

Forced to Flee: the Mark of Trauma among Female Refugees

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My interest in the experience of Latin American female migrants to the U.S. has evolved over the past thirty years in different contexts -- in my role as a Professor of Latin American history teaching first-generation Mexican and Central American university students, through my solidarity work with the peoples of Latin America and in my clinical work as a psychoanalyst. It is informed as well by my own migratory experience, when in the early 1970s I became a permanent resident of Argentina and moved to Buenos Aires, where I planned to live forever. I was a young idealistic Latin American historian, a 60s political activist drawn to that country's passionate political culture and social relations that I had come to know during the previous several years while living there. I could not have predicted the profound psychological difference between the temporary nature of living abroad for several years on a fellowship and the irrevocable quality of becoming a permanent member of a society other than my country of origin. The ruptures I experienced in my core sense of identity were profound. The loss of my native tongue as I integrated into my exclusively Spanish-speaking Argentine relational network had the effect of my feeling like a child, infantilized in my inability to speak as rapidly and complexly as I could think. Cultural differences, including the rituals of quotidian life that I had found so frustrating but also engaging and even humorous during my residence in Buenos Aires the previous several years now took on new negative meanings as they promised to be permanent features of my life. Further, although I had adopted Argentina as my permanent home and was clearly identified with the progressive and anti-imperialist discourse and movements of that period, and while my Argentine compañeros welcomed me into their social and political networks, they often kiddingly greeted me in social situations with a kiss and

the affectionate salutation, “Hola, CIA” (the Spanish expression for a member of the Central Intelligence Association). In this paradoxical communication, I felt at once decentered and rejected, the inevitable product of being “othered”. Even as I endeavored to integrate into my host environment, my identity associated with my national origin and the ambivalent feelings it evoked even in those individuals who cared about me proved difficult to manage. However, the challenges of adaptation to my new life were cut short by Argentina’s descent into a political chaos whose intensifying repression forced my return to the U.S. on the eve of the military coup that launched that country’s infamous Dirty War. My own, albeit interrupted, experience with the psychic disorientation represented by emigration and the multiple losses I experienced before and after my return to the U.S. remain one reservoir of empathic connection to my Latin American female patients who struggle with the paradoxes of loss and possibility that characterize the intrapsychic and intersubjective meanings of expatriation.

Today I want to explore the issue of migration as a phenomenon that takes place within the context of what some scholars call our negatively globalized world. The erosion of all kinds of political, economic and cultural borders is producing an intensification of insecurity and anxiety that is a shared psychological experience in the Global North as well as the Global South. In response to the obliteration of established reliable boundaries some of us cling ever more strongly to well-trodden and familiar signifiers that symbolize tradition as well as group and individual identity. Individual and group violence demonstrate how a fundamentalist state of mind, whether secular, Christian, Jewish or Muslim, easily converts anxiety into hatred and militarized action. It is one gruesome manifestation of the deeply troubled and uncertain times in which we live.

In our globalized world, contemporary crises are in many ways the unexpected and paradoxical effects of modernity, whose expression is now realized through the universal economic and ideological imposition of neoliberal capitalism (Beck, 2009, and Foucault in Lemke, 2005). Negative globalization means a massive concentration of resources, wealth and power, which places

peoples throughout the planet in situations of intensifying vulnerability, in the heart of empire as well as the neo-colonial regions of the world. Indeed, multiple threats, from economic insecurity to authoritarian politics to weapons of mass destruction to ecological disaster, make us all susceptible to the anxieties that float freely from one potential menace to another that Polish sociologist Zigmund Bauman calls "liquid fears" (Bauman, 2007). As he argues, in our negatively globalized planet, which is a mosaic of ethnic and religious diasporas, we can no longer speak of "inside" vs. "outside" or the "center" vs. the "periphery." This erosion of physical boundaries has profound psychological ramifications, which are being experienced by the world's almost 200 million peoples forced to migrate from their countries of origin as well as by the citizens of the countries to which they immigrate. While this phenomenon takes on the unique attributes of the specific immigrants and the host culture, I believe that through an analysis of one particular group, we can make some generalizations about the subjective meanings of the migration experience and the receiving society's responses to its immigrant populations.

I want to examine the experience of Latin American female migrants to the United States and the psychological challenges inherent in the migrant experience that are to a great extent mediated by the political culture of the host country. My perspective is a social psychoanalytic one that attempts to take account of the mutual effects of social forces, ideology and unconscious fantasy, affects and defenses. I'm going to begin by briefly describing some general characteristics of female migration. With this context as a foundation, I want to then explore aspects of the unconscious meanings of this uprooting experience, especially for those women who have emigrated from their countries of origin having already had traumatizing experiences. Women represent approximately one-half of the world's migrant population, a figure characteristic of Latin American immigrants to the U.S. While the major factors that promote both female and male migration from Latin America are political repression, economic crisis and, increasingly, climate change, research shows that motivations and consequences of migration are significantly gendered. Feminist scholars point out that globalization has promoted the movement from

the global south to the global north of capital, technology, popular culture and sexual attitudes and practices (including sexually transmitted diseases) that affect women in different ways from their male counterparts.

