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"A CHAMBERED NAUTILUS"

The Contradictory Nature of Puerto Rican Women's Role in the Social Construction of a Transnational Community

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Recent transnational migration literature does not sufficiently explore women's role in the development of transnational communities. By analyzing 30 interviews with Puerto Rican migrant and return migrant women, the author shows that women, through subsistence production, play a significant role in the social construction of transnational communities. By using a transnational perspective and placing migrant women's subsistence work and its contradictory nature at the center of her analysis, the author challenges studies that assume that maintaining ties to homelands leads to freedom for all family members, moves away from home/host binary frameworks of immigrant women's experiences that locate greater gender oppression in home countries and more freedom in host societies, and explores women's complex perceptions of home.

My grandmother's house is like a chambered nautilus; it has many rooms, yet it is not a mansion. . . . It is a home that has grown organically, according to the needs of its inhabitants. It is the place of our origin; the stage for our memories and dream of Island life.

(Ortiz Cofer 1990, 23)

Unlike previous depictions of immigrant groups, recent ethnic community literature provides numerous examples of groups that do not sever relations with homeland communities once they move to the United States. Instead, migrants maintain ties to home communities as strategies of resistance to race and class oppression (Lessinger 1992; Rouse 1992; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). By exchanging resources, information, and people across borders, migrant groups

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participate in the social construction of transnational communities (Goldring 1992). Goldring (1992), for example, highlights several social practices that help individuals maintain identification with villages, villagers, and family members. Marriage patterns, fictitious and real kinship ties, allow people to claim they are related to almost anyone, and networks that make migration possible all contribute to the social construction of transnational communities. As areas on each side of the border are transformed, traditionally drawn boundaries become blurred while new ones emerge (Anzaldúa 1987).

Transnational families and households represent one way in which Puerto Rican migrants respond to the negative economic, political, and social forces they have encountered in the United States.¹ They maintain ties to their homeland community and negotiate multiple identities (e.g., ethnic, national) as a form of resistance to "their subordination within global capitalist systems" (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, 12). Since resources are spread and distributed unevenly within the global system, Puerto Rican migrants maintain links to various places to maximize their access to economic resources, social services, and resources in the form of relatives or friends. In addition, their ties to Puerto Rican home communities enable them to resist inferior and demeaning definitions of their race and class position within U.S. society. Thus, the process by which Puerto Rican migrants "link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" does not simply stem from a mournful sense of nostalgia for "life the way it used to be"; rather, it represents ways in which migrants act politically to give meaning to the social spaces and landscapes they occupy (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, 1). Out of space, they define place (Martin and Talpade Mohanty 1986).

Although the concept of multiple home bases and transnational communities is not new (Goldring 1992; Rouse 1992), with few exceptions (Georges 1992; Sutton 1992; Wiltshire 1992), most studies of this topic do not sufficiently explore the role women play in the development and maintenance of such communities. The absence of a gendered analysis in the transnational migrant literature is surprising since many scholars have suggested that transnational families and multiple homes are the basis of transnational networks (Goldring 1992; Wiltshire 1992). According to these scholars, transnational families maintain links with relatives in other areas and share resources and information across households and borders. Since women have traditionally served as the main caretakers of families, a study that does not focus on women's role in the creation of transnational social fields is necessarily limited.

In this paper, by drawing on literature addressing subsistence work and transnationalism and by discussing women's competing responsibilities and their efforts to identify and use resources across national boundaries, I explore Puerto Rican migrant women's contradictory conceptions and experiences of home and host societies. More specifically, through in-depth interviews with 18 Puerto Rican return migrant and 12 migrant women, I argue that women's subsistence work,

including kin work and caring work, contributes significantly to the social construction of transnational families and households.² Through women-centered networks, these women care for children and the elders both in Puerto Rico and the United States. They organize family gatherings and connect U.S. households to households in Puerto Rico. They also connect households to social service agencies (e.g., hospitals and schools) across the transnational social field. In doing this work, women redefine space and contribute in important ways to the creation of transnational communities.

To place women's subsistence work³ and women-centered networks at the center of this analysis and to acknowledge the contradictory nature of these networks and the work women perform disrupts coherent notions of home as a haven from race and class oppression. That is, this focus challenges transnational community studies that assume connections to home and broader social fields lead to a sense of having more freedom for all family participants (Rouse 1992). Second, this approach moves us away from the binary framing of immigrant women's experiences that locates greater gender oppression in the homeland and more independence in the host society (Andezian 1986; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 1995; Lamphere 1986). And third, by recognizing the work that women perform to create community across the transnational field, attention is drawn to the complexity and contradictoriness of women's perceptions and experiences of home.

Too often, scholars argue that families in racial ethnic communities provide a haven from the racist world and that immigrants maintain ties to home communities in an effort to resist disadvantaged class conditions and race oppression, and yet they have not sufficiently addressed the contradictory nature of transnational families and communities for women (Rouse 1992; Wiltshire 1992). The women I interviewed (through women-centered networks) carry out and feel responsible for much of the subsistence work that sustains home, family, and transnational communities. In this way they contribute to defining social fields that may afford them and their families greater opportunities to improve their class and race positions, but this work has not always benefited them as women. As the Puerto Rican women I interviewed continue to be responsible for the kin work and caring work that sustain these social entities, this becomes "another way in which men, the economy, and the state extract labor from women without a fair return" (Di Leonardo 1992, 256).

Yet, while it is true that the women in this study are victims, they are also "nurturant weavers" who create "networks of relationship on which [they in turn rely]" (Gilligan 1982, 17; see also Di Leonardo 1992). The kin work and caring work that Puerto Rican women carry out across the transnational field is not equitably distributed and is burdensome, but it is a means of experiencing love, creating a sense of belonging and a sense of family, and can bring women power and recognition (Di Leonardo 1992; Hill-Collins 1992; Thorne 1992).

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Examining the subsistence work that women carry out across the transnational field and the contradictory nature of this work helps to move scholars away from dualistic arguments that see home societies as the site of gender oppression and host societies as the place that offers more freedom or vice versa (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Lamphere 1986). That is, it challenges the belief that the migration process itself dismantles patriarchy in any significant way.

A review of women and immigration literature reveals that scholars who fail to take a transnational perspective and who do not place women-centered networks and women's subsistence work at the center of their analysis construct home/host dualistic arguments that oversimplify women's experiences of home. Much of this literature examines aspects of the migration/immigration experience that contribute to women's sense of greater freedom in the United States and other host societies (e.g., Andezian 1986). Other scholars have examined how the fact of women's increased economic contributions and men's declining economic resources, once in the host society, explains why families become less patriarchal. Lamphere (1986), for example, found that among Portuguese and Colombian immigrants, the need for both husbands and wives to work has meant that in the United States, men are doing more to take care of their children, homes, and those tasks traditionally assigned to women than they did in their home countries.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) in studying family stage migration found that elements of the migration process—for example, spousal separation—lead to women gaining greater gender independence, while men learn and take on work that traditionally has been defined as “women's work.” These elements of the migration process, argues Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992), reshape gender relations. That is, once Mexican immigrant families are reunited in the United States, “women still have less power than men, but they generally enjoy more than they did in Mexico” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 411).

Although some of these scholars do acknowledge that the migration experience does not seriously challenge patriarchal domination, much of their arguments are still framed around the idea that host societies provide greater freedom for women than their home countries (Kibria 1990). This binary thinking mirrors earlier feminist thought that dichotomized and located women's oppression in the family and promised independence in the market place. The market/family dichotomy seems to be implicit in the home/host binary framework when scholars argue that, because it provided more paid work opportunities, the host society offered women more freedom than the home country (Lamphere 1986). Both dichotomies deny the complexity of women's experiences and cultural differences.

