engenho for free or for a nominal wage. Thus, a reserve labour force was created that turned out to be crucial in the transition from slave to wage labour because newly freed slaves simply became indentured squatters and share croppers.
who could be hired for a wage labour when needed (Schepers-Hughes 1992,42-3).

The first profound economic depression struck Brazil in 1930. During this depression, Brazil's export revenues were reduced by 50 to 80 per cent, resulting in a sharp fall in the GNP, and as Cammack, Pool and Tordoff (1988,62) argue, had an impact on the nature of Brazil's relations with the international export economy. Foreign exchange revenues were also seriously depleted which resulted in a national economic crisis.

This economic crisis left Brazil in a state of political instability, and disputes began to occur between the old elites (plantation owners) and new political and economic forces. The new elites that arose during the 1940s and 1950s were considered "populists" (Cammack, Pool and Tordoff 1988). These populists are best understood as an explicit contrast to the old export-centred elites because of their combined emphasis on "import-substituting" industrialization based upon the local manufacture of the most easily produced of foreign imported goods (textiles, processed foods and beverages), and complementary state investment in selected infrastructural and heavy industrial projects (Cammack, Pool and Tordoff 1988,65).

In Brazil, states Gay (1990,450), the exposure of what was essentially a primary product economy to the effects of this form of capitalist competition resulted in a more
limited industrialization and the early growth of the state as an institutional actor. The result was populism and clientelism, directed by the elites, a result that is still in effect today.

Political clientelism is quite common within Latin American countries. A political form of clientelism still occurs primarily between actors of different social classes or statuses, but the exchange relationship tends to be highly transactional and economistic; instead of a set of mutual obligations binding the two parties together, political clientelism involves the exchange of the vote in return for the provision of, or promise of, specific goods and wealth (Gay 1990,450). Given the extreme social inequality in Brazil, as noted by Kottak (1992) and many others, it is not difficult to conceive why political clientelism may continue today.

With the industrialization pushed forward by the new elites, one can see the beginnings of mass urbanization. This mass urbanization occurred primarily because land was needed for the building of new industries, and people were "pushed" off their lands and "pulled" into the city centres. Worsley (1984,176) points out that this rapid urban growth is not just a post-Second World War phenomenon, and that a boom town like Sao Jose dos Camapos, grew by 75,000 (an example in the extreme) in less than a decade in the early 1940s . What characterized the urban expansion in the 1960s
was the need to create temporary housing which saw thousands of immigrants crowded into areas that often had no access to water or electricity and more often than not, they became permanent residents there when people failed to find the jobs in the formal sector they expected.

2. The Military and Foreign Investment: Post World War II

The beginning of manufacturing that was initiated by the "populists" was successful in creating temporary economic stability. As development proceeded, however, and particularly as Multi-National Corporations (MNC) began to invest on a large scale (in the 1940s), Brazil became a victim of its own success. Cammack, Pool and Tordoff (1988,64) claim that

given the unequal distribution of wealth and the widespread poverty, such goods as cars and domestic appliances were available only to a small proportion of the population and, at the same time, the introduction of their manufacture required large capital investments, and drew domestic manufacturers into complementary sectors where start up costs were high.

The trend, therefore, in Brazil came to be a concentration of investment in both the private and state sectors. The resulting political crisis between the populist leaders and civilian opponents (those excluded from the benefits provided from the populist government, who were unable
themselves to generate an electorally viable alternative) created the groundwork for the emergence of the military regime's rise to power.

The industrial growth that was initiated by the populist leaders was carried through in full by the military government which held power in Brazil from 1964-1985. The industrialization period was dubbed "the Economic Miracle" by the military because, as Skidmore (1989,7) points out, while the economy was booming with a growth rate of fourteen percent (viewed by some as an economic "miracle"), Brazil seemed to be the model for many seeking the secret to economic growth in the Third World. The economic results of this path of development, however, were a soaring cost of living and rising inflation rates.

A key result of the regime's economic policies was a further concentration of wealth into the hands of a few. In 1976 the top one per cent of Brazilians had a larger share of the total national income than the bottom 50 per cent, and in 1980, a third of the Brazilians had incomes below the minimum needed for family subsistence (Kottak 1992,173). Worsley (1984,206) states that in 1984 the richest 10 per cent continued to receive 54 per cent of all the income, leaving only 9.7 per cent to be shared by half the population.

With the distribution of wealth being so great, it was in the interests of the military regime to focus on any sign
of working class prosperity and to promote it as representative of all workers. For example, the number of households with refrigerators and televisions increased from 1960 - 1978 and these numbers were used by the dictatorship as a sign of the "miracle" working (Worsley 1984,204).

Worsley points out, however, that only 35 million people in a working population of 80 million received more than the minimum wage. The purchasing power of the minimum wage can be estimated to be extremely low when it is realized that even the elite workers got a tenth of the pay their US, Swedish, Belgian, Dutch or German counterparts would have received for the same work (Worsley 1984,204).

As mentioned previously, with the mass urbanization of Brazil came the development of shantytowns or favelas as people attempted to find temporary shelter immigrating to the cities in search of work. As more people sought work in the cities the favelas grew. For example, where there had only been three favelas in the ABCD industrial triangle (located in the greater Sao Paulo area) fifteen years earlier, by 1980 there were 184 with 200,000 inhabitants, most of them employees of Volkswagen, Brastemp, Scania-Vabis and Mercedes-Benz (Worsley 1984,204). Even if people did manage to locate employment in the developing industries, their wages would not be sufficient to meet all of their basic needs of subsistence and to allow them to move out of the favelas. Thus, the social costs of the "Economic
Miracle" launched by the regime were very high.

Most of the industrialization that occurred after the military regime came to power was funded through foreign investment. There was no lack of countries eager to invest in Brazil with what seemed like few strings attached and a promise from the military government that political opposition would be non-existent (Bacha and Malan 1989).

Alvarez (1990,8) argues that to ensure the goals of this new capitalist pact of development, the political opposition was crushed. This argument is put forth by Garreton (1986,73) who claims that the regime's utopia involved the eradication of politics altogether, or, at least, the constitution of a political system with very limited participation and no alternatives for change. The repression was cleverly accompanied by high levels of violence. As Schepers-Hughes (1992,223) points out, throughout the years of the dictatorship, military police officers were heavily implicated in the disappearances, tortures, and deaths of suspected subversives.

What gave the regime legitimacy, however, was that the performance of the economy from 1968 - 1973 was rather impressive when measured by conventional indicators. According to Bacha and Malan, Brazil during this time had:

a) an average annual rate of GDP of over 11 percent in real terms;
b) an average rate of inflation of around 20 per cent slightly declining over the period and partially neutralized by widespread indexing; and

c) overall surpluses in the running at rates over and above those required to finance Brazil's secular current account deficit, leading to a simultaneous accumulation of reserves (from $199 million at year-end 1967 to $6,417 million at the end of 1973) and gross foreign debt (from $3,344 million in December 1967 to $12,572 million at the end of 1973) (Bacha and Malan 1989,123).

The prosperity and assurance felt by the military regime were soon in jeopardy, however. In early 1974 the first oil shock came, and the beginnings of another depression set in. Because of debt, the regime became somewhat pressured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to change the course of development. As a result, the Geisel administration, inaugurated in March 1974, introduced some structural adjustments but increased foreign borrowing in an attempt to "ride out" the recession (Bacha and Malan 1989,125). The Geisel administration was able to continue some of its projects already initiated during the economic boom, as well as to revive the import-substituting strategy used in 1930. Bacha and Malan (1989, 125) argue that the idea of the need to increase net exports was seen to be the only long-term solution to the real adjustment imposed by the oil shock, and the further growth of external debt was thought to be a temporary price to pay for the financing of this adjustment over time (Bacha and Malan 1989,125).

However, when the second oil shock came and the
international interest rates sky-rocketed, Brazil was thrown into a financial crisis. At this time inflation, which was kept in the 35-40 per cent range from 1974 to 1978, rose to 77 percent in 1979 and to 110 per cent in 1980 (Bacha and Malan 1989,128).

International lending continued throughout 1981 even though Brazil's debt continued to escalate. Its total debt at the end of 1981 was, according to Bacha and Malan (1989,129), around $ 80 billion, more than one-fourth of the total GDP, and nearly three and a half times the value of 1981 exports ($ 23.3 billion), two-thirds of which was required for paying amortization and interest costs (which reached $ 15.4 billion in 1981).

The history of increased international lending continued into 1982; bankers could not seem to resist extending further credit until the vulnerability of the Brazilian economy could no longer be ignored. In October of 1982, Brazil was in a state of economic emergency and began negotiations with the IMF and the United States. Aid came from the United States in the form of a $ 1.4 billion "trade loan" from the U.S. Treasury, another $ 500 million "bridge loan" from the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), commercial banks arranging another $ 2.3 billion "bridge loan" (thanks to the cajoling of U.S. Treasury Officials), and a Brazilian mid-term loan arrangement with the IMF, (Bacha and Malan 1989,132). But again the aid provided
only led to further debt and further appeals from the Brazilian regime for more aid. Negotiations began again in December of 1982 with the IMF resulting in the IMF outlining strict conditions and a funding plan that was linked to major banks' approval of further Brazilian request for funds.

Eventually, during 1983, austerity measures were forced upon Brazil. On the Brazilian side, politically the most spectacular consequence was the passage by Congress of a new wage law, in which the growth of average wages was reduced from some 100 percent to about 86 percent of the inflation rate (Bacha and Malan 1989,134). This and other measures introduced during the economic crisis were hard felt by Brazilians and existing political parties such as the Workers' Party (PT) and Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMBD) began to question the authoritarian rule of the military regime.

3. Abertura and Economic Life

The political parties' questioning of the authoritarian rule, in combination with the previously discussed economic crisis, resulted in a process of liberalization called abertura, or political opening. Although having the appearance of still gaining some support, the popularity of the military government suffered due to its inability to
change the political situation that had existed since 1964.

An alliance between business and labour was created in the early 1980's which resulted in the military dictatorship stepping down in 1985 (after two long decades) and the election of Tancredo Neves. Neves died on the eve of his inauguration, leaving vice-president elect Jose Sarney to assume the presidency and return Brazil to a country with a full democracy.

Ten years later the new democratic government had failed to bring about significant changes in people's standards of living (Bava and Mullahy 1993). Osiel (1983,218) claims that for every authoritarian restriction abandoned, a new one was often added its place. Also, there is evidence that the state-directed terrorism that characterized the period of military dictatorship has continued since the transition to democracy. Scheper-Hughes (1992,222) claims that:

"civil police, appointed by the local politicians, often collaborate with hired gunmen in the employ of the plantation estate owners and sometimes participate themselves in the operations of the "death squads," and a widespread and pernicious form of police "moonlighting" in Brazil."

This situation of state-based terrorism has not, therefore, ended with the transition to democracy.
4. Living Conditions

Schepers-Hughes (1992) outlines the horrific conditions under which the vast majority of the Brazilian population live. In her work in the community of Bom Jesus² she shows that expectations surrounding abertura were high. She states (1992, 92):

People trusted that the new democratic state government would finally begin to attend to the long neglected and pressuring needs of the município for a clean and adequate water supply, improved health services, public housing, jobs and a generally raised standard of living. But the years from 1984-1988 only saw a worsening of the crisis brought about in part by a severe drought and in part by the financial chaos resulting from Brazil's international debt.

Thus, living conditions within the favelas continues to worsen despite the return of civilian government. Millions of people live within the favelas, often in ramshackle houses perched upon mountains of garbage which is often sifted through in search of food or items to sell (de Jesus 1965, Schepers-Hughes 1992, Bava and Mullahy 1993).

These mounds of garbage contaminate water supplies, attract rodents and other vermin and spread bacteria which results in illness. Also, Bava and Mullahy (1993, 15-16) point out that the garbage depositories are the source of a

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² This is a pseudonym created by Schepers-Hughes in an attempt to protect the identity of the community.
new kind of illness - that produced by exposure to toxic materials - and that children have been found playing with radioactive waste discarded from hospital labs.