If women have migrated because of political and/or economic duress, they may or may not achieve an improvement in their life situation. Often the sequelae of prior trauma remain invisible, permeating the paradoxes of the negative and positive potential their new lives offer. If women migrate with other family members, this emotional and cultural continuity can be a source of comfort and reassurance, but it is often a mixed blessing: for example, female migrants from Latin America may encounter new possibilities for autonomy in U.S. culture, either through paid work or in their role as mothers who interact with schools, health providers and so forth. But many still feel marginalized from their new communities if they have immigrated with spouses who sustain or reactively intensify traditional patriarchal attitudes and expectations. These men may become depressed, engage in alcohol and drug abuse and violently lash out at women who are experienced as a threat to their customary dominance and authority. In such cases, female migrants often feel too intimidated to challenge oppressive husbands so that enhanced opportunities and even heightened self-confidence and pleasure in new achievements are permeated with fear, pain and anxiety. In situations where women enjoy the support of a partner who endorses the expansion of their social roles, a conscious rise in self-confidence and self-esteem may exist alongside a paradoxical unconscious inhibition about challenging traditional gendered expectations, often fostered by guilt for achieving what their mothers could not or persecutory anxiety for defying paternal preferences for feminine dependency and passivity.

When Latin American women choose partners from among the host society, they encounter conflicted cultural experience stemming from, among other factors, differences in degrees of veneration of authority, variations in comfort with what is felt to be an optimal psychological distance between individuals, disparities with regard to the crowding or sparseness of internal objects, discrepancies with respect to expectations of romantic love and

intimacy and differences in the role sexuality has played in their respective identity formation and intersubjective bonding experiences (Huang and Akhtar, 2005). In the domain of gender and sexuality, the distinctions between Latin American and U.S. cultural attitudes toward and legal rights of LGBT communities may provide positive expanded opportunities in this country for female migrants to experiment with and expand their own unexplored or previously suppressed or repressed sexuality and sexual orientation. On the negative side, those Latin American women who are absorbed into the world of sex work or forced into the trafficking underworld become exposed to heightened levels of discrimination, exploitation or violence, whose concomitant psychological trauma is inevitable.

These patterns that mark the gendered experience of Latin American female migrants to the U.S. are complicated by the ways their identity is reinforced and simultaneously altered by the relations of race, gender, class and other social forces in contemporary North American culture. (Castaneda and Zavella, 2007, p. 250). Latin American female migrants are increasingly caught up in the intensifying polarization of domestic U.S. politics and the maelstrom of right-wing attacks on the rights of women and immigrants. Indeed, as psychoanalysts we might say that today's U.S. political culture and its related psychological dynamics are replete with ideological "Othering," a condition produced by the post 9/11 xenophobic culture of fear and profoundly exacerbated by the recent economic debacle imposed by neoliberal philosophy and policy (Hollander, 2010b; Parenti, 2011). Untold numbers of working and middle class citizens have been thrown into terrifyingly insecure and unpredictable life conditions, making them vulnerable to the corporate-funded right wing political movements that transform fear into a rage easily directed at immigrants, the most vulnerable in society.

How might we understand the psychological dynamics that account for the successful appeal of ideology that is fundamentally regressive and does not serve the real interests of the people who support it? Most psychoanalytic research demonstrates that the social matrix either facilitates or impedes psychic development and integration. Libidinal and aggressive impulses are

fated to be constructively or destructively expressed, depending on the existence and nature of container/contained relationships, not only in the intimacy of the family but in the culture at large. Hegemonic institutions and ideologies either exacerbate primitive anxieties and their manifestation in envy, greed, and hate, or promote the capacities that form the basis of reparative guilt and love, concern, and responsibility for others. Psychoanalytic theories have elaborated how interpersonal experience is realized through the medium and psychological use of social symbols. D.W. Winnicott, for example, thought of symbolization as a constructive, expansive intrapsychic capacity as well as a relational process in which one uses a transitional me/not me space to negotiate a balance between acceptance of authentic internal wishes and needs and responsiveness to external reality's expectations and demands. When the transitional space fails, it exacerbates what Melanie Klein called paranoid/schizoid states of mind. These are characterized by primitive defenses such as splitting, projection, idealization and projective identification that protect the subject from being overwhelmed by annihilation anxiety stimulated by external as well as internal forces. The Winnicottian transitional space is a social reality that is characterized in the present United States by the dramatic erosion of political and economic democracy, whose impact is producing a terrified population vulnerable to interpreting the deterioration of their life circumstances in light of hegemonic ideological symbols, values and attitudes. In the U.S., hegemony is permeated by the values of individualism and competition and a reverence for free market economics. Even while this ideological matrix objectively facilitates the catastrophe that haunts peoples' lives, it converges with unconscious affects and defenses that turn fear into hatred too often expressed toward socially-created scapegoats rather than the authentic source of collective anxiety. The current unprecedented systemic crisis robs individuals of reliable psychosocial identities embedded in class, status and other signifiers of some degree of continuity of life expectations. In the face of new ambiguities and losses of jobs, homes and a predictable future, many citizens become susceptible to the psychological reassurance promised by conservative ideological appeals to individualism and anti-state principles and