Arguing that immigrant women experience more freedom in the United States and other host societies because of the unique aspects of the migration experience seems to obscure and oversimplify women's contradictory experiences. First, this dualistic way of thinking can easily deny the rewards of motherhood as well as the prestige and power women gained from caring work and household work. The

home/host dichotomy also obscures the reality that many immigrant women, while gaining some forms of freedom because of their paid work, still have the primary responsibility for the subsistence work that sustains their families and communities. Thus, women must work the double shift of paid work and household work. Furthermore, with the decline of traditionally male manufacturing and service sector jobs, some immigrant women find themselves working more steadily and earning more money than their husbands. Men who feel that their status and identity as primary wage earners and providers are threatened because of their wives' paid work will at times be abusive toward their spouses (Hossfeld 1990).

Home/host dualistic arguments also fail to acknowledge how the workplace and host societies expose women to different and additional forms of gender oppression as well as class and race domination. For example, Hossfeld (1994) and Segura (1994) show that employers prefer to hire immigrant women over men because of patriarchal and racist assumptions that women can afford to work for less and are suited physiologically for routine work and work that requires good hand-eye coordination. It is immigrant women's comparative disadvantage in the global labor market that gives them a comparative advantage over their male counterparts. In addition, Wihtol de Wenden and Corona DeLey (1986) and Caspari and Giles (1986) show how patriarchal and racist beliefs inform, for example, French and British immigration policies. These policies, they argue, channel women to traditionally low-paying and unpopular jobs and to service sector jobs "that are seen as an extension of woman's work in the home and therefore not really work" (Caspari and Giles 1986, 168). These jobs offer few chances for upward mobility, are prone to seasonal fluctuations, and expose women to poor and at times unhealthy working conditions. Furthermore, French "laws that link a woman's residence and work permit to that of their husband's" increase "immigrant women's dependency on their husbands" (Wihtol de Wenden and Corona DeLey 1986, 211). In short, home/host dualistic arguments do not challenge the underlying economic and political systems that maintain women in subordinate positions and tend to oversimplify women's experiences in host societies.

Immigrant women from developing countries may cite the comparative advantage of economic and social positions they hold in the United States as compared with their home country, but as Hossfeld (1990) argues, it should not deter our attention from the relative lack of job security, poor working conditions, pay inequity, and gender discrimination that immigrant women experience in their jobs in the United States and other host societies. Nor should it steer us away from seeing how women still carry out an unfair share of subsistence work or from examining what happens to the nature of subsistence work and how women carry it out in transnational migration and community context. It is the transnational/global perspective that Hossfeld (1990) and Segura (1994) bring to paid work that we must bring to our analysis of women's subsistence work.

The home/host binary thinking also conceals the different family structures that these women experienced in their home countries, as well as the benefits, freedom, and resources that home societies afforded them. For example, the Portuguese and

Colombian women that Lamphere (1986) studied explained that in their home countries, they could rely on kin to take care of children, while in host countries, they could not as readily rely on friends or relatives. Kin-centered networks in home communities also offered women a social life as they carried out their subsistence work.

To fully examine all the ways to challenge the home/host dichotomy is beyond the scope of this article; however, a perspective that recognizes women's transnational community experience and the subsistence work they do to create these communities problematizes traditional notions of family and community and recognizes the multiple forms of oppression and disadvantaged conditions (race, class, and gender) that women experience. Family households and communities are not bounded by space and the subsistence work that women carry out to create these communities transcends national boundaries, making it difficult to argue that women experience greater gender freedom in host societies and more oppression in home countries. By exploring the subsistence work that women conduct across the transnational community and by recognizing how it is on one hand oppressive but on the other offers more freedom from race oppression and disadvantaged class conditions, a more complex picture of gender inequities emerges.

Finally, recognizing the work that women carry out to create and sustain ties to home communities also highlights the complex attitudes and perceptions immigrant women have about home. Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1992) research of Mexican immigrant women and Pessar's (1986) work with Dominican immigrants indicates that some women, because of the greater freedom they experience in the United States, have a very strong preference for permanent settlement in the United States, while men in the samples more often expressed a desire to return to their home country. Wanting to stay in the United States, women use various strategies to acquire permanent resettlement here. "The women seek, and then try to stabilize year-round employment, they utilize public and private institutional resources to sustain their families' daily needs, and in their neighborhoods, they build community ties with other immigrant women, families, and neighborhood organizations" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1995, 40). Yet, the findings in this study suggest a more complex picture. For example, the Puerto Rican women I interviewed may make significant contributions to the settlement of their families in the United States but not to the exclusion of maintaining ties to home communities and sustaining relations with people back home; they do not see the home community exclusively as the locus of oppression. The homeland for them is also the site of nurturance and resistance.

METHOD AND SAMPLE

For me as a Puerto Rican scholar, in the words of Reynato Rosaldo, "questions of culture emerge not only from my discipline, but also from a more personal politics of identity and community" (1989, xi). Like Rosaldo, I find myself

"work[ing] outward from in-depth knowledge of a specific form of life," as a "connected critic" and knower, "rather than work[ing] downward from abstract principals" (1989, 194). Excerpts from my fieldnotes best describe how I, as a connected knower, first became interested and developed my project on migration and transnational communities.

It's strange for me to sit here with my lap top computer overlooking the hills. This is where my parents grew up. As a child, I listened carefully to the stories they told me about Puerto Rico. It's their stories that draw me to this place. I know the struggle and the trajectory that took my parents to Chicago and now brought me to this place where I am now—in the "marquecina" with my 92 year old grandmother.

I believe the questions that I pursued in this article began to form on those evenings when I watched my father nostalgically listen to Puerto Rican records for hours and on those nights when I was awakened at 3 and 4 in the morning by the unexpected arrival of relatives from Puerto Rico. The boxes of clothing my mother prepared and sent to relatives in Puerto Rico was also how I first experienced what we now have come to know as transnational communities.

Also, underlying my interest in migration and transnational communities was a desire to connect at a deeper level to a place I consider home and to the stories I grew up hearing. Since childhood, I learned the stories, myths, and characters of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican migration experience. Each telling of these stories, I believe, engraved in my memory the people, places, and dreams of Puerto Rican migrants. As I was told these stories over and over and as each relative added different details, a more complex picture was formed. My interviews with Puerto Rican women, in some ways, represent for me a way to hear and come to know more deeply the stories I heard as a child, but they were also a way to further complicate them. I came to know and understand the tensions and contradictions of Puerto Rican migrant women as I did my own anxieties concerning my own place on the borderland—both Puerto Rico and Chicago are home, but each is also unfamiliar to me.

As I carried out this study, I realized I could neither study Puerto Rican social networks and transnational communities from the outside nor simply from an objective stance. It was not possible to separate myself as a scholar from who I am as a Puerto Rican woman. As I conducted interviews and gathered field notes, I found myself enmeshed in the very social and woman-centered networks I was studying. I was myself a conduit of, as well as an active participant in, the social networks when I took packages to the post office for my relatives in Chicago or when I helped with the funeral arrangements for my aunt who had died in Chicago and would be buried in Puerto Rico.

While many of the questions I pursued in this study emerged from my own life experiences, it was not until 1986 and then again from the fall of 1992 to 1996 that I formally conducted the study. The findings are based on life history interviews I completed with Puerto Rican migrant and return migrant women. I conducted

interviews in Chicago and Puerto Rico (Caguas, Rio Piedras, and San Lorenzo).⁴ In addition to the life history interviews, I also collected field notes of Puerto Rican women's family life experiences both in Puerto Rico and Chicago.

The sample consists of 12 migrant women and 18 return migrant women. In Chicago, I located women to interview using an informal snowball sampling technique, speaking with them in their homes. In Puerto Rico, I identified my first respondents by asking friends and relatives who live in San Lorenzo if they knew anyone who had lived in the United States. It was not difficult to generate an initial list of names. Once I exhausted my initial list, I relied on the snowball sampling technique to find other potential respondents. The discovery in Puerto Rico of various social and civic organizations that cater to the needs of return migrants also provided me an easily identifiable pool of women to interview.