Most of the people living under these conditions are faced daily with the struggles of survival, without clean water, sewers or electricity, conditions which result in sickness, hunger and death. As Bava and Mullahy describe their situation, the "fortunate" ones are those with jobs, who each morning, pour down the hillsides and wind their way around the towering garbage pile to wait for an overcrowded, overpriced bus, that, if they are lucky, will take them within walking distance of their destination and not to another wait for a connecting bus (Bava and Mullahy 1993,13).

The reference to the "fortunate" ones who have jobs makes one question the degree to which employment is available to people who live within the favelas. The rate of Brazilian women's employment and the sectors of employment within which women work will be the focus of the next chapter in an attempt to flesh out just what economic opportunities do exist.
CHAPTER THREE

Economic Structure and Women's Work in Brazil

"I hate this begging for money, for medicines, for food, this scavenging everywhere for tiny handouts so I can somehow embroider one day to the next. I have worked all my life. I do whatever is necessary. Do you think I like asking for money. You who have the conscience for the poor, tell me Nanci, what else am I supposed to do? Biu, cited in Scheper-Hughes 1992,120)"

In the previous chapter I outlined the course of development that the Brazilian government took, which resulted in the concentration of wealth into the hands of a few. The percentage of GNP accruing to the poorest 50 percent of the population fell from 17.71 percent in 1960, to 14.91 percent in 1970, to 11.6 percent in 1976, while the richest 5 percent of the population reaped the benefits of this income concentration; by 1976 they controlled 39 percent of the country’s wealth (Alvarez 1990,44). This concentration of wealth was primarily achieved through the Economic Miracle period, a period which saw manufacturing for exports increase dramatically. This enormous accumulation of riches was concentrated in Metropolitan Sao Paulo and by 1980, this area accounted for 46 percent of the total industrial wages paid in the country, 40 percent of the total value of manufacturing industries and capital investments in industry and 24 percent of the Gross National
Product (Kowarick 1985,75). This form of economic
development that Brazil has pursued undoubtedly has
influenced the class structure of Brazil and the employment
opportunities available for women.

While capitalist development in Brazil has increased
dependence on monetary income for the purchase of goods and
services, this process has generated a market structure that
excludes large segments of the population (Schmink 1984,88).
Not only does capitalism exclude large segments of the
population as "unskilled", but it excludes women,
particularly working class women, from the labour force
(Safa 1977,126).

It is difficult to determine exactly what the rate of
participation of women in the Brazilian labour force is,
because of the lack of adequate data (Meuller 1983; Cammack,
Pool and Tordoff 1988; Safa 1977; Merrick and Schmink 1983;
Saffioti 1983). Issues of race have been virtually ignored
when looking at occupational and class status. Telles
(1992,111) says that despite the large number of studies
done in Brazil on marginality and the informal sector, this
literature has neglected race on the assumption that it is
irrelevant to economic analysis. The argument, claims
Telles (1992,111), is that modern capitalist employers
select employees on the basis of a candidate's
qualifications and productivity; hence, hiring tends to be
colour blind and if non-white workers do not receive
benefits of formal sector jobs, it is because they have low levels of education. Race therefore is not seen, by most researchers, to be an important factor when examining employment in Brazil. This neglect makes it impossible for me to access information on race that would benefit my research.

However, from the scant data available, I will look more closely at gender as a factor in employment patterns in an attempt to describe the occupational and wage-labour opportunities in Brazil and more specifically to see how social class contributes to women's work activities.

1. Women's Paid Employment

Even though conventional employment statistics in developing countries, including Brazil, fail to accurately report women's work, wage rates and earnings (Meuller 1983; Warring 1988), there are some reports on women's rate of participation in the labour force. Safa (1977,131) for instance points out that the rapid industrialization that took place during the Miracle Years failed to increase the percentage of women employed in the industrial labour force while the percentage of men doubled. Thus, the rate of participation of women is not as high as one may have predicted given the economic plan Brazil adopted. While women account for 52.8 percent of the population over 15,
only 15.7 percent of them are involved in the labour market (Saffioti, 151). As well, the rate of economic participation is influenced by class status. Alvarez (1990, 51) maintains that some middle class women saw their families' standard of living increase during the years of the Economic Miracle and that it was middle class women who were trained to become the white collar and professional workers in the rapidly growing State bureaucracy. Elite, well educated women have been entering the labour force in greater numbers, particularly in white collar employment, while the employment picture for working class women has remained stagnant (Safa 1977, 133).

There are two factors which contributed to the ease with which middle class women were absorbed into the bureaucracy of the State. First is their access to education and training. Between 1969-1975 alone, the numbers of women attending Brazilian universities increased five fold, the number of women enrolled in master's programs rose 336.8 percent between 1971 and 1975, and there was a 400 percent increase in women earning Ph. D.'s during the same period (Alvarez 1990, 51). Access to educational opportunities has remained highly elitist. Poor and working class Brazilians seldom reach the upper echelons of the educational hierarchy. Second, middle class women have the support of domestic servants and child care facilities. Thus, as researchers show (Aguiar 1975; Alvarez 1990), the
expansion of educational and employment opportunities that were available to white, middle-class women was accompanied by the expansion of the tertiary or service sector (see table 2) which became the principal source of employment for poor and working-class women. While the middle-class woman has the maid to do the housekeeping, the lower-class woman does double work; she must go to her job to earn more money for the family and, at the same time, face the arduous duties of her own household (Saffioti, 157).

There are several possible sources of household income. The schema of Youssef and Hetler (1983,239) provides a starting point for examining work activities in general, and women’s work in Brazil in particular. Income is categorized as coming from four sources:

1. **Income of Household Head**: derived from wage employment and/or self employment;
2. **Income of Resident household members**: derived from wage employment and/or self-employment;
3. **Remittances**: derived from absent spouse and/or children;
4. **In-Kind Income and/or Services**: derived from local nonresident kin (excluding remittances).

This delineation looks specifically at wage employment and is useful for my purposes because it provides a standard by which to measure variations in women’s work. However, as we will see in chapter five, restricting sources of survival to wage labour alone may not be adequate to describe how people have ensured their own and their family’s survival.
Table 2: Most Common Occupations for Females by Labour Market Sector: Metropolitan Areas in Brazil, 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
<th>Percentage Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office aide</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor and dressmaker</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesworker</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Teacher</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonregistered nurse</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washer, ironer</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping Crate Worker</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office manager</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luncheonette tender</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the fact that Brazil is now eighth on the list of capitalist countries in terms of industrial output, wages (when compared with other industrialized societies) are exceedingly low (Kowarick 1985, 74). Alvarez (1990, 44) points out that during the Economic Miracle, the real value of the minimum wage dropped steadily, falling to approximately 80 percent of its 1963 value by 1971 (see table 3). Not only did the value of the minimum wage decrease during the Miracle years, a worker was now required to work double the hours in order to earn enough for the

\(^3\)Aguiar 1980, 121.
essential staple consumption. Kowarick (1985, 76) points out that the employee who earned minimum wage in 1981 had to work 84.35 hours longer per month to acquire the same essential staples as the worker who received the minimum wage 22 years ago.

The importance of the decreasing value of the minimum wage is magnified when one considers that most women in Brazil receive less than the minimum wage. For example, Saffioti (1983, 157) found in her sample of an urban centre that 71.2 percent of women received less than the minimum wage. Even the highest status female jobs, such as school teaching, are extremely low-paying, despite the relatively large investment in education they require. Women’s earnings rise much less with education than do men’s so that salary differences between the two sexes increase systematically with women’s educational levels (Merrick and Schmink 1983, 250).

It becomes obvious then that wages are not enough to ensure that subsistence needs are met for large segments of the work force and that other strategies must compliment wage labour. Schmink (1984, 90) claims there are nonmonetary inputs from domestic work and from inter-household exchanges and that such activities, most notably in poor households, help to substitute for purchased goods and services and to diversify social resources. Moreover, these nonmonetary strategies are therefore important to consider as well when
Table 3: Evolution of the Minimum Wages and Work Hours Required to Earn the Essential Staple Consumption in the Municipality of Sao Paulo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Real average minimum annual wage (Index)</th>
<th>Time Required to earn the essential staple consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>83.96</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>93.36</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>85.24</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>75.02</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>77.42</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>74.35</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>63.65</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>60.31</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>58.92</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>56.70</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>57.70</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>55.22</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>54.24</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>49.70</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>45.60</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>47.60</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>47.33</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>49.32</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>50.79</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>51.26</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>52.10</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>52.94</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>46.23</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1959 = index 100)

looking at work activities. Jelin (1983, 132) found that, in the examination of urban household economies in Salvador Brazil, 63.3% of women over 18 years of age are not gainfully employed.

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*Kowarick 1985, 77.*
These statistics become even more alarming when one considers the number of women-headed households in Brazil. It is difficult to determine the effect of increases in the number of households headed by females on the overall level of poverty in Brazil. Paes de Barros (1992, 209) reports that in 1985 only one-third of Brazilian families were nuclear families, that is, husband-wife families with or without children. Therefore, many of the households in Brazil are headed by women. Households headed by women are usually responsible for child care as well as the financial maintenance of the household in the absence of a male-breadwinner (Merrick and Schmink 1983, 246). Also, in the absence of a male wage earner, the woman often will turn to her children in order to supplement the household's income. In 1976, a survey suggested that 25 million children between 10 - 14 were working to supplement family income, of whom 68 percent were working more than 40 hours a week (Beecham and Eidenham 1987, 13).

The result, therefore, is that women often attempt to enter the labour force because of an economic need rather than an intrinsic need, or because they "like to work". For the 91 percent of working women who were interviewed by Saffioti (155), the main reason to enter the job market was economic necessity (they must share the responsibilities of family maintenance), only 9 percent do so because they enjoy work.
Neuhouser (1989, 693-4) points out that even though women may engage in paid labour due to necessity, they do derive the benefits of diminished economic dependence on a spouse and an knowledge of the urban environment: its labour markets, bureaucracies and commerce. However, despite these benefits, one must consider that overall, women have less access to basic services. For example, women are less likely to have access to the main government-sponsored health program, Instituto Nacional de Previdencia Social (INPS); are less likely to turn to a pharmacist and more likely to resort to a friend or relative or ritual curer; and are less likely to have children registered in school, citing financial problems as the reason (Merrick and Schmink 1985, 265).

When discussing the concept of poor women and their work activities, it is interesting to note that Scheper-Hughes (1992, 84) found that among themselves the poor make finer distinctions, subdividing themselves into the working classes, the respectable and the disreputable poor and the "beyond the pale" under-under classes.

The "os pobres" or the poor were distinguished as having the entire family working to supplement household income and are seen to be financially independent. The "os pobres" or the respectable poor do not have check books or borrow money, strive to pay cash for every item and are generally employed in the city (85). The next division is
the "probrezinhos" or the truly poor. These people are characterized as seasonal workers who rely on temporary work when available. And, at the bottom of the social ranks are the "probetoes" or "the truly wretched ones" (85) who often resort to begging and live hand to mouth in order to survive.

These distinctions outline the way social classes are defined by poor Brazilians; they affect the way the kinds of work activities in which women of these classes become involved. For example, it was noted by Schepet Hughes (1992,85) that the truly poor women will often wash clothes or work in the homes of the rich in a temporary fashion in order to supplement the household income.

The occupation of the paid domestic worker includes nearly one quarter of all female jobs in Brazil, fully three times the next most common occupation, that of office aide (Telles 1992,120). Women therefore find themselves using their domestic skills in order to earn money. Schepet-Hughes (1992,16) notes that in Bom Jesus:

Many women worked as lavadieras, taking in the dirty laundry of the middle class and even working class families who were able to pay a pittance for the gruelling work. Without public washstands the only source was to wash clothes in the schistosome-infested river, dry them on sand and over bushes and carry the bundle home for starching and ironing with heavy cast-iron irons filled with burning charcoal.