the safe, firm boundaries guaranteed by traditional white and male social domination. The latter component of conservatism is so powerful because of the hegemonic tradition of white male privilege in Western ideology and power structures. The discourse of the “other” – including people of color and females – reinforces ideological and psychological splitting, which deconstructs and reinforces the categories of “us” and “them”. This discourse is informed by affective attachments, whose libidinal investment has a paradoxical component of hatred and aggressiveness directed at the socially-constructed “other” (This material is elaborated in Hollander, 2010).

Especially in times of duress, potentially benign signifiers of difference, those based on gender and ethnicity, for example, collapse into verbal or physically violent encounters that promise at least a partial sense of coherence gained through the libidinal intensity of shared group fantasy and action. In white Anglo-Saxon Protestant America, the ethnic other has served the psychic function of reinforcing group identity among whites, guaranteeing their membership around the signifier of racial privilege, no matter how inequitably distributed that privilege is within the group itself. The ethnic other authorizes the realization of omnipotent strivings of white America and white Americans alike, while simultaneously providing a fantasy of its polluting effects that must be destroyed in order to preserve whiteness itself. In today’s culture of fear, too many white Americans can be politically mobilized through an impoverished displacement from the real systemic sources of terror onto the ethnic other, be they Muslims, Africans or Latinos. So at the very time that immigrants continue to contribute necessary energy, labor and vitality to the U.S. economy and culture, paradoxically they can become the socially-created culprits of domestic problems. Right wing extremist groups have proliferated and are stockpiling arms since the election of a Black president. Nativist organizations, like the Council of Conservative Citizens, are multiplying throughout the country to assail all those who are not part of European Christian America and its values. Vigilante groups, such as the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps, proliferate along the U.S.-Mexican border as whites defend themselves from the “polluting” effects of the Latino invasion of their music, their foods, their jobs, and their

land. The most recent ideological assault on immigrants occurred last week in the midst of the current Congressional debate about new immigration legislation, when it was discovered that a conservative think tank Heritage Foundation analyst who co-authored a study claiming the immigration bill would cost over \$6 trillion based his figures on the assumption that Latino immigrants have lower IQ's than white Americans and thus would never contribute to the American economy. Such heightened antagonism among mainstream discourses toward Latino immigrants affects the attitudes of the border police, one expression of which is the sexual violation of Mexican and Central American immigrant women committed by border policemen in what some feminist scholars refer to as the institutionalized militarization of rape. (Castaneda and Zavella, 2007). Moreover, the U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) has been increasing its surveillance of undocumented workers, randomly picking up Latinos in their homes, places of work and off the streets, keeping them in holding cells and then extradicting them without due proces. This process has escalated under the Obama administration, far outnumbering his predecer Bush's record of forced repatriations. Even U.S. citizens are victims of increased surveillance and are being illegally sent out of the country in these indiscriminate assaults on Latinos.

Alongside rising racist trends, in the U.S. there is an increasing ressurection of patriarchal values and attitudes, manifested in the cultural, political and legal hostility toward women and their human rights. Right wing corporate interests, such as the Koch brothers, have created organization like the Tea Party, many of whose grass roots activists have been elected to state and federal government, Legislation sponsored by the Right is being made law across the U.S., reducing women's access to social programs that protect them and their children's health and welfare and curtailing women's reproductive rights, including access to pap smears, mammograms, treatment for infectious diseases and safe therapeutic abortions. Those who suffer most from the defunding of organizations that provide reproductive services at low cost are the poor and ethnic minorities, including Latin American immigrant women. These regressive political and economic realities, marked by rising xenaphobic and

mysogynist attitudes throughout the U.S., constitute an increasingly hostile environment in which female migrants from Latin America have been forced to negotiate the stressors of their migratory experience (for different perspectives on the impact in the U.S. of continuing immigration patterns, see National Foreign Intelligence Council, 2005).