Nearly all 30 women in the sample migrated to the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. While most were in their late teens or early twenties when they left Puerto Rico, 9 women were 14 years or younger and migrated to the United States with their parents. Fourteen of the women were single when they first left Puerto Rico and 1 was separated from her husband. Most of the married women ($N = 8$) went to the United States at the same time as their husbands and 7 of the 8 had children when they left Puerto Rico and generally brought their children with them at the time of their migration.

Like most of the Puerto Rican migrants who came to the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, many of the women in my sample grew up in rural and semirural areas. Of the 21 women who were 15 years old or older when they migrated, 12 worked for pay in small factories before coming to the United States, and in the textile industry and tobacco industry in Puerto Rico. Most of the women first migrated to Chicago or New York; however, a few of the women first went to live in Indiana and New Jersey. Twenty-two of the 30 women had lived in the United States for 16 years or more at the time of the interview.

Most respondents grew up in poverty in Puerto Rico, and although many explained that there were times they experienced economic hardship especially in the first few years after arriving in the United States, most were able to achieve working-class status in the United States. Thirteen of the women had some high school education, while most only had grammar schooling. At least 25 of the 30 respondents worked in the United States in small factories and in the textile and service industries. Seventeen of them at one time or another owned a home in the United States.

Of the 18 return migrant women, most went back to Puerto Rico in the late 1970s or 1980s. While some had retired when they returned to Puerto Rico, most were still of working age. In fact, 12 of the 18 women had school-age children when they returned to their home country. Most of the working-age women once in Puerto Rico returned to full-time housework and were not actively looking for paid work when I interviewed them.

My sample is generally representative of the cohort of Puerto Ricans who migrated to Chicago during the 1950s and 1960s. The employment and migration

patterns of the women I interviewed coincide with what is reported in the literature on Puerto Rican migrants as a whole. For example, the fact that many of the women returned at least once to Puerto Rico is not an atypical experience among the Puerto Rican migrants who came to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s (Padilla 1987). That more than half of the women I interviewed who were 15 years and older worked for pay before migrating is also not unusual. Safa (1986) and Monk and Alexander (1993) report that Puerto Rico's industrialization program of the 1950s and 1960s led to an increase in female labor participation. Compared with Chicago's Puerto Rican female population, the women in my sample are less educated. Less than 20 percent of the women in my sample had completed their high school education as compared with 42 percent of Chicago's current Puerto Rican female population. That most of the women in my sample who worked for pay in the United States worked in the manufacturing, textile, and service industries is consistent with the employment patterns of the Puerto Rican migrant population of Chicago as a whole (Padilla 1987). The migrant women in my sample who still live in Chicago represent part of Chicago's 46 percent of the female population who were born in Puerto Rico (Latino Institute 1996).

In my interviews with migrants and return migrant women, the questions focused on understanding their migration experience and the contact they maintained with their homeland communities and with relatives. I asked questions about their life in Puerto Rico before migrating and also about their early immigration experiences. I explored with the migrant and return migrant women questions about their paid and unpaid work both in Puerto Rico and the United States and discussed with them their perceptions of home. While I did ask return migrant women questions that focused on their experiences as return migrants, that data are not generally a part of this article.⁵

I conducted all interviews in Spanish. When transcribing and translating women's stories, I made every effort to maintain the meaning behind their spoken words. I do recognize, however, that in transcribing and translating, I lost some of the nuances of the Spanish language and of the particular dialects in which the women spoke.⁶ Also difficult to capture were the strong emotions and passion with which some of the women told their stories. For example, in at least two instances women started crying as they shared their life histories.

PUERTO RICAN WOMEN'S EARLY MIGRATION AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF HOME

The meaning of transnational communities and the work it takes to create them can initially be located in women's stories about their lives and unpaid work in Puerto Rico and their early migration experience. Through these stories, we learn that Puerto Rican women construct home as a place of security and stability, but their constructions also include an awareness of the gender oppression typical of these places. In particular, women passionately articulate the longing for, and the

expectation of, homes that provide nurturance and security and that do not rely on women to create them. The Puerto Rican migrants expressed a desire to do work within their communities and home that is meaningful and nonexploitative.

Recent studies of immigrant groups have argued that "remembered place . . . serve[s] as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 11; Leonard forthcoming). The metaphoric use of homeland as an anchor highlights communal intensity and the importance that home has for migrants as they try to make sense of their lives. This image of home dissolves separations and the hierarchical relations of inequality among family members (Brow 1990). At the same time, this depiction of homeland as an anchor tends to obscure the tensions and ambiguities that are also a part of women's construction of homeland. Puerto Rican women speak out about the burdensome work they and their mothers were expected to do.

Through stories and jokes, Puerto Rican migrant women share their experiences and journey from their homeland communities to the United States and in the process participate in an impassioned construction and reconstruction of their homeland and their history. Each retelling of their history reshapes it and uncovers the multiple layers that make up home. For Puerto Rican women, the landscape and particular towns of the homeland provide concrete, physical anchoring points. One woman in her 50s recalls what home meant for her as a teenager and explains how she regrets not having asked her parents to leave her in Puerto Rico when they migrated to the United States.

The other day I was just remembering that I should have asked them to leave me here and not take me over there. Here I would have so much fun with my friends and you would find things to do and over there, I don't know, it was harder for me because it was like you were in a cage in the house. I missed the trees and the slopes.

Similarly, a Puerto Rican migrant in New York, Elizabeth, describes how her sister holds on to memories of home and their mother. "Yes [the house is there] and we have remodeled it. . . . My sister, the youngest one, doesn't want to get rid of it. Every time she goes, she goes there and its like she sees our mother." Judith Ortiz Cofer (1990) in her narrative work echoes these sentiments in speaking about her grandmother's house in Puerto Rico.

My grandmother's house is like a chambered nautilus; it has many rooms, yet it is not a mansion. Its proportions are small and its design simple. It is a house that has grown organically, according to the needs of its inhabitants. To all of us in the family it is known as *la casa de Mamá*. It is the place of our origin; the stage for our memories and dream of Island life. (Ortiz Cofer 1990, 23)

However, it is also true, as Martin and Talpade Mohanty explain, that "the very stability, familiarity, and security" of home is "undermined by the reality that these places obscure particular race, class, and gender struggles" (1986, 196). Puerto Rican women's stories of home and homeland show that they were acutely

conscious of the repression, conflicts, and power relations that made up home and family as they were growing up. They knew that they were less privileged than others and in particular were aware of the unfair share of the subsistence work they were expected to carry out. They saw little room for adventure, growth, or the creation of a place for themselves in their homelands. And, like many of us, they desired to make significant contributions to their community, family, and home through meaningful work that did not require their deference and self-sacrifice. As one migrant woman put it, "I aspired to much more. I wanted much more." Migrant women's awareness that the homeland is not simply a utopia "politicizes and undercuts any physical anchors" they "might use to construct a coherent notion of home or . . . [their] identity in relation to it" (Martin and Talpade Mohanty 1986, 196).

Within Raquel's, Maria's, Teresa's, and Rosa's depictions of home as an anchor, there is also a keen awareness of their oppressive experiences. Raquel, a 52-year-old migrant explains how as the youngest adult daughter she was expected to show deference not only to her father but also to her older sister and had to carry out an unfair share of subsistence work.⁷

No, they [my parents] didn't let me work; they didn't even let me leave the house. Well, I used to work at home. Look at home, I was the one that used to cook and did everything. . . . Just to let you know . . . there was one day when my father and sister went to town to buy some things. . . . A neighbor came by to ask my mother if she would send me or my sister to her house later in the afternoon to shuck some beans. . . . I overheard this and because I wanted my mother to send me instead of my sister, I remember that I did everything I had to do in the house as quickly as I could. I cleaned and cooked . . . I figured that since I had been the one who spent the whole day in the house cleaning and since my sister had gone to town, well, I thought they would let me go to our neighbor's house. When all of a sudden, my mother yells . . . to my sister telling her to go and help Doña Panchita. Look . . . I felt like they had poured a bucket of cold water over me. I went to the barn in the back of the house and I cried. . . . Well, just to let you know, there was a rope hanging down from the ceiling of the barn and I would look at that rope and think to myself, should I choke myself?