Alvarez (1990,47) claims that by 1980, fully 70 percent of all women workers remained employed in stereotypically
female jobs, jobs which represented extensions of their roles as mothers, nurturers and helpmates in the private sphere. As previously mentioned, access to education is elitist. Moreover any training that is provided to low-income women fits within their roles as wives and mothers (Alvarez, 1990). Youssef and Hetler's (1983,237) research on woman headed households in the third world found that the tendency has been to promote women's training programs that focus on activities that yield little or no income such as cooking and handicrafts. However, regardless of the kind of wage labour that women are involved in, some will argue that simply being "employed" adds to a woman's status in the household. For example, Neuhouser (1989,692) found in a lower-class community in a medium sized city in the interior of the state of Sao Paulo, that 42 percent of the women who did not engage in paid labour controlled the family budget, compared with 56 percent of employed women. To the extent that lower-class women become engaged in wage labour, their power within the household is enhanced.

2. Women and the Informal Sector

Many researchers support the argument that because of the small numbers of jobs in the formal sector, women are forced to work in the informal sector (Schmink 1984; Cammack, Pool and Tordoff 1988; Telles 1992; Merrick and
Schmink 1983; Alvarez 1990). Worsley (1984) discusses the informal sector as a result of rapid urbanization and the resulting lack of jobs even in the tertiary sector. Informal sector jobs absorb the urban population in activities such as street hawking, petty retail trade and low-productivity backyard workshops (175). Merrick and Schmink (1983,256) point out that although it is misleading to group all workers into formal and informal categories, the division is useful for understanding differences in employment and earning opportunities. The activities which take place in the sphere of informal work are often exploitative and contributes to the reduction of costs for local entrepreneurs. For example, capitalists seek to compete with foreign and domestic competition by going back to the practice of putting out - shifting their activities from purpose-built factories to the homes of (mostly female) workers and transferring to them the responsibility for acquiring and maintaining the necessary machines (Cammack, Pool and Tordoff 1988,197). But again, these women who work at home often find themselves working at traditional tasks of cooking, embroidering and weaving. However, employment in production of merchandise does not provide enough money to sustain the household on its own. Jelin (1983,136) notes that almost 40 percent of the women in the simple production of merchandise work less than four hours a day - indicating only a partial dedication to paying jobs.
What is perhaps the most important aspect of informal sector work is that it allows women to meet some of the other demands placed on them in terms of child care and maintaining the household. Informal work will allow women to still take care of their children, prepare needed food and take care of other household activities because work in the informal sector gives women access to income over which they have some control (Beneria and Roldan 1987,74). Beneria and Roldan’s (1987,123) research on women’s industrial homework in Mexico City found that:

women habitually carry out all tasks required for the daily and generational reproduction of labour power such as housecleaning and dishwashing, sewing, mending, washing and ironing, buying and cooking of food, the search for water from a collective source in periods of drought, supervision of children’s homework, care of the children and of sick and elderly people, transportation of children and elderly people to the doctor.

The conflict between the need to care for children and the need to bring in income affects these women’s decision about what kind of work to do and for how many hours. Given that the poorer the country the more hours the women work (Birdsall and McGreevy 1983,9), one would expect the number of hours to be worked to be extremely unbalanced given Brazil’s overall poverty.

It appears, therefore, that most Brazilian women are marginalized from work that provides an adequate income. As a result, women are often forced to find forms of income
through work in the informal sector. Income from work within the informal sector, however, is unpredictable and most often low and this, in combination with lack of access to adequate day-care and other essential urban services results in many Brazilian women living in absolute poverty.
CHAPTER FOUR

Women's Movements in Brazil

"We religious, we have a great task to carry out together with the people. Beginning with consciousness-raising, so that the people have an awareness of their value, of their reality, of their oppression and become capable... the small need to believe in the small. But the power of oppression has been so introjected into the people, their dependency is so great, that it's difficult to do consciousness-raising work (Sister Denise, cited in Patai 1993,51)."

Women have a long history of being dedicated participants in social movements within Brazil. Their involvement in organizations such as neighbourhood associations dates back as early as 1940 (Mainwaring and Viola 1984,27) and since the 1960s they have been active in Mother’s Clubs and Housewives Associations and have been the leading participants in the Christian Based Communities (or CEBs).

What becomes evident when examining these movements is the distinct class bias that exists, a bias that results in the movements’ practices being distinct from their theoretical stances. The inherent class bias that exists results in many low-income women being marginalized from the very groups that are praised as being primarily popular class movements. Not only are these women marginalized, but one finds their activities being trivialized by scholars because they are based around meeting the basic needs of subsistence.
1. Christian Based Communities

Perhaps the organizations that best exemplify the differences between theoretical stances and practices are the Christian Based Communities. Della Cava (1989, 143) states that through some 80,000 CEBs organized in the country, the Brazilian church hierarchy (350 bishops strong and the third largest in the Roman Catholic world) has emerged from the 1980s as perhaps the single most important voice for the nation's lower classes.

The CEBs were created in the 1960s in response to the Church's desire to have better links with the popular classes and are based to some degree on the Liberation Theology that is prevalent throughout much of Latin America. Liberation theology emphasized the egalitarian dimensions of the Gospel and interprets Christ as calling for a struggle for social justice (Burdick 1990, 153). The CEBs also drew on the work of Paulo Freire who has been influential in the spheres of education and developing critical consciousness in Brazil. More specifically, Freire's work complemented the catalytic and prophetic mission of the church by suggesting a politicized pedagogy, enabling the oppressed to identify the sources of their oppression (Alvarez 1990, 62).

The mission outlined by the church was not carried out exclusively by church officials and, for the first time, laypersons were encouraged to become involved in a more
influential way in the Church through these CEBs. This call for participants in the CEBs was mostly answered by women who became the overwhelming majority of supporters for this movement (Alvarez 1990; Burdick 1992; van de Hoogen 1990; Vink 1985). However, one must question to what degree these base communities address the needs of women given the historically patriarchal nature of the Roman Catholic Church. Alvarez (1990, 67) notes that the Brazilian church's new message that women should participate "as equals" in the "human community" coexists uncomfortably with a very old message, that women's primary and unique, if no longer exclusive, vocation remains motherhood and the family.

In theory, the women who participate have a crucial and important role in the leadership and continuation of the CEBs. The roles of women in the CEBs is described by van den Hoogen (1990) who found that women are to encourage faith and religious education amongst community members. To emphasize their significance within the organizations, these leaders are given the title of zeladoras and are given a fita (a ribbon to indicate membership).

It is primarily middle class women who are called upon to be zeladoras and although these women stand in subordinate positions to the men in formal positions within the Church hierarchy, they find satisfaction and also a relative freedom of action in the religious arena and a
basis for exerting influence on other people's behaviour (van den Hoogen 1990,174). van den Hoogen points out that the middle class and often bourgeois women were chosen by the priests to be the leaders because of their importance as mothers of prominent families. These women in turn were given the directive to go spread their Christian love to the poorest of families and help them, through community meetings, with their problems.

Vink (1985) provides a picture of how the Church's mission included the "subaltern classes" in their communities of hope and faith. In Vink's view (1985,102) people involved in CEBs gathered at meetings to tell each other about actual problems they are facing in their lives, such as danger of removal from their houses and the need for electricity and water. He describes that these meetings, led by laypeople, have people trying to decide what Jesus would do in a similar situation or problem that the participants reveal. The results, Vink claims, are that the CEB is an exercise in practical democratic behaviour because everyone has the possibility of speaking up and dealing with his or her problem.

Although this view, which is boasted about by Roman Catholic officials, is theoretically attractive, it is essentially distorted. Burdick (1990,158) states that one priest pointed out that "the Bible circle should try to focus on all the dimensions of neighbourhood, the family,
community and survival," a view that complements the meetings described by Vink. In practice however, it was found that participants did not speak out about many of their problems. The primary reason for this, argues Burdick (1990, 159), is that people feel the groups are always on the edge of becoming "gossip centres" or centros de fofocas.

Other problems are associated with the limitations of being participants in the CEBs, further highlighting some of the class distinctions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. For example, illiterates, people with heavy and inflexible labour schedules, married women facing domestic conflicts and people who identify themselves as blacks find the CEBs ineffective (Burdick 1992, 173). If this is true, and all of these aforementioned groups are marginalized from the CEBs, a serious question is raised about the Church’s proclamation of a "preferential option for the poor".

Burdick (1992) notes that leaders often distribute flyers and pamphlets to members but do not consider the people who cannot participate in the organization because they cannot read. Also, being a good member of the CEBs requires one’s attendance at many meetings and prayer nights. Many people cannot attend on a regular basis and are viewed as not being dedicated enough. People are further marginalized when only white or light mulatto children are allowed to carronade the image of the Virgin Mary during the May festivals (Burdick 1992,178) and blacks
are passed over whenever people are needed to read from the Bible. These practices seem to reflect that the "new" People's Church is not for the people at all, but only a mechanism to further the patriarchal, classist and racist traditions that already exist within the Church doctrine and hierarchy.

This view is also supported by van den Hoogen (1990,180) who maintains that to be accepted as a zeladora a woman should have a "good reputation" which still means that she has to be a caring mother who has never been compromised by a divorce or by infringement of sexual mores; a woman can only be accepted when she behaves mais recatada, a phrase that is a combination of modest, shy and prudent.

Alvarez (1990,68) also notes that in keeping with the existing sexual division of labour, the local parishes created Mother's Clubs which functioned alongside of the church organization. These organizations, creations of the Catholic Church, recruit their members primarily from the existing CEBs (mostly middle class women) and adopt many of the values espoused by the CEBs. For example, Alvarez (1990,69) points out that these Mother's Clubs provided sex-stereotyped courses and activities for women, such as sewing classes, which would enhance the skills needed for a woman to be a good wife and mother.
2. Mother's Clubs

An argument has been made by Campfens (1990) that Mother's Clubs are primarily characteristic of those groups which seek to provide basic subsistence needs. He states that meeting subsistence needs has become the highest priority for a rapidly pauperizing shanty-town population which is bearing the brunt of the deteriorating economic conditions plaguing all Latin American nations since the 1970s. This argument does not hold, however, when one considers the class basis of this movement and that, as middle class women, many of the mothers participating in these clubs may already have domestic help within the household and may not be feeling the economic devastation outlined in Campfens theory.

3. Daycare Movement

Another movement which arose directly from the middle class CEBs was the Day Care Movement. This initiative began in one area of Sao Paulo through classes offered (for middle class women) by a multinational corporation. Johnson and Johnson's sales representative came to the neighbourhood to promote the use of sanitary napkins (Alvarez 1990, 85) which resulted in the women continuing to meet after the classes were finished. As a result of these meetings, the women
began to discuss their concerns regarding adequate day care and how nice it would be to have somewhere to take their children when they attended these meetings. Support was canvassed from the popular sector and a petition (upon the suggestion of a social worker) was circulated and presented to the municipal government. According to Alvarez (1990), problems were introduced social workers deprived the organization of its autonomy and began to initiate changes without consulting the women of the neighbourhoods. For example, the name Society of Friends of the Neighbourhood (or SAB) was arbitrarily given to them by the social workers. As a result, the women of the neighbourhoods who had been recruited for this cause by the middle class women, did not want to be affiliated with this organization any longer. The middle-class women of the Sao Paulo periphery decided to continue to press for the day care organizations on their own. The women who split from the SAB are characterized by Alvarez (1990, 85) as mostly poor housewives or domestic servants who had been mobilized by the middle class and often lacked the support from parallel community organizations such as the SAB or the male dominated organizations such as the CEBs.

4. Housewives' Associations

Closely related to the daycare movement are the
associations known as the Housewives Associations. The initial goals of these associations were to promote friendship between women in Sao Paulo’s peripheral neighbourhoods and to provide these women with an opportunity to meet and discuss their problems (Schmink 1981,120). Although the Housewives Associations initially identified daycare as their primary concern, their efforts spread to include supporting the unions during strikes and organizing schools. These efforts were made by participants who were middle class, much like the in CEBs, Mother’s Club and Daycare Movement. Although one of their initial goals was to allow a forum for these women to meet and discuss their problems, their problems did not address issues relevant to low-income women.

If the argument can be made that low-income women have been excluded from the associations and clubs already discussed, one must wonder whether being a member of an association is strictly a middle class phenomenon or whether there are associations that exist within the urban areas of Brazil that do indeed meet their needs. Many argue that these women’s needs are met through what are known as Neighbourhood Associations.

5. Neighbourhood Associations

The activities undertaken by neighbourhood
associations' participants are varied, and perhaps Campfen's (1990) ideas surrounding Mother's Clubs and basic subsistence needs would in fact be more appropriate in a discussion of neighbourhood associations because it is exactly those needs (i.e. clean water and health) around which participants do mobilize. Campfen (1990, 24) does describe how low-income people come to join neighbourhood associations and states:

moral pressure and sheer necessity of survival forces residents to volunteer a few hours a week or more to: build roads, garbage disposal sites, schools, community and daycare centres, set up vigilance committees in controlling crime, delinquency and illegal hikes of prices on the sale of vital food items, operate and staff literacy programs, health, sports and recreational activities.

It becomes evident that people become involved in these groups for an extensive number of reasons but what about low-income women specifically?

When trying to address this question, it appears that the activities of the women who are involved in neighbourhood associations become trivialized and are not deemed as credible or worthwhile as the other groups composed of primarily middle class women. For example, Mainwaring and Viola (1984,27) state that popular women's neighbourhood associations tend to be oriented towards basic urban services such as sewers, electricity, transportation and health posts, whereas middle class women's associations
are "more innovative" and are interested in breaking down the traditional communication barriers, encouraging new patterns of communication and developing ecological consciousness.

6. Poor Women's Organizations and the Feminist Movement

This concept of an implied "higher purpose" is also evident in the research of others such as Alvarez (1990), Campfens (1990), Maurer Lane and Burihan Sawaia (1991) and Molyneux (1985). In fact, Campfens (1990,30) argues explicitly that poor women's organizations need to integrate a feminist agenda, and that feminist centres would help them to reflect critically on the specific impact that the economic crisis has had on them as women and not just on their families or on the poor at large. What he appears to be arguing is that activities of organizing for better water, sewage site and health centres are not feminist activities and that they need help from feminist groups.

This concept of helping poor women is also evident in the work of Maurer Lane and Burihan Sawaia (1991) who conducted research in Belo Horizonte. As psychologists, Maurer Lane and Burihan Sawaia (1991,125) placed themselves as responsible for the development within groups of "awareness" and the ability to exercise self control over the events in the lives of the members of the group through
cooperative and organized action. This cooperative and organized action seems to be contingent on the poor women organizing themselves in the community of Belo Horizonte over a four year period. Maurer Lane and Burihan Sawaia describe the women who met weekly as unmotivated to take action and always had housework to do and so the focus of the group needed to be shifted in order to counter their lack of motivation. Through the use of positive reinforcement (1990,133), Maurer Lane and Burihan Sawaia helped them create a handicraft business that eventually became independent.

The entire language used throughout the research findings of Maurer Lane and Burihan Sawaia appears to trivialize the concerns that the low-income women brought to the weekly meetings. Their needs became something that needed to be "countered" or transformed. This argument, implicitly stated by Maurer Lane and Burihan Sawaia, is explicitly argued by both Molyneux (1985) and Alvarez (1990). As socialist feminists note, many tensions exist between gender and class. The importance of class issues is accentuated when sharp distinctions are made analytically between women who undertake what Molyneux (1985) calls strategic gender interests and women who undertake practical gender interests, what Alvarez (1990) calls "feminist" versus "feminine" movements.

Molyneux (1985,232) maintains that strategic gender
are derived in the first instance deductively, that is from the analysis of women's subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements to those which exist. These ethical and theoretical criteria assist in the formulation of strategic objectives to overcome women's subordination such as the abolition of the sexual division of labour, the alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and childcare, the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, the attainment of political equality, the establishment of adequate measures against male violence and control over women.

Therefore, strategic gender interests are fundamentally attentive to transforming the subordination of women.

Alvarez (1990) describes what Molyneux calls strategic interests as feminist interests. The feminist organizations in Brazil today are predominantly, but not exclusively, middle class in composition (Alvarez 1990,25). Feminists organize debates, circulate petitions, stage numerous protest actions denouncing violence against women, exploitative conditions of women's work and unequal access to education, demand changes in the realm of family and civil law and call for reproductive freedom (Alvarez 1990,39).

The composition of these feminist movements as primarily middle class discourages the participation of women from lower economic statuses and, considering the huge discrepancy of wealth in Brazil, means that the majority of the population may be marginalized from developing strategic
gender interests simply because they do not have the luxury of excess time to devote to these activities. This was also Maurer Lane and Burihan Sawaia and Burihan Sawaia’s (1990) characterization: low-income women are unmotivated and have a lot of housework to do.

Molyneux (1985) uses the analytical category of practical gender issues to describe some of the other activities of women. Practical gender interests are given inductively and arise from the concrete conditions of women’s position within the gender division of labour. These are formulated by the women who are themselves within these positions rather than through external interventions. Practical gender interests are usually a response to an immediately perceived need and do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women’s emancipation or gender equality. These practical interest do not in themselves challenge the prevailing forms of gender subordination (Molyneux 1985, 233).

Molyneux’s practical gender interests are very similar to what Alvarez (1990) describes as feminine groups. Whereas feminist organizations focus on issues specific to the female condition (i.e. reproductive rights such as birth control and access to abortions), feminine groups mobilize women around gender-related issues and concerns such as providing the basic needs of subsistence for their families (Alvarez 1990, 25). Therefore, the neighbourhood associations discussed would seemingly fit into Alvarez’s category of a feminine group.

The distinction between feminist and feminine goals
parallels the differentiation between middle class women and low-income women. It is far from evident that these distinctions are at all useful because a serious question can be raised concerning the legitimacy of the division between feminist and feminine organizations. The difficulty of applying the term feminist to Brazilian women also raises the question of whether the western notion of feminism is universally held.

In 1975 the United Nations International Women’s Year conference, held in Mexico, revealed the tensions that exist between industrialized and developing nations. For example, while the United States delegation set a priority on women’s issues exclusively confined to the United States, many of the women from the Third World countries emphasized the problems of uneven development and the global political issues resulting from this process (Nash and Safa 1980, x).

Butler Flora (1984) notes that many Latin American women have avoided the label "feminist" and deny any similarities with western feminism. One reason for this is the seizing of the feminist label by groups of middle class women in Latin America dedicated to supporting the class structure of Brazil (Corcoran-Nantes 1993). A second reason is the strong awareness of United States imperialism (Butler Flora 1984, 75).

Conger Lind (1992) also offers an alternative framework to Molyneux’s and Alvarez’s from which to examine the
organized activities of low-income women. Although Conger Lind looks specifically at the region of Ecuadorean women, her question "why have Ecuadorean women chosen to organize in the sphere of everyday life?" is easily transported to the Brazilian case as well. The approach favoured by Molyneux and Alvarez assumes that women's basic needs are different than their strategic needs and that a practical or survival strategy cannot simultaneously be a political strategy that challenges the social order. Such an approach overlooks the important contributions of low-income women (Conger Lind 1992,137).

What is attractive about Conger Lind's argument is the way that basic needs can become politicized and therefore challenge the theoretical division between strategic and practical gender interests. By arguing that poor women do have agendas which may be articulated differently but still coincide with strategic gender interests, one can re-examine the activities of low-income women without trivializing them. Also, the consequence of accepting that low-income women articulate their agendas differently means that practical or feminine interests would not necessarily have to be "transformed", as Molyneux would have it, to constitute a political practice.

Evers (1985,46) argues that the intellectual task for the day consists of
the construction of a new hegemony through direct action of the masses, undertaking a reconceptualization of politics that broadens its realm and recovers as valid action the vast popular field with its everyday life, thus accepting the challenge of visualizing a project of society from the viewpoint of the practice of the popular classes.

What Evers most significantly denotes is the recommendation that the viewpoint of the popular masses be heard, and that the definition of politics be extended to include the personal as political and political potential. The argument here is that even in cases where no political institutions are apparent, politics still exist, albeit expressed in another language and through different actions (Arizpe 1990,xiv).

For example, Sacks (1988) looks at political activism through America's black working class women's eyes and asks what politics and leadership look like when these women's vision and voices are placed at the centre of analysis. What is suggested by her research is a revision of our concepts of the political process. Sacks (1988,93) states that analytically it is important to recognize that political speakers are dimensions of leadership through they are separate from the political leadership. Sacks declares that many people equate political leadership with a movement's public spokesperson and finds that the invisible leaders, the women who are key actors in network formation and consciousness shaping, need to be seen as important
dimensions in the direction of the movement. This therefore requires a redefinition of political leadership and politics itself.

Having argued that Brazil's low-income women might experience the economy and the polity differently than middle class women, and drawing on the work of Sacks who puts women's visions and voices at the centre of analysis, it is now important to listen to the different experiences of Brazil's low-income women through their visions and voices. This is the subject of the following chapter and it is only in this way, by listening to low-income women's voices, that it can be determined whether these women can be considered political without being directly involved with political parties or the state and perhaps new types of political activity will be observed.
CHAPTER FIVE

Women's Lives

"There will be those who while reading what I write will say - this is untrue. But the misery is real (Carolina Maria de Jesus 1962,56)."

"No, I’ve never heard the word 'feminist' what is it? (Carmen, as cited in Patai 1993,184)"

Examining the narratives of poor women in Brazil makes it obvious that treating them as a homogenous group would be misleading. What emerges are two groups of women, both of whom cite money as the central root of their lives' problems. Where they differ, however, is in the extent to which those economic problems shape their day to day activities, and the degree to which these economic problems limit them from becoming involved in community organizations and/or feminist groups.

The first group of women is the women who are represented in Daphne Patai's Brazilian Women Speak and Teresa Pires de Rio Caldeira's Women, Daily Life and Politics. This first group is primarily composed of women who have either paid employment themselves or are housewives whose husbands are employed in wage labour. If these women are employed outside of the home, they are most likely to be working in the domestic domain or in a factory setting, and tend to work long, gruelling hours only to return home to tend to their own domestic duties. I will classify these
women as "working women" as a means of distinguishing them from the second group of women, whom I will categorize as "no income women".

No income women are best exemplified by Carolina Maria de Jesus and the women's narratives found in Scheper-Hughes ethnography *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. These women's sources of livelihood revolve around scavenging through garbage and begging, both of which are done while being harassed by the state police and the more wealthy members of the community. There is seldom a permanent man in the household to provide an income. The poverty of these women ensures that they bear more children than they see live.

This chapter is divided into two sections in order to determine what the activities of both the poor working women and no-income women are. What is found is that both groups of women spend most of their time trying to meet the basic needs of subsistence.

1. *Working Women*

In Chapter Three I have described some of the limited employment opportunities for women in Brazil. It was argued that nearly one quarter of women's employment is in the
domestic sphere. Of the six "working women" Patai (1993) interviewed, five had been involved in some kind of domestic labour and the sixth was a housewife who had no paid employment herself, but who employed one of the other five women. Conceicao is a 20 year old woman who works as a maid. Her narrative reveals that she has been a maid since the age of 14 and had little schooling because of the high cost of books. She talks about being a maid:

"It's true I have some freedom with this kind of job, but I still think that if I worked as a clerk in a store, for example, it would be better ... If I had my own home that I could leave everyday, it would be better. They (mistresses) talk to the maid as if they think that a maid is an animal. (1993,211)"

Her income as a maid is approximately $75.00 per month (in 1987, the minimum wage was $68.00 a month [Patai 1993,364]) and from this money, Conceicao pays her half of the social security benefits (for retirement and medical bills) which amounts to $13.00 per month (the other half is paid for by Marta, her employer). Conceicao considers herself to be poor and says:

"I wouldn't want to be rich. I think poor people have love, but the rich ... I wouldn't want to be rich ... I'd like to have a house ... like any one can have, not a luxurious house, just a roof of my own, but not be rich. I don't know why, but I

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5Patai presents twenty interviews in her book Brazilian Women Speak however, for my purposes, the six "working women" were the most representative of the population of women I wanted to research.
think the rich are unhappy ... its like they live on illusions. They've got all sorts of things in their heads ... money ... And some of them don't like Blacks; they've got ideas like that too (1993,211)."