Maria, Raquel's sister, who was in the room during the interview responded to her sister's story.

Please don't talk about that. I don't even want to remember because I get angry. Look to let you know the truth, I left with Pedro because I wanted to get away from home. I left with him so that I wouldn't commit suicide . . . I didn't love him . . . I left because I was the one who had to milk the cows and tend to them and the pigs. My sister and I were the men of the house. That's why they use to call my father "Rooster Tip." . . . They use to call him that because he would walk like a proud rooster on the tips of his toes so that he wouldn't get his shoes wet or dirty.

Even before marriage and bearing children, women were expected to engage in caretaking work. For example, while the youngest adult female sibling in a family had to show deference to older sisters, my respondents explained that when they were growing up, parents expected the eldest daughter in the family to care for

younger/school-age siblings, to cook for the family, and to assist in household maintenance work (Toro-Morn 1995). Often, meeting these expectations meant that parents did not allow their oldest daughter or daughters to attend school. A New York Puerto Rican migrant, Elizabeth, for example, explains how she was expected at an early age to do housework and help her mother with paid work. She, like other Puerto Rican migrants, had to serve as "other mothers" for their younger siblings. Elizabeth explains that she was not able to go to school but desired a more meaningful and more caring home life.

Well, I use to help my mother in the house, and . . . when we had to return clothes, because she ironed a lot for other people, we had to go to town to turn in the clothes. . . . One time I remember that I was so angry with my mother that I left the house. I was jealous of my sister, since I saw that she (my mother) would be more loving toward my younger sister. . . . And I use to see that they did not caress me and everything was work, work, and I said, I'm leaving. . . . I was about 10 or 11 years old. . . . But like I was telling you, at that age I was already doing some heavy (difficulty work) . . . I would have wanted to continue studying and I couldn't. I was only able to get to third grade [because] I had to get out of school and stay at home to help the younger ones and to help my mother.

Teresa also describes how she desired to leave her hometown and do meaningful work.

My father was very strict with us. I didn't have much liberty or movement and that is what made me go out there [to the United States]. But out there I went to live with an aunt of mine and it was more or less the same thing. . . . When I was living with my aunt, I wasn't able to go to school because . . . her husband didn't let me. . . . He said it was a waste of time. . . . My father was the type of person, how should I say it, he didn't let me make my own life. The only alternative, since I couldn't find work here (in Puerto Rico) . . . I lived in a small town, you know, and he didn't let me go to other places where I could find work. I told him he had to let me go to New York with my aunt. I helped a lot around [my aunt's] house. When you live in someone else's house, they tend to depend on you. She was . . . laid back . . . I realized that I left my parents' house and I went to live with my aunt [but] she too was fairly rough. . . . And so I had to get married.

Raquel's account of when she first left Puerto Rico to come to the United States shows how she had to do most of the paid and unpaid work within her family. She expresses a desire to break away from an abusive home situation. She left with four children under the age of five.

I was disgusted with him [her husband] . . . I was the one that was working and had to do everything. I had a bad life and was very, very sick. . . . He just wanted to continue having babies. I went and got an operation [hysterectomy] before I left. He wouldn't sign for me to get the operation but I got it anyway.

The Puerto Rican women I interviewed not only point out the unfair share of subsistence work they were expected to carry out but also the contradictions

between Puerto Ricans' gender ideologies and actual practices. In contrast to the ideology of *Marianismo* and the expectation that women stay home and engage in only caring work, the Puerto Rican women in my sample carried out both productive and subsistence work (Rivera 1986).⁸ In addition, although women are expected to be "feminine," they often performed heavy work both inside and outside the home, in farms and as part of paid work. In short, as with many other cultures, Puerto Rican gender relations are paradoxical—a domestic ideology coexists with the reality that women engaged in productive work (Momsen 1993).

In their construction of homeland communities as a remembered place, women also juxtaposed stories of home with stories of their early immigration experience and their relationships with men. Intertwined with their accounts of having to carry out an unfair share of subsistence work and the contradictions between gender ideologies and actual practices were stories that pointed out the irony surrounding women's attempts to leave the oppressive nature of their home life (Momsen 1993). Raquel explains,

I came here [to the United States] to get away from the house because they wouldn't let me do anything and then when I got here it was worse. I remember that when Miguel would go off to work he would lock me up in the small apartment and I couldn't go anywhere. From 2:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. I was locked up unable to leave, alone in the apartment. I would spend the day looking out the window.

Gloria, who was single when she migrated, came to the United States to take care of her nieces and nephews. She sadly describes the unfortunate circumstances that pushed her to migrate, the inequities she experienced living with her brother when she first arrived, and her desire for doing more meaningful work.

[My father] even tried to rape me and my childhood was no more . . . until my brother [who came] over here [Chicago] wanted me to come here so that I could take care of his kids and since I was looking for a way out. Because the truth is that since that had happened with my father, well I did not feel good . . . then my brother wanted me to be like their housekeeper and nanny and it is not that I felt above this, but I felt . . . that I couldn't live like a housekeeper—I wanted to work.

By weaving together both stories of home and their early immigration experience, women emphasize the themes of surveillance, constraint, and the burdensome work that made up home in Puerto Rico, and at the same time, the relearning of their "place" once in the United States.

As represented by these women's stories, subsistence work within the individual household is the place where gender oppression is perpetuated; where women are controlled, confined, and restrained. Seen in this context, migration can be a form of resistance to gender oppression. Yet, these women did not abandon home entirely. Among the Puerto Rican women that I interviewed there is a desire for sameness, for the security of place. Puerto Rican women's stories, in the words of Martin and Talpade Mohanty, demonstrate an "unrelenting . . . desire for home, for security, for protection—and not only the desire for them, but the expectation of a right to

these things" (1986, 206). However, there is a tension, ambiguity, and ambivalence between the desire for the security of home and the awareness of the oppression of home.

In this tension, there is a sense of agency and politicalization (Martin and Talpade Mohanty 1986). The women I interviewed wanted to change and to break away from home without denying their past. They left home because of the poverty and gender oppression they experienced, and because there was no room for adventure or to grow and make a life for themselves through meaningful work. But faced with race oppression and conditions of poverty in the United States, they make a place for themselves, in part, by salvaging some things from their past and from the home territory that "can be made new" (C. Kaplan 1987, 195).

TRANSNATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES AND THE WORK WOMEN DO

Puerto Rican women sustain relationships across national boundaries and in particular create and maintain women-centered networks because they share their subsistence work and responsibilities; that is, they are engaged in caring work and in the process of creating cross-household kin ties. In addition, as resources become unevenly distributed across the transnational field, women also maintain ties with one another and use their networks to take advantage of what each place within the expanded social fields has to offer. In the process, they reclaim and redefine home, creating transnational communities and spaces. The process is, however, contradictory. Both kin and caring work require self-sacrifice as well as provide opportunities for self-expression, power, and prestige.

Kinship Work

Subsistence work, which is work that creates and sustains physical life and psychological well-being, includes what Di Leonardo (1992) calls the "work of kinship," a concept important for understanding Puerto Rican women's role in creating transnational families and households. Di Leonardo (1992) explains,

By kin work I refer to the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organizations of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi kin relations; decision to neglect or to intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities; and the creation and communication of altering images of family and kin vis-a-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media. (1992, 248)

The Puerto Rican women I studied do the work of maintaining cross-household kin ties as described by Di Leonardo (1992) and others (Rosenthal 1985). Across national boundaries they work to create family through gatherings, reunions,

celebrations, and meals. Women describe their role in organizing major events—for example, weddings, anniversaries, baptisms, and family reunions—that involve many extended family members in both Puerto Rico and the United States. Even when visiting Puerto Rico, migrant women work with nonmigrant women to bring families together and cook meals. While at home in the United States, migrant women also undertake the responsibility of hosting relatives visiting them from Puerto Rico. Such events, according to Kaplan Daniels “symbolize the integrity of the family and provide concrete memories of sharing in an activity. The memories help create the sense of solidarity and commitment to the common aims of family that make it a special unit” (1987, 411-12). Although the women delegate chores to the men in preparation for these visits and celebrations, they are usually the ones who notice the tasks and carry out the bulk of the work.

Highlighting the work-related aspects of maintaining kin ties across national boundaries demonstrates Puerto Rican women's complex and contradictory experiences and perceptions of home. Creating a sense of family across national boundaries and constructing transnational households and communities requires that women monitor, schedule, and plan “to produce points of intersection among diverging paths” (DeVault 1991, 81). In Puerto Rico and in the United States, migrant women networked with nonmigrant women in pooling resources, such as beds, sheets, towels, and food in preparation for family visits and reunions. Whether they were visiting Puerto Rico or hosting relatives from Puerto Rico, migrant women spent numerous hours setting up temporary housing for relatives and in planning and cooking meals for them. To do this work, women had to know who had extra space, who had a car, and who was and was not capable of helping. Given the physical distance, Puerto Rican women developed creative strategies for bringing family together. One example is Luisa, who prepared a holiday meal for her family in Chicago. When one of her nieces was visiting in Puerto Rico, she decided to send back with her niece an entire meal for their extended family in Chicago. She then made arrangements with her sister in Chicago to serve the meal.

Creating family is emotional work because migrant and nonmigrant women have to manage intense relations. Social conflicts and power relations were part of the extended family experiences I observed and required that women function as negotiators and mediators. At times they attempted to minimize conflict and smooth out the edges, work deemed necessary for the creation of family. At other times because of the distance between household and kin family, the work of kinship required that women create a sense of familiarity and belonging among people who did not see each other very often or even know one another. Migrant women who brought their U.S.-born children to visit relatives in Puerto Rico, for example, introduced their children to longtime friends as relatives rather than as acquaintances. They expected their children to treat these fictitious kin with both respect and familiarity.

Women used gatherings, holidays, and meals to create family and sociability but also catered to the preferences of individuals. Responding to individual needs such as food preferences, for example, as DeVault points out, “is not a personal favor but

a requirement of the work" (1991, 40). It is a way to make people feel special as well as members of an extended family unit. Thus, part of the planning work that the migrant and nonmigrant women I studied performed involved taking into account these differences. It meant making sure that everyone got something that would satisfy them. Migrant and nonmigrant women tried to do this by preparing buffet meals with enough choices to please everyone while catering to individuals by helping them pick and choose food that would be personally enjoyable. They did this not only for members of their immediate family but also for other members of their extended families.

Large extended family gatherings and holiday celebrations often have to conform to patterns of "proper meals" and "proper celebrations" (DeVault 1991, 44). Thus, kin work involved cultural standards and expectations Puerto Rican women had to meet. For example, in the large Puerto Rican family gatherings that I observed, this meant that migrant and nonmigrant women had to prepare traditional meals and party favors as well as entertainment that maintained traditional cultural practices.

Not only were these women expected by men to do a greater share of this highly skilled kin work but within women-centered networks they fostered strategies that perpetuate the unequal distribution of the work. For example, women made the work seem easy in several different ways. First, they denied their own physical labor by discouraging one another from complaining about feeling tired or their inability to do the work. Making the work look simple also required that women improvise when they did not have the necessary resources or when unplanned situations arose, as, for example, when 14 relatives came unannounced to stay for two weeks with Teresa, a Chicago Puerto Rican migrant. These situations required too that migrant women be flexible, creative, and willing to create alternative plans. Anticipating other needs, which has been widely documented in the literature as an important dimension of caring work, also functions as a way to make the work look effortless (Aronson 1992). By anticipating other needs, women made it seem as though the work came naturally. Women-centered networks also perpetuated the unequal distribution of kin work between men and women by pressuring each other to assume responsibility for carrying out kin work. For example, Rosa explains how her sister seems to consistently avoid doing the kin work expected of her. "My sister Luz really tries to get away with murder. She never wants to do her share."

Kin work across the transnational field is labor. It is highly skilled, demanding work that has specific requirements, standards, and expectations. But, building extended family ties that help create and maintain family solidarity and continuity is not only a place where, as Di Leonardo says, "much unpaid labor must be undertaken, but also a realm in which one may attempt to gain human satisfactions—and power—not available in the labor market" (1992, 256). For immigrant and migrant women in disadvantaged race and class positions in the United States, building extended family ties that transcend national boundaries also serves as an important way to resist feelings associated with racial discrimination and their disadvantaged class position. Family gatherings and celebrations, especially those

in Puerto Rico, serve as a place to receive nurturance. Male and female migrants and return migrants often talked about the subtle and not so subtle forms of discrimination they experienced. One migrant speaking from Puerto Rico explains, "Puerto Ricans over there, I don't know why this is, but they don't treat us Puerto Ricans very well in the United States." He continues,

You are rejected by people, there are people over there that if you are speaking [Spanish], the first thing that they will tell you is to shut up because Spanish is not permitted. They tell you have to speak English in the United States. . . . There is a lot of discrimination over there.

Another migrant describes the discrimination she and her friends and family experienced:

We wouldn't pay too much attention to it [racial discrimination], the only thing is that when we were living on Racine there was this white woman . . . and every time she heard us talking, she would say [in a taunting way], "the cockroaches, the cockroaches."

Family gatherings and celebrations helped migrants feel a sense of relief from experiences of alienation and discrimination and served to rejuvenate them. One migrant explained,

I will tell you one thing even when you get to the airport you feel happier. You understand what people are telling you, and you can talk to anyone you want. You can go into any business and any store.

Another migrant explained feeling more comfortable in Puerto Rico, "It is where you are born, I suppose it's tradition . . . and one feels better."

Both men and women experienced racial discrimination, but visits home, often facilitated by the kin work women carried out, provided continuity and connection with relatives. Often migrants used whatever vacation time they had to visit with relatives in Puerto Rico. During these visits and family gatherings, women could interact with others with whom they had a shared history, experiences, and relations. For example, Puerto Rican migrant women felt that their struggles to break away from poverty as well as their successes were understood in this context (Rouse 1992). Migrant women who eventually returned to Puerto Rico often shared how important their visits to Puerto Rico were for them. One migrant woman explains, "Even when I would come here [Puerto Rico] for vacation or to visit my mother, if it had been up to me I would have stayed."

Although women have the unfair share of kin and caring work, these efforts help construct social fields where women can improve their positions of power and find opportunities for self-expression, satisfaction, and recognition; as well as opportunities for sociability, leisure, and fun—a break from the routine of household work, of paid factory or manual work in the United States. Kin work also provides migrant women opportunities to connect children to family and

expose them to traditions and customs. It provides sociability, is nonroutine, and creates families on which they can later rely for nurturance. In part, these dimensions of kin work also explain why women have a difficult time labeling the activities of planning, organizing, and executing family gathering or hosting relatives as work (DeVault 1991).

Acknowledging that kin work is contradictory helps to highlight the reality that women's conceptions of home and community are also contradictory. The Puerto Rican women in this study have a more complex picture and experience of homeland family and communities than what is typically presented in arguments that dichotomize migrant and immigrant women's experiences. Putting the subsistence work women carry out across the transnational community and women-centered networks at the center of the analysis complicates perspectives that see home communities as the site of greater gender oppression and host societies as offering greater opportunities for freedom or that see the migration process as offering more freedom for women (Andezian 1986; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Lamphere 1986).