Teresa, a forty-four year old woman living in the slum in the city of Recife, remarks that not having enough money is her biggest problem and that she took a part-time job because she needed money to get the things she "wants". Her job - doing laundry - pays $ 5.00 a week for 2 days work. Out of this money she has to pay her bus fare to get to and from the job. Her laundry money is supplemented by her late husband's pension money and she remarks that she cannot remarry because she would lose the $ 40.52 a month she gets.

Maria Helena, a seventy year old woman, is also a widow whose husband, a dentist, committed suicide at age forty. When she was younger Maria Helena had a job as a seamstress and she would get up a 4:00 a.m. and work the whole day through. She says:

"I'd have a one month old baby next to the machine; I'd hang up some toys for him to play with and give him a pacifier and get back to sewing. So much so that my vision began to go bad (1993,186)."

Maria Helena's narrative indicates that she had worked extremely hard in order to provide the best opportunities for her children, who, she bitterly relays, are of little economic support in her old age.
"For example, Gil, he's really well off now, very well fixed, and all he pays here is the rent, and yet he says he won't even pay the maintenance. He pays the rent of $150.00 a month and it's a lot of money, but he earns $3000.00 a month (1993,186)."

After revealing that her five children were of little support, she was asked about having friends and she replied:

"No, I don't have any friends here. In this neighbourhood there's nothing but a bunch of nasty women. Heaven preserve me from getting involved with them! (1993,193)"

Sonia, in her late 20s, lives in one of Rio de Janero's many North Zone favelas and is married with one son. She now works as a maid in the house across the road from her house but most of her narrative describes what it was like to work in a foreign-owned cigarette factory where she worked for nine years. She worked eight hours a day (from 5:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) and she had Saturdays and Sundays off. There were meals provided on the 45 minute lunch break for which the government paid half. Other benefits at this job included a month of vacation, medicare rates and the option of joining the union. Sonia states however,

"I think the union's in cahoots with the company and whenever we'd have a big meeting you couldn't get it out of your mind that the union was in cahoots with the company and that it let the company do whatever it wanted, so we wouldn't go to the meetings and we'd end up losing out (1993,215-216)."

Her wages were $220.00 per month when she left the factory
(due to bronchitis from a tobacco allergy) which was much higher than the minimum wage of $8.00. Her job doing domestic work now pays $4.00 a day for four days a week. She claims that this is a bit more than minimum wage. The money goes towards helping pay the bills such as the house rent which is $12.00 a month and other bills which she did not know the amounts of because her husband paid them. Her domestic employment is tiring and she mentions that

"Last week, I really had to use my arms a lot, to wash the windows. I felt pins and needles in my arms, a kind of tingling (1993,223)."

Like Conceicao, Sonia discusses the way the employers talk about the poor (which she considers herself to be).

"At the house I work at, he puts down the favelados, that’s a kind of racism too and he always puts them down if he can. Anything bad that happens in the neighbourhood, he blames the favelados (1993,226)."

Carmen is a sixty-two year old woman whose narrative is perhaps the most forthright about discussing formal politics (see Chapter Six). She also talks about working in a textile factory and, after getting ill, having to leave and find other employment. She says:

"I didn’t have any trouble finding a job here; I was even lucky in some ways. I was lucky and found a job right away. It wasn’t a good salary, but it was better than the backlands. I still didn’t earn enough, but it was more than in the backlands. It was a textile factory, and I ran a machine. Both men and women worked there and we
got paid per piece, so if you got more work done you earned more. Then, after I got sick, I had to leave the factory, and I stayed home, just doing people’s laundry. Poor people have to work, right? I worked for two families, and every week I’d go fetch the clothes. I’d wash them at home, and then take them back. I don’t do it anymore, I can’t, not even my own; now my granddaughters do our laundry (Patai 1993, 180)."

The women who have been discussed here are considered working class women (as opposed to the no-income women) because all of them had some form of wage labour, and are either married to a husband who had wage-labour or have widow’s pensions. These characteristics make them drastically different from the no-income women whose daily activities rarely include the steady basic income from wage labour.

2. No-Income Women

Carolina Maria de Jesus’s diary was first published in 1962. She wrote it over several years on scraps of paper she found while scavenging and it outlines the misery of life in the favela. Although some may argue that the narrative is no longer applicable to current activities in Brazil, and most notably since the beginnings of abertura, the narratives provided by Schepfer-Hughes (1992) only reinforce the images of misery put forth by de Jesus forty years ago. The diary thus is not only useful as a narrative to provide information about life in the favela, but it is
an important tool to measure just how much change has occurred in the new democratic Brazil.

At first one may think de Jesus's narrative is not much different from the women presented in *Brazilian Women Speak* such as Conceicao, Teresa and Sonia. However, a few pages into her diary it becomes clear that there are important differences.

The major themes which arise from her diary are those of hunger, sickness and tiredness. Her conditions arise directly from a lack of money and she says in one entry from 1955 that "they are always lacking things" (her family).

She describes herself and children being hungry:

"My children are always hungry, when they are starving, they aren't so fussy to feed (1962,40)."

"Vera stared at the cheeses and choked on her saliva (1962,114)."

"When I came home I was starving. A cat came around meowing. I looked at him and thought: I never ate a cat, but if he were in a pan, covered with onions and tomatoes, I swear Id eat him. Hunger is the worst thing in the world (1962,185)."

"In the old days, macaroni was the most expensive dish. Now its rice and beans that have replaced the macaroni, They've crossed over to the side of nobility (1962,52-53)."

"If all the poor in Brazil decided to kill themselves because they were hungry, nobody would be left alive (1962,164)."

She describes her sickness:
"I didn't take the examination for snail's disease because I could not buy the medication (1962,109)."

She describes her tiredness:

"the poor don't rest nor are they permitted the pleasure of relaxation (1962,122)."

She describes her dream:

"I dream to be very clean, wear expensive clothes and live in a comfortable house, but it is not possible. I am not unhappy with the work I do. I am used to being dirty (1962,31)."

She talks about not having any soap to wash herself:

"and I don't have any soap to wash the dishes. I say 'dishes' only from force of habit. But they are really tin cans. If I had soap, I would wash the clothes. I'm really not negligent. If I walk around dirty its because I am trapped in the life of a favelado (1962,52)."

"I don't get upset when I see a stranger looking at my dirt. I think I will start travelling through the streets with a sign on my back 'If I'm dirty it's because I don't have soap' (1962,102)."

Carolina scavenged through garbage cans to sell items for food money. Mostly she collected paper and would start early in the morning after lining up for water. She describes one day in 1958:

"There was no paper in the streets. I went past the slaughterhouse. They had thrown a lot of sausage in the garbage. I sorted through the ones that were not rotten. I don't want to grow weak and I can't afford to buy. I have an appetite of a lion - so I have to go through the garbage (1962,102)."

On days when Carolina could not scavenge through the
garbage, she would beg. She says:

"On a rainy day I am a beggar. I walk around ragged and dirty. I wear the uniform of the unfortunate (1962,70)."

She discusses in her diary about how difficult it is to scavenge and beg because the surrounding community often does not make it easy. In 1958 she says:

"Now the garbage truck, before it starts its regular collection picks up trash and puts it inside the car - selfish! They have a good job, hospital, drugstore, doctors (1962,125)."

"At the slaughterhouse they don’t put the garbage in the streets anymore because of the women who look for rotten meat and eat it (1962,128)."

"Today I am going out to look for paper but I know I am not going to find anything. There is an old man who is in my territory (1962,128)."

At times when Carolina was scavenging she would be personally threatened by wealthier members of the community. She describes a day when a man told her he was going to hit her and called her a "nut". She replied to him:

"And its just because I am crazy that you’d better not mess with me. I’ve got all the vices. I rob and I fight and I drink. I spend 15 days at home and 15 days in jail. He made a move toward me and I told him I am from the favela of Canine. I know how to cut with a gilette and a razor and I’m learning how to handle a fish knife (1962,91)."

Her description of herself to her harasser is not harmonious with the life she describes in her diary, however. By conforming to the wealthier people’s concept of favelados,
she was able to protect herself from physical harm.

Carolina uses her diary as a way of describing her perceptions of how people felt about the favelas. She makes a distinction between the people who live in brick houses and those who don’t and says:

"The people in the brick houses near the favela say they don’t know why people of culture pay attention to the people of the favela (1962,91)."

"The neighbours in the brick houses look at the favelados with disgust. I see their looks of hate because they don’t want the favela here. They say the favela debases the neighbourhood and that they despise poverty. They forget that in death that everyone is poor (1962,66)."

Carolina once overheard someone who lived in a brick house saying:

"Someone should send a flood to wipe away the favela and kill those nuisances. There are times when I am furious with God for putting poor people on earth. All they do is annoy others (1962,66-7)."

she also heard young men driving off in a car say:

"we’re going to throw the sandwiches in the garbage because the people of the favela are stupid four-legged beasts that need harnesses not sandwiches (1962,79)."

One may argue that Carolina’s perceptions are ones that were perhaps accurate at the time she wrote them but can no longer be used as a representation of how people in the favelas feel almost 40 years later. This argument can be
dismissed by contemplating the women’s narratives provided by Schepер-Hughes.

Certainly the theme of hunger is prevalent in Schepер-Hughes’s ethnography (1992). Although the primary research question of her research revolved around mother love and child death, the factors that influenced these women’s ability to care for their children, such as hunger and sickness, are more than evident. For example, an unnamed woman claims:

"What can be worse than hunger? We are still hungry. What is worse than sickness? We are still sick. If anything, we appear to be sicker than before. We have no strength left. They say that Brazilians are mole (soft). That we are dying like flies, a toa (for no reason at all). That we are weak, without energy. But if we are weak, it isn’t because we are soft. It’s only because we are hungry. Food is the source of weakness of the poor … and money (Schepер-Hughes 1992,96).

The affirmation of Carolina’s concerns, and the argument that little has changed, is verified through this woman’s narrative. Her story could be a page from Carolina’s diary. She goes on to describe how difficult it is to have enough money to buy food:

"The poor work like donkeys and asses, cutting cane, cleaning streets, washing clothes, butchering animals, all the dirty work there is, we do it, and we still don’t make enough to buy a kilo of fresh meat at the end of the week (Schepер-Hughes 1992,96)."
entire ethnography and she confirms that begging is still a source of obtaining food and money for one’s family. She says:

"I hate this begging for money, for medicines, for food, this scavenging everywhere for tiny handouts so that I can somehow embroider one day to the next. I am a mulher trabalhadora; I’ve worked all my life. There’s practically no job I can’t do. I’ve worked in the fields, in the river, in the factories and in the feira. I do whatever is necessary. Do you think I like asking for money? You who have half a conscious for the misery of the poor, tell me Nanci, what else am I supposed to do? (Scheper-Hughes 1992,120)"

Begging and scavenging seem to be the most prevalent source of income described throughout the Bom Jesus’s women’s narratives. However there are some discussions regarding working for a wage as domestic labourers. These stories reflect what was already described by Conceicao. Lordes for example, describes working for Dona Rita:

"I worked for Dona Rita for three years and six months, and in all that time she offered me a meal only five times. I would arrive at their house at daybreak, often with an empty stomach and I would have to clean up the last days dirty dishes before I could even begin the chore of washing clothes. There would be piles of dirty clothes. I would scrub until my knuckles bled and all the time I wouldn’t be offered so much as a piece of dry bread or a cup of black coffee. My pay in those days by 25 mil reis, but I never got all of it at once. Always there would be something owing towards next week! I think now this is how she kept me coming back! After three years of working myself like this, I began to cough and vomit blood. Dona Rita caught me spitting blood in the quintal (backyard) and she ordered me out of the household immediately. She said ‘Get away from us. You are contagious with tuberculosis.’ I"
replied ' I'll leave your service and gladly, but you should know that if I am coughing up blood, it's because I've been made to work all these years on an empty stomach (Schepers-Hughes 1992,115).

Therefore, for women who do find wage labour, the wages are low and the conditions can be horrific, often making the women ill.

Certainly the theme of sickness was evident when reading Carolina's diary, for mostly every day she narrated feeling indisposed. This is evident with the women of Bom Jesus as well. For example, Sebastian claims "As for me, I'm always sick (Schepers-Hughes 1992,125)." In fact, the women's narratives show an entire classification of nerves or nerves, classifications they used to make sense of their feeling ill.

Black Irene describes "anger nerves":

"That's like when your patroa says something that really ticks you off but because she is you boss you can't say anything, but inside you are so angry that you could kill her. The next day you are likely to wake up trembling with anger nerves (Schepers-Hughes 1992,175)."

Anger nerves are but one kind of nerves however. Beatrice characterizes what "overwork nerves" are:

"I suffer only from overwork nerves. I've washed clothes all my life, for almost 60 years and now my body is as beaten down and worn out as Dona Dora's bed sheets. When I came home from the river with that heavy basin of laundry on my head, my knees begin to shake and sometimes I lose my balance and fall right on my face. What humiliation (Schepers-Hughes 1992,175-176)."
Black Irene maintains that one can get nerves from parasites as well. She states:

"But you can get nervos from worms and parasites, too. I almost died from it. Twice they carried me in an ambulance to the hospital in Recife. The first time I was in crisis with pains and shaking. My mouth was full of blood. It was my liver, the worms had gotten to it. They were getting fat on me. The next time it was a crisis from amoebas. I had to take so many pills, every kind, but in the end it was useless. Amoebas never die. They leave eggs inside you and the pills can’t kill them. So they just keep on growing and growing until they take up all the room inside you. Sometimes they’re quiet, but when they wake you up and start attacking you, that’s when you have a crise de nervos (Schepers-Hughes 1992,176)."

It is clear that these women lead lives filled with hunger and sickness, sickness often caused by excessive amounts of working without food.

The absolute abhorrence wealthier people within Brazil still have for the favelados is evident when one woman, while discussing Carnival, says that:

"Today all the wealthy of Bom Jesus own cars and the road to the coast is paved. They do not appreciate us or our carnival play. They do not want to lend their prestige to our festival. And so they show their disrespect, their contempt for us, in this way (Schepers-Hughes 1992,495)."

And, although the women from Bom Jesus’s narratives are not as explicit as Carolina’s about the middle class’s distaste for the poor, their narratives are full of discussions regarding social hierarchy and standards of living, often times claiming they would not want the burdens of middle
class living (much like Conceicao's discussion of why she would not want to be rich). For example, Antonieta explains:

"We pobres always have to work hard to get what we need. In fact we have to work at least twice as hard as everyone else. The whole family has to cooperate, we all have to find work, but in many ways we are better off than the middle class because we are more independent (Scheper-Hughes 1992,84)."

"Luckily, ..., as poor folk we don't yet have to spend money just to keep up appearances or to be 'in style'. We are not dependent on maintaining a particular standard of living. And we are a self-respecting class with a social conscience that the middle class cannot afford. We are able to distribute charity to those worse off than ourselves (Scheper-Hughes 1992,85)."

It can be seen therefore that like forty years ago, the divisions between the people within the favelas and the middle class still run deep. But what about the misery surrounding hunger, sickness and tiredness that Carolina wrote about in her diary? Do those same concerns still exist?

In the narratives of women whom I have classified as "working class" it was mentioned several times that medicare or medical expenses were covered through their places of employment. These benefits do not seem to exist for the no-income women. Previously Carolina was quoted as saying she did not go for a medical test because she knew she could not buy the medication to treat it. And, even if people in the favelas do manage to scrape together some money for
medicine, one unnamed woman in Bom Jesus claims that:

"The medicine for the poor is worthless. It's street medicine or medicine on the run. There is no diagnosis, no examination. They don't want to handle us. Maybe they're afraid that poverty, like disease, is contagious. So without exams, without referrals, with whatever drugs are handy, we die of grippe, of fevers, of diarrheas, or many things we don't even know what they are. We are like walking corpses (Schepere-Hughes 1992,203).

Another unnamed woman discusses being ill and says:

"So many children walk around this clinic with their knees shaking from hunger. The doctors send us away. They don't touch us. They don't even look inside their mouths. Aren't they supposed to do that? How do they know what is wrong with us (Schepere-Hughes 1992,203)?"

While reading the narratives of the Bom Jesus women, another important theme arises, that of violence. What becomes evident is that the people within the favelas are frightened to go to the hospital and visit doctors because of child abductions for organs and the disappearance of bodies. Scheper-Hughes' research assistant Little Irene stated:

"They are looking for donor organs. You may think this is nonsense, but we have seen it with our own eyes in the hospitals and in the public morgues and we know better (Schepere-Hughes 1992,233)."

Nilda also describes death and bodies disappearing. She narrates:
"It is always like that with the poor. Our lives and our deaths are very cheap. The nurses and doctors look at us and they say 'Well, what does it matter, one more or one less?' And when we arrive in the city with our ugly clothes without knowing how to speak properly or how to behave, they make us wait and tell us nothing. It's for this reason that we are so afraid of hospitals and why we fight with the prefeito to let us travel in the ambulance with our family members (Schep-Hughes 1992, 233)."

The fear of bodies disappearing in the hospitals and from the streets for organs is only one area of violence in their everyday lives. The other involves police and state violence. Schep-Hughes describes a situation where several young men were seized from their homes by unidentified men in uniform and disappeared. When the police arrive with graphic photos for family members, Dona Elena screamed hysterically:

"How do you expect me to recognize meu homem (my man) in this picture (Schep-Hughes 1992, 217)."

The theme of police violence is difficult to draw out from narratives because people are reluctant to speak about it. For instance, Schep-Hughes (1992, 218), when asking for information was told:

"The police have to be free to go about their business. The police know what they're doing. It's best to keep your mouth shut." Mariazinha zipped her lips to show me exactly what she meant [the author]."

Carolina also hinted at the existence of violence from the
police and military in her life. One day in 1958 she writes:

"I heard the rumour that the police are going to demand the favelados get off state land where they've built their shacks without permission. Many people who had houses here in the favela moved to state land because there, when it rains, there's no mud (1962,82)."

"That soldier is dangerous. It would be a good thing if the lieutenant would remove this soldier from the favela. The slightest thing with him he shoots. He's already wounded two in the favela (1962,86)."

On another day, after calling the police to break up a fight, she writes:

"Johnny went to be treated at Central Police Station and came back. I ask if they gave him an anaesthetic. He said they only gave him an injection against lockjaw. Its just one more case for the police. If I had saved all the money I have spent telephoning for the patrol car, I could buy a kilo of meat (1962,117)."

The picture of these no-income women thus becomes one of hunger, sickness and violence. And although working class women talk about there not being enough money, their life experiences are not tinged with the magnitude of misery that their favela neighbours have.

In the next chapter I will analyze these women's narratives in an attempt to discern what solutions they put forth for their problems and to what degree they can be considered political actors who challenge social relations.
CHAPTER SIX

Politicization of Basic Needs

"When Vera was born I was alone in the favela. No women showed up to wash my clothes or look after my children. My boys slept filthy (Carolina Maria de Jesus 1962, 67)."

"In the Women's Movement I discovered myself as a woman, as a being, as a person. I hadn't known that women have always been oppressed (unnamed, in Caldiera 1990, 59)."

In the previous chapter I provided narratives of no-income and working class women to demonstrate how the economic problems they face shape their daily activities. It was shown that these women spend most of their time providing the basic needs of subsistence for themselves and their families.

In this chapter I will analyze how no-income and working women problematize their needs and what solutions they put forth to alleviate their burdens. Secondly, I will consider alternative perspectives on women's politics to further understand these women as political actors.

1. Problems and Solutions

1.1 Economic Survival

All of these women's descriptions, the working class and no-income, are given with little explicit reference to what they see as both the causes of and solutions to the
problems they identified. However, occasionally, while attempting to make sense of their lives, they allow one to get a glimpse of how they go about "embroidering one day to the next".

Carolina was quite conscious about depicting her views about the "nasty" women of the favela. She, almost daily, discusses all of the "bad" things her neighbours do. For example,

"One day I argue with Leila. She and Arnaldo set fire to my shack (1962,63)."

"My friendship for Dona Chiquinha cooled off. The other day she came and asked me if I wanted a fight and if so she’d go and get a knife. I didn’t give her the satisfaction (1962,88)."

"I left my bed at five in the morning to get water. I don’t like to be with those women because at the tap they speak of everybody and everything (1962,98-99)."

But woven throughout her narrative, one also sees a theme of neighbours helping one another by distribution of food and other necessities. Although Carolina seems to emphasize the importance of the conflict between neighbours in the favela, it is also important to note the number of times she says things such as:

"I sent a note to Dona Ida. Dona Ida, I beg you to help me get a little pork fat, so I can make soup for the children. Today it is raining out so I can’t go looking for paper. Thank you, Carolina (1962,41)."
"I met a poor man and I told him, you wait here. I am going to sell this paper and will give you five cruzeiros so you can have some coffee. It's good to drink a little coffee in the morning (1962,65)."

"Dona Alice gave me a bowl of soup (1962,98)."

"I went to go see Dona Guilhermina, on Carlos de Campos Street. I asked her for a little rice. She gave me rice and macaroni. I stayed on to talk with her husband. He gave me some bottles to sell (1962,108)."

"I sold some scrap to Senhor Manuel. I got 55 cruzeiros. I took very little scrap with me and thought that was a lot of money. I asked Senhor Manuel if he hadn't made a mistake (1962,103)."

"While I was getting ready for dinner I heard Juana's voice asking me for a bit of garlic. I gave her five pieces. Then, when I was fixing supper I didn't have any salt. She gave me a little (1962,122)."

There appears to have been an informal system amongst these women of helping one each other with what they have within their means. This informal system still exists and is shown in the narratives of both the no-income women of Bom Jesus and the working class women. For example, Biu, a woman with no income claims:

"Today you can always show up in the house of a neighbour and your comadre will never deny you a piece of bread or some cornmeal to take home or even just a cup of black coffee (Schepers-Hughes 1992,466)."

Among the working class women, you see the same kinds of informal assistance occurring but involving different issues such as water and electricity. Carmen describes that:
"Some houses have water. Teresa's doesn't. She gets it next door. Mine does and I give some to neighbours and somebody else gives some to another house. Then when the bill comes in, you split it, you say 'you give me this much in exchange for that' (1993,183.)."

So borrowing and lending between neighbours appears to be one way these women survive and find at least temporary solutions to their economic problems. Given the economic situation of poor women outlined in Chapter Three, this survival strategy is an important aspect to understanding how these women compensate for being marginalized from work that provides an adequate income.

1.2 Government Change

Occasionally, other strategies which directly challenge social relations to solve problems appear in these women's narratives. Carolina mentions the possibility of a revolution when she states:

"I see that people are still thinking that we must revolt against the price of necessities and not just attack the transportation company. If the cost of living keeps on rising until 1960, we are going to have a revolution (1962,135.)."

A total strike against the electoral process is the solution to the problems cited by one of the unnamed Bom Jesus women:
"There is no solution but one. Only a total strike. Nothing less than that. We need to organize people to refuse to vote in the next elections. To refuse to vote, that is also the right of people. We should not participate in any elections or work for any of the candidates or support any political party. They all lied to us and fooled us. Now it is our turn to show them. We will engage in desordem (chaos). We will steal and kill until we have reached a general and total paralysis that will stop everything. We have been passive for too long. The rich and the powerful have been so accustomed to violating our lives, our persons, and our bodies that everyone takes it for granted. A poor person is murdered or is made to disappear and who cries out in his defense? Where is the justice for him or his family? (Schepers-Hughes 1992,96)"

Throughout all of the women's narratives there does seem to be disillusion with politicians and some are willing to point the blame towards the state. However, in general, discussion about solutions to their problems, as well as directing blame for their problems, is scant.

Perhaps the most explicit in her description of politicians, is Carolina who gives some advice to the politicians when she says:

"My advice to would-be politicians is that people do not tolerate hunger. It's necessary to tolerate hunger to know how to describe it. Brazil needs to be led by a person who has known hunger (1962,39)."