Caring Work and Competing Responsibilities

As part of their subsistence work across the transnational field, Puerto Rican women also carry out many kinds of caring work, including caring for pregnant daughters, elderly and sick parents, and tending to children other than their own. To do this work, Puerto Rican women have to monitor and meet the physical and emotional needs of individuals in more than one household and balance their time and energy between these. The experiences of the Puerto Rican women I interviewed are not unlike those of other Caribbean immigrants. Olwig (1993), for example, shows that Nevisian women who emigrate to other countries still feel a strong moral obligation to their home island, communities, and families. They maintain ties to their homelands because they remain critical to familial networks as economic and social resources.

Research clearly indicates that women, more than men, are expected to care for dependents (e.g., children and elderly parents), and in general to perform caring work for immediate and extended family members (Aronson 1992; Brody 1981). These expectations stem from strong ideological forces about femininity and gender roles and the taken-for-granted belief that women are naturally better caregivers. For the Puerto Rican women in this study, these beliefs created webs of competing obligations between immediate family needs and extended family needs. This was further complicated by the fact that much of their work was transnational: Migrant women were expected to meet the needs of those who live in Puerto Rico and those who live in the United States. They found themselves, for example, having to take care of an ailing father in Puerto Rico but also having responsibility for the care of their immediate families in the United States. The work that was expected of them was the same, but the geographic separation caused spatially competing expectations around the same kinds of responsibilities.

By asking questions about women's competing responsibilities and how they think about these multiple demands, we again can come to understand the contradictory nature of subsistence work and the meaning of home. What are some of the constraints Puerto Rican migrant women face? What are some considerations they take into account when negotiating who they will care for and for how long? When do the women refuse to do kin work and/or limit their contributions especially in situations where their kin work conflicts with other caring responsibilities? From women's accounts we learn that caring work requires self-sacrifice but also affords them the opportunity to gain recognition and seek personal satisfaction. It is also contradictory because, while caring for others is work, it also has dimensions of leisure—it is nonroutine and provides opportunity for sociability and fun.

Teresa, a Puerto Rican migrant woman with a home base in Chicago, recalls how, in the early 1980s, she went to Puerto Rico and stayed for two months to take care of her elderly father who was terminally ill. Although she wanted to stay in Puerto Rico until her father's death, her relatives constantly reminded her that she should return to the United States to take care of her family in Chicago. Teresa clearly felt responsible for the care of her immediate family and household in Chicago but also her kin in Puerto Rico, and she felt guilty when she was not able to meet everyone's needs. Teresa explained,

I wanted to stay there. I wanted to take care of my father, but I felt everyone was putting pressure on me to come back to Chicago. They kept on telling me that I had done everything I could for my father and that I needed to fulfill my responsibilities and obligations to my own family. I wasn't sure what to do.

It was not easy for the Puerto Rican women I interviewed to determine which of the competing obligations to fulfill. In Teresa's case, there were clearly articulated expectations that she should care for both her elderly father in Puerto Rico and her immediate family in Chicago, but these expectations rarely translated into clear rules and standards about how caring work should be accomplished and how to negotiate the needs of multiple households (DeVault 1991). Thus, Teresa not only faced the task of meeting competing responsibilities but also of deciding which of her competing responsibilities she would fulfill.

Women, in part, make a decision about what caring work they will perform and for how long on the basis of the normative expectation that husbands and children have a greater claim on their time and attention than other relatives. This belief, however, is only one of the considerations Puerto Rican women took into account when deciding for whom and for how long they would perform caring work. The women did not simply succumb to ideological beliefs that they should limit their care for family members living in Puerto Rico when it interfered with their ability to care for their own children and husbands. Women negotiated with immediate family members in Chicago for more time to do meaningful caring work and developed strategies for caring for immediate and extended family members spread out across a broad geographic space.

In their accounts women also made choices, or at least stated a preference, based on a desire to do creative work that would sustain life, home, and family members. This desire to do caring work that is more meaningful, and that shows less deference to traditional expectations, speaks of Puerto Rican women's sense of agency. For example, their decisions or preferences were also based on whether they perceived their work as truly caregiving or as simply providing "personal service," which is work done by subordinates for those in superior positions and is not reciprocated (Dressel and Clark 1990; Waerness 1984).⁹ Teresa, for example, who had been pressured to return to her immediate family in Chicago, explained she wanted to stay with her father and take care of him. She explained later, "It made it easier to deal with his death knowing that I had taken care of my father during his last days." Teresa saw the work of taking care of her father as meaningful, giving her something in return, an ability to deal with her father's death. But her account also suggests that meaningful work also meant work that felt more like true "caregiving" than personal service (Waerness 1984).

As DeVault (1991) points out, in the nuclear family household there is an "intermingling" of caring work that is meaningful and that produces group life, sociability, and nurturance with "personal service work." Similarly, caring work across the transnational community context includes both "caregiving" and "personal service" work. Thus, women made choices or stated preferences on the basis of their perceptions about which of the tasks would be most rewarding and provide a sense of pride and identity versus a feeling of resentment and self-sacrifice. Women may have felt obligated to both care for immediate family in Chicago and family in Puerto Rico, but they showed a preference for doing work that was rewarding and provided opportunities to gain recognition and power within family networks.

When discussing the caring work they were obligated to do across the transnational field, these women also expressed a preference for taking care of extended kin because it seemed less routine, commonplace, and ordinary than taking care of their immediate family in Chicago. Some leisure was involved in the travel to Puerto Rico. For example, Teresa found herself embroiled in several households at the same time. Her story shows how she attempts to negotiate and manage multiple responsibilities and seeks out work that gives her something in return.

Teresa left for Puerto Rico to take care of her oldest daughter who was having complications with her pregnancy. Once there, she stayed five months to help her daughter with the baby, but, through phone conversations, she continued to be involved with her immediate family and household in Chicago. She monitored her family's needs, delegated tasks, and gave her husband and children instructions for taking care of the house and each other. In addition, during the last two months of her stay in Puerto Rico, Teresa alternated between staying with her daughter and her mother who had become ill and was bedridden. In addition to all the work she was doing for her daughter, new grandson, and mother, Teresa found herself enmeshed in other kinship work when 15 relatives from the United States came to visit her mother. Teresa, together with her two sisters who lived in Puerto Rico,

pooled resources and worked to prepare for the family visit. When I asked Teresa about all the work she was having to do, she explained,

For me, it's a nice change from my own routine and is a distraction from my usual worries. At least here, I rest from having to worry about my son and I get away from my husband and his nagging.

As Teresa's story shows, women may also choose between their competing responsibilities based on which work seems more interesting and different. The women I interviewed seem to indicate that while tending to the needs of family members in Puerto Rico, especially older parents, was difficult work, at least initially and as long as the work did not drag on, there were elements of taking care of kin that were not as routine as the housework and caring work they did for their immediate family in the United States. Teresa, like other Puerto Rican women I interviewed, welcomed the break from the daily worries of home life. From Dressel and Clark's (1990) research, we know that women perceive "thinking" about others as caring. This caring work takes "place in their head" and is not "observable," but can be burdensome (Dressel and Clark 1990, 779-80). It includes reflection about diverse family situations, worrying or thinking about an unemployed son, figuring out how best to help a recently divorced daughter, or worrying about an alcoholic brother. For Teresa, going to Puerto Rico, even if it was to care for her daughter, grandson and mother, provided a break from the day-to-day work of worrying about her immediate and extended family members in Chicago. In addition, the travel provided Teresa and others like her opportunities to socialize with relatives and friends they had not seen in a while. Often, unless relatives were very ill, these "work" trips still left room for migrants to go sight-seeing and attend extended family celebrations.

These women's preference for what they would like to be doing expresses a sense of agency; however, women also perpetuated their own oppression within the family. Rosa's situation best exemplifies how this occurs.