Carolina also conveys the idea that politicians only show up at election campaigns. She argues:
"When a politician tells us in his speeches that he is on the side of the people, that he is only in politics in order to improve our living conditions, asking for our votes, promising to freeze prices, he is well aware that by touching on these grave problems he will win at the poles. Afterward he divorces himself from the people. He looks at them with half closed eyes and with a pride that hurts us (1962, 48)."

She also speaks in 1958 about democracy and claims that:

"Democracy is losing its followers. In our country everything is weakening. The dollar is weak. Democracy is weak and the politicians are very weak. Everything that is weak dies one day (1962, 48)."

Carolina's thoughts on politicians cannot be dismissed as outdated. In Bom Jesus, disillusionment with the government is evident as well. Ramona, an unemployed factory worker talks about the election of the PMDB in 1982:

"The PMDB was the hope of the people. For twenty years we waited to be liberated from the military. During the state and municipal elections of 1982, how the people prayed, how they begged God and the Virgin for the PMDB to win. Some of us did penances; we fasted and went without shoes to church, all to bring the PMDB into power and so to end our years of suffering. And here we are; we have arrived! The people are in power again, and ... nada feito (nothing accomplished). We are disillusioned, deceived, fooled ... (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 96)."

Carmen as well speaks of being disillusioned with the government. She claims she will never vote again:
"Yes, in the last election I voted against the government and then I said I'd never vote again because the government always wins. They put up two candidates against one; even so, he wins; but they pulled some fraud and so he lost. Two against one. And he almost won and they still got votes away from him. So why bother voting. If other people feel like it, let them vote (Patai 1993,184)."

Carmen also speaks about election promises, much like Carolina:

"At election time the politicians come around, they promise all sorts of things: they'll pave the streets, run water into every house. So where is it? The politicians only come around when there's an election. When you see a politicians face you know its election time. You see those men only at elections and they're so good! They promise everything, promise sure and give nothing (Patai 1993,184)."

Carmen went on in her story to argue why she thinks that the next president should be a woman. She says that:

"She would have to help us wouldn't she. Because we're all women. We're the ones who know how much food costs, we know what's going on at home. The husband's off at work and what's to eat? What can you give the kids at noon? What's left? Tell me. A woman knows, she goes into the kitchen and sees what is needed (Patai 1993,184)."

What is interesting about this woman's desire for the next president to be a woman is that when she is asked if she has ever heard the word 'feminist', she responded:

"No, I've never heard the word 'feminist', what is it? (Patai 1993,184)."
1.3 Political Participation

Carmen had however heard of the women's movement and says that she has seen it on television. Her response to a question from Patai regarding the women's movement was:

"Isn't it lovely. To see all those women struggling, rising up like men, isn't it lovely. It really is. They have to insist they are equal to men. Are men the only ones who work? (Patai 1993, 184)"

Sonia, on the other hand had heard of feminism and replied to Patai:

"I think that's over with. Feminists say 'I am a woman, so the man has to pay the bills' right? Well, the way things are going you have to divide things up. If you go out for a beer or grab a bite to eat, you always have to split the bill. Money's really tight now so that's the end of that old feminism business (Patai 1993, 227)."

Sonia was the only working class woman who described being in a neighbourhood association or woman's group. She recalls:

"We used to have June festival every year, in the neighbourhood association which we stopped because we no longer have any headquarters. Where our headquarters used to be, now there's a police post (Patai 1993, 226)."

Sonia describes the meetings and the response she received from her husband about going:
"I used to go to a meeting at another hill, until the night my husband didn’t want me to go anymore. It was great, but they didn’t get very far. It didn’t last long - less than one year. I liked it because what you do is a kind of mental hygiene: each one tells about her life, you know ... what’s going on at home. I started going toward the end and they were talking about this business of nurseries and child care centres, debating this and that, whether men should help their wives. It was great. I agree completely about how we ought to have equal rights, but I don’t go anymore. Oh, I remember, it’s called the ‘Women’s Meeting’, that’s where they were talking about nurseries and they asked if we had a neighbourhood association here and I said we did but it stopped functioning because we don’t have any funds to construct a headquarters (Patai 1993,227)."

Sonia’s husband’s response of not wanting his wife to go to meetings is similar to another woman’s story narrated to Caldiera about why her husband doesn’t like her to participate in the local Christian Based Community (CEB).

She says:

"My husband doesn’t like me to participate. Ah, but even if there’s a fuss, I go. I don’t know, he seems to think that I go out too much, that I stay out too long. He thinks that if I get too stuck on Church things I’ll become a fanatic. At least that’s what I understand from him. But, I like it, so I put my food down and go. Sometimes, when I have a chance to go and celebrate the liturgy, when I get back there’s a row, a fight. But he’s the one who causes it, I don’t want to get involved in arguments and the following day I’ll go again. He’d have to tie me up to stop me. It seems to me that men prefer to see women at home washing clothes, cooking, I think that’s what it is. If he goes out that’s all right but if the woman goes, she’ll see what happens. Women must do something they like: I like it so I do it ... you make friends in the local groups, you make contacts and it opens women up, little by little, things become clearer; lets see if we can overcome
this fear we have of our husbands. (Caldeira 1990,65)"

Caldeira’s research provides narratives of women like
the one above involved in the local CEB. One woman
describes why she got involved in the CEB and how she,
unlike the two women cited previously, had the support of
her husband.

"At that time, I was really ill, depressed because
I felt alone here, I think I’m scared of being
alone. So, I felt alone and I felt sick, maybe it
was an illness or perhaps loneliness, I don’t
know. Then my husband said to me: ‘It would be a
good idea if you went over to help that sister’
(the nun who was organizing the local C.E.B.). So
we began work there in the community. I think
that friendships are a good thing. When you see
someone with problems, quite often just a word
helps. It also takes you out of yourself and
resolves your own problems too. That’s how I
started having plenty of friendships here. And
there one begins to move ahead. (Caldeira
1990,56)"

Another woman joined because:

"One gets to know people and find out the problems
of others in the neighbourhood. Yes it’s a
healthy thing to get out of the house to be with
lots of people, each talking about their own
problems. Getting to know about others problems,
you forget your own. Getting out, mixing with
people, with different neighbourhoods, but mainly
in the struggle ... one learns, one even learns to
talk a bit better, by sharing with others you also
find out about many things you don’t have here.
(Caldeira 1990,59)"

These women’s involvement with women’s groups and local
CEB’s also provides a way to solve some of their own
problems. What strikes the reader of these narratives,
however, is that they are all working class women, who, although they have economic concerns, clearly have fewer constraints on them than do their no-income counterparts. This is not meant to dismiss the constraints that do exist. Clearly husbands forbidding their wives’ participation in groups and police take-overs of headquarters make one wonder to what extent the Brazilian environment is conducive to the development of neighbourhood associations and women’s groups. Moreover, this situation raises the question of how realistic it is to be talking about feminist movements or about challenging dominant forces within the hostile economic and political atmosphere of Brazil (described in Chapter Two). It raises questions about the class differences within feminism and whether pictures painted by scholars that portray the wonders of abertura fail to include an entire group of women.

2. Alternative Perspectives on Women’s Politics

The question remains as to whether or not the no-income and working class women of Brazil challenge the social relations of society. Using Conger Lind’s theoretical model to explore this question I will retain the division of no-income and working class women utilized in the Chapter 5. Conger Lind’s theoretical model is important for this thesis, because when used as a series of questions about the
activities of low-income women, it is an effective instrument that allows me to analyze whether or not these activities challenge existing social relations. The model's emphasis on whether women organize to alleviate burdens, engage in collective reproductive work and whether or not poor women have critical perspectives on the world in which they live, will be used in this chapter to further analyze the narratives and to see if the activities can be seen as a political practice that influences the low-income women's lives.

"No-income women" such as Carolina Maria de Jesus and the women presented by Schepers-Hughes do seem to organize informally, at least on a small scale, within their neighbourhood to alleviate their burdens as women, mothers and providers for the families. For instance Carolina, as seen earlier in this chapter, remarked that she shared food items with her neighbours. Her views were echoed by Biu and others within the community of Bom Jesus. However, one must wonder if these are the kind of activities Conger Lind has in mind when discussing the collectivization of reproductive work. Even though the theoretical argument provided by Conger Lind allows for looking at small numbers of women composing a group, never did I get a sense that the no-income women in Brazil really had their identities transformed in the way described by Conger Lind, resulting in new ways of strategizing around their basic needs.
Certainly these women do not participate in consciousness-raising groups nor do they seem to create a shared identity. The everyday challenges that face these no-income women are so great that it seems almost unrealistic to expect them to form a shared identity given the prevalence of their individualized survival strategies. Also, no-income women in urban Brazil live their lives surrounded by violence. Because the external constraints on these women are so great, the neighbourhood, to some extent, becomes a vicious place where people race and fight for resources, leading to distrust of neighbours rather than to organization based around those resources.

For example, Carolina states that "favelados live by robbing from one another (1962,37)", "the only thing that does not exist in the favela is friendship (1962,25)" and "one day I argue with Leila because she and Arnaldo set fire to my shack (1962,63)". Carolina’s diary, although describing some informal sharing between neighbours, is predominately filled with a narrative of distrust of neighbours, especially other women. One entry in her diary (1962,32) describes "Here all the women pick on me. They say that I talk too well and that I know how to attract men. When I’m nervous I don’t like to argue. I prefer to write."

Although it appears as if no-income women do not challenge social relations in their efforts to share
resources, Conger Lind’s model includes the possibility for these women to have a critical view of the world in which they live and, therefore, must be considered political actors.

Carolina for instance often discusses the political situations and says:

What our president Senhor Jucelino has in his favour is his voice. He sings like a bird and his voice is pleasant to the ears. And now the bird is living in a golden cage called Catete Palace. Be careful little bird, that you don’t lose this cage, because cats when they are hungry think of birds in cages. The favelas are the cats and they are hungry (1962, 44).

As presented earlier in this chapter, Carolina discusses an understanding of politician’s methods to ensure votes. She writes in her diary about politicians securing votes through promises of improved living conditions and price freezing and then never following through on those promises. She considers who should lead the country and says:

"who must be a leader is he who has the ability. He who has pity and friendship for the people. Those who govern our country are the ones who have money, who don’t know what hunger is or pain or poverty. If the majority revolt, what can the minority do? I am on the side of the poor, who are an arm. An undernourished arm. We must free the country of profiteering politicians (1962, 49)."

After reviewing Carolina’s narrative within Conger Lind’s framework, I feel that she in fact does hold a critical view of her world and this includes a reflection on
the role of political authorities. But what about her counterparts, the other no-income women's narratives we heard in the last chapter? Do they reflect a critical view of the world?

This is evident when Little Irene (cited in Scheper-Hughes 1992, 305) discusses marriage and says:

"Two men have already left me. Do you think I need another? Nothing doing! Men are so jealous, I don't need anymore of those bandits around here. When my old man came around to 'visit' me the other night, I laughed in his face. What some of the younger women haven't learned yet is that marriage is a kind of slavery."

The women's narratives provided by Scheper-Hughes also contains a vast number of comments surrounding why their children die and point to external grounds as the causes of the high rate of infant mortality. Approximately one million children under the age of five die each year in Brazil, largely the result of parasitic infections interacting with infectious disease and chronic undernutrition (Scheper-Hughes 1985, 292). A group of women Scheper-Hughes (1992, 313) interviews gives the five following reasons which reflect their understanding of the world:

"Our children die because we are poor and hungry."
"They die because the water we drink is filthy with germs."
"They die because we can't afford to keep shoes on their feet."
"They die because we get worthless medical care."
"They die of neglect. Often we have to leave them alone in the house when we go back to work. So you wash them, feed them, give them a pacifier, close the door and say a prayer to the Virgin hoping that they will still be alive when you get home. Yes they die of neglect [a mingua] but its not due to lack of goodwill toward our children. The problem isn't one of vontade [willingness] but one of poder [power or ability]."