Within women-centered networks that span national borders, women developed creative strategies for addressing elderly parents' needs and their husbands and children's needs. Rosa is a Puerto Rican migrant woman in her 50s who lives in Chicago and explains how she and her sisters devised a strategy for taking care of their mother, since none were able or willing to relocate permanently in Puerto Rico.

My sisters and I decided that we would take turns going to Puerto Rico to take care of our mother. Our brother lives with her, but it is better if one of us is there with her. So, we decided that each of us would take turns going to Puerto Rico for a month at a time to be with her and take care of her.

As Rosa's story shows, she and her sisters have internalized the belief that they more than the men in their family are responsible for caring for their mother. For them, it is only natural that they should care for their elderly mother and also believe that they can provide better care for her, excusing their brother from certain kinds

of caring responsibilities. Aronson's (1992) work indicates that this is not atypical. Women tend not to expect men (husbands and brothers) to care for elderly and sick parents based on the belief that men's primary commitment should be to their paid jobs and their belief that men lack the "ability to anticipate and respond to their mother's needs" (Aronson 1992, 19). Rosa and her sisters believed they were better at providing emotional and moral support to their mother, limiting expectations of their brother, even when he had long periods of unemployment. Although their brother lives with their mother, Rosa and her sisters perceive that there are things he cannot do for their mother. For example, they did not believe he was aware of their mother's particular habits. They did not want to push him to do too much for fear he might move out, leaving their mother alone at night.

The women also perpetuated the ideological beliefs that they, more than their brother, were ultimately responsible for their mother's care by sending him gifts and money as a way to thank him for being "nice" and doing them a "favor." With these gifts, the women upheld the belief that their brother was doing more than what is expected. Men typically only do the "nice tasks," visiting their parent and bringing flowers or taking them out to eat, but they do not think of helping them out with the day-to-day chores (Aronson 1992, 20). Rosa and her sisters were aware that their brother was not happy about having to stay with his mother, and they were careful to let him know his self-sacrifice was appreciated.

The Puerto Rican women I studied, including Rosa and her sisters, also perpetuated the ideological belief that they should care for both family in Puerto Rico and immediate family members in Chicago, even across the transnational field, by actually finding ways to accomplish the multiple and sometimes competing responsibilities assigned to them. The women, when taking care of family members in Puerto Rico, devised strategies to ensure that their immediate families in Chicago and their needs would be addressed. For example, while Rosa was gone, her two sisters, living in Chicago, would provide cooked meals for her husband and children. She, in turn, would do the same for her sister's families when they were in Puerto Rico.

Rosa and her sisters further perpetuated the unfair distribution of caring work for their mother by exerting pressure on each other to take care of their mother and by reminding and scheduling each other's trips. Through phone conversations and gossip with their sisters in Puerto Rico they also exerted pressure on their two sisters in Puerto Rico. In this way, women-centered networks helped create competing responsibilities and maintain structures of inequality.

Clearly caring work is contradictory. It is self-sacrificing but also affords women opportunities to do meaningful work. Puerto Rican women are motivated to maintain ties to home communities and family members who need care not only by a sense of duty and obligation (Aronson 1992) but also from a desire to provide care that is truly needed. Home therefore is both a place where they are held accountable for doing an unfair burden of caring work and a place that offers rewards. The contradictory nature of the work that women are asked to undertake across the transnational community makes it problematic to dichotomize women's

experiences where home societies are the site of oppression and host societies are the site of freedom.

THE SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION OF SPACE

Recent literature on transnational communities shows that because of global economic and political restructuring, sites within a particular transnational social field become differentiated (Goldring 1992). Among Puerto Rican migrant women I interviewed and their families, Puerto Rico is seen as the site for investment (e.g., buying the farm land they had worked as young adults or starting up a small business). It is also the site for recreation and it is seen as a safe place to raise children. In contrast, the United States is seen as the place for work and provider of good social services. Women were aware of what each place had to offer and the advantages and disadvantages of each. One woman explains, for example, "In the United States you have better medical attention." Another migrant, however, explains the disadvantages of the United States, "It is bad over there. The gang situation is bad. . . . There is so much gang problem that the oldest one [her son] would be afraid to go out."

Transnationalism and the social differentiation of space thus put new demands on women as they try to bring together resources and family needs. The Puerto Rican women I interviewed relied on women-centered networks to take advantage of what each place within the transnational field had to offer. They also undertook kinship and caring work that "connect[ed] households with" various social service agencies and "institutions such as hospitals . . . and schools" across the transnational field (Thorne 1992, 19). The women had to, as Waerness explains, mobilize informal resources "both to make use of existing social services and to substitute for [their] shortage" (1984, 187).

In their caring work, Puerto Rican women, more than men, assumed the task of connecting households to the various social service agencies and resources across the transnational social field to which they were entitled. Within women-centered networks, women sought information about social services available both in Puerto Rico and the United States and secured services for relatives. Like the provisioning work described by DeVault (1991), the task of connecting households to social service agencies required Puerto Rican women to knit together the special needs of families and household life with the larger society.

Angela, who is in her mid-40s and lives in the United States, for example, explained how she had encouraged her mother to come to the United States for medical services. Angela explains how after the surgery, she continued to draw connections between her mother's needs and social service agencies. "I came one time (to Puerto Rico) to bring my mother back. She had gone to the United States (for medical care) and I came to bring her back and stayed with her for a little while to take care of her."

In another example, Miriam, who was living in the United States when I interviewed her, explained how she had gone to Puerto Rico to bring her elderly mother to the United States for eye surgery, believing her mother would get better medical attention in the United States. After the surgery, Miriam accompanied her mother back to Puerto Rico. Raquel also explains the role her sister played in connecting her to medical services in Puerto Rico.

She [her sister] had come from the United States for a visit and she told me that I was suffering because I wanted to because in the States they had better medical services and that I could rear my children. They were sick. Some had asthma, another one had polio and they always had diarrhea and were vomiting.

Puerto Rican women not only helped connect extended family members' needs with social services in the United States but also connected family needs with resources that extended family members offered. For example, because Puerto Rican women perceived Puerto Rico to be the safer place to raise children, especially in the 1980s, it was not uncommon for women to send their children to live with relatives in Puerto Rico as a way to protect them from gangs, drugs, crime, and violence. As Patricia Hill Collins points out, while "physical survival is assumed for children who are white and middle class," for many Puerto Rican children and teenagers, survival cannot be taken for granted (1994, 49). Caring work or mother work, for many Puerto Rican women, involved developing strategies to ensure their children's safety. Women practiced cooperative child care even across national boundaries to fulfill this important requirement of their work. Doris, for example, a Puerto Rican migrant woman living in Chicago, sent her 17-year-old daughter to Puerto Rico to live with her sister. Her daughter, she explained, was performing poorly in school and was "hanging out" with a street gang and she feared for her well-being.

Parents from Puerto Rico also sent children interested in attending schools in the United States to live with relatives living there. Teresa, who lived in Chicago, housed and cared for a niece for five years and a nephew for one year because they wanted to attend school in the United States. During this time, Teresa and her husband financially supported their niece and nephew. As is true among other groups, women migrants in my sample also often left their children with female relatives back home when they first came to the United States. This facilitated migrant women's efforts to find jobs and housing in the United States (Toro-Morn 1995). In some cases, but not always, parents sent for their children once they had secured a job and housing in the United States.

Thus, despite the distance between Puerto Rico and cities in the United States and because of the social differentiation of space, female members of extended families still practiced community-based or cooperative child care, which has long been a tradition within the Puerto Rican culture. As in African and African American communities, Puerto Rican women recognize that "vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result,

othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities have been central to the institution” of Puerto Rican motherhood (Hill Collins 1992, 219). Puerto Rican women-centered networks that span national borders and relationships such as those among blood mothers and other mothers are an important basis of transnational communities.

Women-centered networks thus served as an important means of taking full advantage of the resources that each place within the transnational social field had to offer. These social networks provided women with social support and were a way to deal with the inequitable distribution of resources, but they were also constraining for women who had to do an unequal amount of this caring work.

CONCLUSION

Women construct home and homeland communities as familiar places that offer security and stability, yet they are aware of the gender oppression that makes up “home.” They weave stories of their past with stories of their early immigration experience, and their present life. In this manner, they highlight the inequities that made up home and their desire to break away from the repression. Yet, they do not abandon home entirely. In part, they survive the race oppression and disadvantaged class conditions they experience in the host society by maintaining ties to the homeland. Through their caring work, mother work, and kin work, women not only symbolically create community but also maintain family ties that allow the best use of resources that different places have to offer. Women’s work allows for the subsistence of their families under conditions that perpetuate their poverty both in the United States and Puerto Rico. In addition, for immigrant and migrant women in disadvantaged race positions in the United States, building extended family ties that transcend national boundaries and organizing family gatherings and traditional celebrations serve as an important way to resist race oppression. That is, gatherings, celebrations, and visits home serve to alleviate the feelings of alienation associated with the race oppression they experience within host societies.

But the subsistence work that women carry out is contradictory, as are their ties to home and homeland communities. There are several major contradictions. Because the women need a sense of stability and security in their own individual family to resist the race oppression and disadvantaged class conditions that accompany migration, they have to put up with gender oppression. Caring work and kin work bring with them power and recognition and are important to building a sense of belonging and connectedness, and at the same time they are oppressive because women are held accountable for doing an unfair share of this work. Ties to homeland communities are also contradictory because of the “expanded social field” and geographic separation causes spatially competing expectations around the same kinds of responsibilities.

Finally, Puerto Rican migrant women’s experiences are also contradictory because, while they sought autonomy through migration, they find they are

still expected to carry out an unfair share of subsistence work. They believed their own migration would be an escape from the gender oppression they experienced at home, affording them the possibility of becoming "free to work outside of their home." Paradoxically, traditional gender expectations coupled with women's sense of moral obligation and their desire to resist race oppression and disadvantaged class conditions in Puerto Rico and the United States keep them tied to subsistence work that extends across national boundaries (Momsen 1993; Olwig 1993). This paradox confounds the issue that certain kinds of satisfactions come from unpaid work in the home/transnational community that are entirely absent from typically underpaid labor in the market.

The findings in this study do not suggest that patriarchal domination is dismantled in any significant way through migration experiences. Indeed, this study is less about determining quantitatively if Puerto Rican women are doing more or less work in the private space of the home once they migrate and more about the nature of women's subsistence work and what happens to it in the context of transnational migration and community. With economic restructuring, the uneven distribution of resources, migration, and the separation of families, new demands are being placed on women and the subsistence work they are still expected to undertake. The task of providing for their families and creating a sense of family and community for themselves and others is complex. Puerto Rican women find themselves having to coordinate and negotiate between family needs, competing expectations, racism and poverty, and their own sense of agency and desire to do meaningful work, as well as to achieve personal satisfaction. They must negotiate between their sense of home and nationalism and their desire to improve their positions of power vis-à-vis men.

The experiences of the Puerto Rican women studied here are not likely unique. There is overwhelming evidence to show that many immigrant groups including, for example, Mexican Americans and Indian immigrants, maintain connections with homeland communities (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). Future studies of women and immigration that explore topics of settlement, their conceptions of home, and changing gender relations, therefore, must consider women's transnational experiences and the subsistence work they are expected to carry out across these fields.

In this article, such a gendered perspective has pushed me to rethink transnational migration literature that depicts home as a haven from race and class oppression but fails to recognize the gender oppression that women experience in home communities. It challenged dualistic thinking that argues that women experience greater gender freedom in host countries than in their own homeland. Puerto Rican women's experiences further complicate the traditional dichotomies between private and public. Subsistence work does not just take place within the private space of the home but rather requires women to connect private and public spaces across transnational fields. A gendered transnational perspective moves us away from strict conceptual categories of household, family, and motherhood. In these women's experiences, we can also see the political in subsistence work as it

connects families and resources across transnational communities and contributes to the resistance of race oppression and disadvantaged class positions. More important, the transnational perspective and the focus on subsistence work I have taken captures ways in which women continue to be exploited in the aggregate and at the global level. However, it has also highlighted how women desire to make connections to home that are meaningful and how women seek to do subsistence work that is essential for creating family and community as well as sustaining life.

Puerto Rican women's subsistence work and their ties to homeland communities redefine social spaces at the same time that they maintain others, and in this way the transnational experience for women is indeed "a many chambered nautilus" whose rooms do not always have doors. One migrant woman in her 40s described some of this reality best when she said,

I believe that the Island is part of you, that goes with you. It does not matter where you live, it is always with you. I believe that the desires and dreams of every person [that leaves their homeland] is to return to the place where they were born. If it were up to me, I would be over there [in Puerto Rico]. For about 10 years, I felt melancholy that the Island called me. What happens is that once you are married, you are in between your land, your country, your mother, your father, or your husband and your family.

NOTES

1. For a discussion on the disadvantaged economic reality faced by Puerto Ricans, see Baca Zinn (1990).

2. I use subsistence work, and not reproductive work, to describe the labor women carry out to create transnational communities, because subsistence work as an analytic category highlights the very basis of capital accumulation. Subsistence production is labor that creates and sustains immediate life. According to Hart,

It therefore includes such diverse activities as pregnancy, childbirth and nursing, and work associated with making food, clothes, or shelter for immediate, private use. Apart from work oriented towards physical well-being, subsistence work also includes work oriented toward psychological and sexual well being. Subsistence producers are the ones whose labor and production is directly oriented towards life—its creation, sustenance and improvement. (1992, 95)

Hart further states, "Subsistence work therefore not only contradicts the industrial system of production, but it is also its ongoing basis" (1994, 6). Without subsistence work, we cannot produce goods or services.

3. Toro-Morn (1995) also highlights the need to acknowledge migrant and immigrant women's reproductive/subsistence work in understanding their migration experience.

4. Two of the interviews in the sample were completed by scholars at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College as part of an oral history project on Puerto Rican women in New York.

5. There are some women who never leave the home territory but nonetheless carry out their lives within the transnational field and in the process contribute to the social construction of transnational communities. They maintain and create attachment to those who have migrated and call on them to address their own needs as well as respond to the needs of others. This is consistent with Gupta and Ferguson's (1992) idea that, "it is not only the displaced who experience a displacement." Gupta and

Ferguson continue, "for even the people remaining in the familiar and ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed, and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between place and the culture broken" (1992, 10). For this reason some of my field notes and examples in this text reflect the experiences of women who have not migrated but who participate in the creation of transnational communities.

6. Many of the women, for example, spoke in a dialect common among people who grew up on farms in Puerto Rico, while others occasionally used "Span-english" words and phrases.

7. While in Puerto Rican culture the eldest daughter is expected to care for younger siblings, once younger siblings reach adulthood, they are expected to show deference and respect to older sisters (Toro-Morn 1995).

8. Traditional Puerto Rican gender ideologies dictate that women's place is in the home. Underlying this belief is a gender division of labor where women are expected to maintain households and care for children, while men are responsible for paid work outside the home (Acosta-Belen 1986). The concept of Marianismo, which identifies the Virgin Mary as the role model women should follow, is also important for understanding gender expectations in Puerto Rico (Stevens 1973). Marianismo defines motherhood as women's central role. It is only by bearing and caring for children that women realize themselves. In addition, in contrast to the patriarchal ideology of machismo, which assumes men have a strong sexual drive and affords men more freedom, women are expected to be sexually pure, chaste, and virtuous. Virginity is expected until marriage and sexual relations are only for the purpose of conceiving children.

9. According to Waerness (1984), personal service also involves doing work that others may clearly be capable and at times even willing to do for themselves (e.g., picking up clothes left behind by a spouse). It reflects "deference and power differentials in addition to, or instead of care" (Dressel and Clark 1990, 778).

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