These selections of no-income women's narratives from Schepers-Hughes' (1992) ethnography do allow one to conclude, given Conger Lind's framework, that they have a critical view of the world in which they live. Though having a critical view alone can not lead one to the conclusion that these women are challenging social relations, the important point here is that they have refused to accept the middle class view of their lives: they have politically negotiated some space to permit a construction of reality based on their own experience.

An argument could be made that because the no-income women are expressing their critical views publicly, they consequently challenge social relations. This argument, however, would ignore the substantial power differences between the state and no-income women discussed in Chapter Two. The fact that these women have very little power within Brazil's economic and political structures and spend the majority of their time trying to meet the basic needs of subsistence, the effect of their public criticisms of the world around them cannot truly be considered as challenging social relations. This does not, however, negate the
possibility of these women ever forming a counter resistance. But, until the power relations within Brazil are shifted, most likely through a more even distribution of wealth, these women cannot be viewed as influential political actors. In this sense, Conger Lind's theory is flawed because of her underestimation of the power of the political economy context to limit the political activities of poor women.

If it can be concluded that no-income women are not challenging the existing social relations, one must wonder whether the same argument holds true for the working class women presented in the previous chapter.

Again, using Conger Lind's theoretical framework to analyze these women's activities, one can determine whether working class women can be viewed as political actors through their politicization of basic needs and thereby challenge social relations. It is possible to argue that working women, unlike no-income women are challenging social relations. This is not to say that they do so with ease; like their no-income counterparts, they often live their lives within a hostile environment. What works to their advantage however is that they are not starving and exhausted at the end of the day from fighting for survival and this allows them to pursue other activities not practical for no-income women.

For the case of Ecuador, Conger Lind points to the
existence of women organizing in small groups to alleviate their burdens. In Brazil, the working class women (most of whom had at least one wage-earner within the household) described their pooling of resources such as water and electricity and then splitting the bills among members of the neighbourhoods. Some of the working class women discussed in the previous chapter also had been involved in the kind of consciousness raising groups outlined by Conger Lind as one of the strategies that leads to challenging existing social relations. Conger Lind (1992,146) maintains that consciousness raising is recognized by feminists across economic classes as essential to the growth of the women’s movement and that it is recognized by participants that, though consciousness-raising meetings are necessary spaces for individual women, it is equally important to struggle as groups of women. The development of these consciousness-raising groups within Ecuador is a sign that women have become disillusioned with male-biased neighbourhood associations and because middle class women from the state sector have focused primarily on reforming the law, women in the popular classes have recognized the need for a space within the community which they can refine and struggle around their own needs (Conger Lind 1992,147).

In Brazil, it is true that external constraints on working class women (different from those experienced by no-income women) limit the effectiveness and the longevity
of consciousness raising groups. For example, often husbands forbid their wives to attend "women’s" meetings, and as seen in one narrative, the police can find ways to halt meetings by simply taking over meeting locations. Nevertheless, what one can see are small groups of organized women, whose organizations are short-lived but they do address the inequalities of the women’s living situations. The women who belonged to these groups talked about their lives, and often within these meetings, came to discuss the social relations of their homes and society at large.

It has been mentioned that Conger Lind’s framework allows poor women’s concerns to be articulated differently than those of middle class feminists, yet coincide with them (1992,145). This argument certainly applies to the Brazilian working class women whose narratives have been provided because their voices seem to support the middle class feminist agenda to some extent. For example, the woman who states:

"It seems to me that men prefer to see women at home washing clothes, cooking, I think that’s what it is. If he goes out that’s all right but if the woman goes, she'll see what happens (cited in Caldiera 1990,65)."

is clearly questioning the sexual division of labour. Sonia (as cited in Patai 1993,222) discusses her husband as "being the boss" and says:
and I wish he would do more at home. He helps, but he’s not too happy about it, and afterward he starts to complain.

Even if they themselves may not put it this way, there is a sense in working class women’s narratives of what Conger Lind calls a critical perspective on the world in which they live. For example, when Carmen (as cited in Patai) describes politics she says:

politics is for men, not women ... I can’t talk because I don’t know much, I don’t understand it. As far as I’m concerned its like this: its fine whoever wins, because sometimes you vote for one and the other wins and then you have to put up with him. So I think, let the ones that do it best manage it. What can we do? We are poor, so what can we do? Nothing. But the government ought to help the poor more, they really ought to, but they don’t (Patai 1993,181)."

Even though Carmen claims that politics are for men and not women, she openly discusses the problem that the government is not helping the poor enough. Carmen’s story continues to be filled with "political" narrative, such as discussing political promises, fraud and elections. She concludes her interview with arguing that the next president needs to be a woman because then things that are needed will get done.

The working class women’s narratives provide a sense of the views these women have of their world, and undoubtedly, they are critical. On subjects that include politics, working conditions, abortions and marriage, these women condemn the external constraints that affect their lives on
Even though, using Conger Lind's model, working class women in Brazil can be seen as being potentially more influential as political actors than no-income women, it should be noted that it is still extremely difficult for these women to transform their identities into strategies that will constitute significant political power or to form a fully-formed influential political group. The fact that husbands are adamant about their wives not becoming involved in consciousness raising groups and that the police have ways of silencing these women makes it extremely difficult to speak of these women as a "movement" of any kind.

The women's movements outlined in Chapter Four are applicable primarily to middle class women rather than the working class and no-income women whose narratives I examined. I think that the political and economic climate of Brazil provides constraints upon both the no-income and working class women that are almost impossible to overcome. To a greater extent than the low-income women, the working class women, because they are somewhat more economically stable, do challenge existing social relations but not with any consistency. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the women's groups that are formed are often short-lived and husbands often discourage participation in these groups therefore making it difficult to form a viable women's group that challenges dominant social relations.
Conger Lind argues that even if these women's groups fail to create an influential political group, their activities are extremely important and can be considered micro forms of resistance. She says that these women's challenges to the social organization of society are important because they clearly have changed the lives of women activists and those around them, and that they challenge the making of theory at macroinstitutional levels (1992,139). It appears that by looking at these women's activities as resistance at a micro level, one can consider them as political actors because they are in the process of redefining social relations.

Conger Lind's framework for examining small groups of women and their activities, centering on the provision of basic needs of subsistence, is helpful. What is missing from this framework, however, is the possibility for contemplating women as individual political actors. Given the finding that many of Brazil's no-income and working women are involved in very individualistic activities, and not collectivized work, it is useful to consider women as individual political actors.

For example, Ong (1987) looks at individualized (or micro) resistance in her work focusing on Malaysian women working in factories who are periodically seized by spirit possession. What is helpful in Ong's analysis (1987, 196) is the argument that instances of individual conduct, acts
of defiance and violent incidents were scattered tactics to define and protect one's moral status. This argument can be applied to low-income women's activities in Brazil and provide a way to examine their narratives without having to look for the existence of, or even the potential of, the counter resistance with which Conger Lind is concerned. For example, Carolina's narrative provides numerous accounts of how people external to the favelas came to give advice or lessons. Carolina simply refused to go and she often says things such as:

"Brother Luiz came by to give a catechism lesson and then they had a procession. I didn't go (1965, 109)."

"I didn't take the examination because I can't afford the medicine to cure it (1965, 109)."

In the favelas, a common tactic seems to be to simply ignore (rather than to organize against) the external influences of religious, state and health officials who are trying to impose their programs upon the favelados.

Warren and Bourque's research (1985) also provides a way to view women as individual actors. Their work on political "muting" in the Andes is important because it looks at how women use song as an idiom to express their otherwise silenced commentaries about political affairs (1985, 267). What is important about these songs, they argue (1985, 269), is they go on to still another level of commentary about central conflicts in values between the
family and communal order or between the priorities of men and women in economics. Thus, even though in public forums these women's "political" messages are silenced, through song their convictions are heard.

The concept of political muting is applicable to both the no-income and working women of Brazil. As demonstrated by a vast literature, the fear of violence has kept Brasilian's commentaries on politics and repression to a minimum. But, can their activities be examined, following Warren and Bourque's lead, to see if they in fact create a new forum for decision making? Again, these women's reluctance to participate in activities organized by "outside" organizations such as churches and hospitals points to an attempt by these women to create their own space within Brazil's political climate. Also, Carolina's act of writing in her diary perhaps places her as a political actor. As seen earlier in this chapter, Carolina prefers not to "argue" with other people in the favela and instead likes to write. Certainly her narrative contains the most dialogue, of all the women examined, concerning politicians, government and elections (most likely because no-income women of today are illiterate and are therefore deprived of this space).

The feminist movement needs to see low-income women's limited participation in the movement not as a result of their having only "practical" interests, but as women who
simply are trying to survive and perhaps articulating a feminist agenda in a different way. The politics of low-income women may not be full counter resistance, but individualized and collectivized forms of "feminine" resistance contain at least the potential for challenging social relations. So far, abertura has failed to deliver what it promised with its "democratic openings" and provision of a better standard of living and the reduction of state terrorism. Perhaps what a true "opening" for Brazil needs is the recognition by middle class movements that the activities and concerns of the poor must form a central part of their challenges to dominant forces within Brazil.
CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the everyday lives of poor women in urban Brazil. Through their narratives it is evident that these women spend most of their time providing the basic needs of subsistence for themselves and their families. How poor women of Brazil problematize these needs and the solutions they put forth to alleviate their burdens are analyzed in order to determine whether the women can be considered political actors who challenge social relations.

It is shown that neighbouring low-income women often participate in borrowing and lending in order to find a temporary solution to their economic problems. However, given the external constraints on these women (gaining access to food, water and shelter, husbands forbidding their participation in groups and police take-overs of meeting spaces), the environment within Brazil is not very conducive to the successful development of viable neighbourhood associations or women’s groups.

Although the poor women of Brazil do not seem to be involved in women’s groups, their daily life activities can be considered political when examined within the theoretical contexts provided by Conger Lind (1992), Ong (1987) and Warren and Bourque (1985). What becomes apparent is that no-income women have refused to accept the middle class view of their lives and have politically negotiated a space to
permit a construction of reality based on their own experience. As seen in Chapter Six, no-income women cannot be considered influential political actors, however, the possibility of these women challenging social relations exists and how they will do so may become evident if power relations within Brazil shift. Also, if the environment in Brazil becomes less hostile and the power relations do shift, one would expect working women to be paid more and work within safer environments. As a result, they may be more consistent in their challenging of social relations and form more viable women’s groups.

This thesis has examined the politics of poor women without trivializing their activities. It examines an entire group of women who have traditionally been marginalized from research, and most importantly, it puts Brazil’s poor women’s voices at the centre of the research.

Theoretically, I utilize new social movement theory in a unique way. By combining the arguments surrounding the political economy of the state and the autonomy of social actors from poor women’s point view, I contribute to an understanding of low-women’s place in social movements. New social movement theory was particularly helpful for my purposes in providing a political and economic context in which to analyze poor women’s narratives and to view them as political actors.

The arguments of Molyneux (1985) and Alvarez (1990)
were not beneficial for this thesis because of the population of women studied. However, even though these theorists do not effectively address poor women's organizations, their contributions to understanding middle class women's organizations cannot be diminished.

Because Molyneux and Alvarez's theories were not suitable for my purposes, Conger Lind's theory was applied to poor Brazilian women, as an alternative perspective on these women's politics. This new perspective is one that does not necessarily require women's interests to be transformed in order to be considered political activities or strategic interests. Conger Lind's theory was found to be quite helpful when examining the activities of Brazil's working women, but, because of the underestimation of the power of the political and economic context of Brazil, her theory was not adequate for helping one understand the activities of no-income women.

As a result of the shortfall of Conger Lind's theory, the concept of political muting, as provided by Warren and Bourque (1985) was used to look at how no-income women's political messages may be silenced.

Future research in the area of poor women's politics within urban Brazil may involve closer examination of resistance measures used by low-income women. Despite the democratic reforms being made, Brazil continues to have an extremely hostile environment. One of the consequences of
this is that women’s narratives gathered by researchers do not perhaps reflect women’s true feelings towards the state or what they feel the solutions to their economic problems may be because of fear of repression. However, by doing more research, most notably in the area of micro-resistance, one may be hopeful that a new understanding of poor women’s politics will become possible in the near future.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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