With these general considerations of the gendered nature of migration and the increasing xenophobia of the U.S. political culture in mind, let us turn to the intrapsychic meanings of the migration experience (the following material is summarized from Hollander, 1998 and Hollander, 2010). The stressors of migration begin at home and impact on the twin challenges represented by the separation experience from all that is familiar and the adaptation process in the new and unknown environment. Migration is perhaps the human experience in adulthood that most closely recapitulates the infant's experience of attachment, separation and loss. In adults, separation of any kind, but especially caused by migratory uprooting, may remobilize these aspects of early life, along with the unconscious meanings ascribed to interpersonal connection. In order to understand the multiple meanings of migration motivated by political repression, we can divide the process into its various phases with their attendant stressors (see, for example, Akhtar, 1995; Grinbergs, 1989; Hollander, 1998, 2010b). Let us look at the situation of the political refugee. Because of the often life-threatening conditions produced in those Latin American countries ruled from the late 1960s through the 1990s by authoritarian military governments, women often fled to El Norte as political refugees. Whether alone or with family members, they were forced from their homelands into exile. They were journeying *from*, not *toward*, something, and they brought with them into exile a legacy of social trauma.

I have known many such women from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, El Salvador and Guatemala, who have had to struggle with the dual demands of metabolizing a history of suffering and loss and of dealing with the complex demands of survival and assimilation into a new society. A number of women among these refugees were middle class, often trained professionals, whose only way of surviving in a First World economy was to take jobs in the informal

sector as nannies and domestic workers, where they joined their working class counterparts in the most exploitable work categories of developed capitalist economies

As I have indicated, in the case of political repression, the premigratory period is characterized by a traumatogenic environment of extreme violence that constitutes an assault on the psyche. So, for example, Latin American women migrants often bring with them into their new lives histories that are haunted by traumatic experiences whose sequelae may be invisible but which in dissociated ways permeate intrapsychic and intersubjective experience in the new environment and, barring the existence of an empathic other, cannot be metabolized or integrated. The first loss suffered by Latin American women who have fled as political refugees from the life-threatening conditions produced by repressive authoritarian regimes is life as it had been before it was reshaped and distorted by a terrorist state. Living in the culture of fear produced by regimes who disappear, torture and assassinate their own citizens induces in citizens a regressive pull to primitive states of mind, including paranoid-schizoid anxieties in the face of the uncontained aggression unleashed by military and paramilitary forces. Targets of repression include labor unions, peasant confederations, university students, human rights activists, members of progressive political parties, women's organizations, wives, mothers and daughters of known activists and even random targets in order to terrify the population in general and to break down social ties. Refugees fleeing political repression who have been involved in progressive political struggles arrive having lost family members, neighbors, fellow workers and comrades, as well as the hopes and aspirations of their political movements that have been destroyed or are under threat by repressive forces. The experience of loss is inescapable. We may think about this in terms of the collapse of a facilitating social transitional space (Gutwill and Hollander, 2007) whose impingements constitute an assault on what Winnicott refers to as a sense of going on being. Such a traumatogenic environment has been characterized by Sam Gerson as a "dead third", by which he means the loss of the larger good-enough cultural matrix upon which each of us depends for our sense of personal continuity and purpose (Gerson, 2009). A

disordered social environment, dominated by Power whose attacks on the welfare and rights of citizens are carried out with impunity, imposes on citizens a proclivity to rely on primitive defenses such as dissociation, disavowal and identification with the aggressor that foreclose the ability to structure meaning out of experience. This kind of social trauma can be understood as an encounter with the Lacanian “Real”, and the absence of the containing and meaning-making resources in such an environment leave us bereft of the internal means by which we make life comprehensible.

My clinical experience with women from Latin American state terrorist regimes reveals how such histories marked by politically traumatogenic conditions compromise the capacity to deal with the complex demands of survival and assimilation into a new society. Some of these women bring into exile a history of having been raped by police or military personnel, or been tortured or witnessed loved ones tortured in front of them. They have had relatives disappeared by the state or have lived terrorized by the threat of being victims of these and other widespread violations of human rights. Already in a state of vulnerability, their encounter with the new environment of exile threatens to provoke emotional reactions comparable to the helplessness and futility felt by a baby or young child bereft of the containing environment that can help manage frustration, anxiety, loneliness and fears of separation. Even while experiencing relief in the flight from persecution, refugees are often faced with a profound sense of dread in response to the strange and new features of the host society. Typically, in order to deal with a threatened regression and to defend against anxiety and helplessness, refugees resort to defenses such as splitting that profoundly affect the ways the homeland and the new society are experienced. The splits oscillate over time, moving back and forth between the idealization of the country of origin before its descent into political hell and a devaluation of the new culture and vice versa. Internal representations of the self alternate as well between an idealization of one’s identity in the past and a devaluation of one’s status in the new environment, and then the reverse. Often as refugees learn about the ongoing horrors of life at home, they are plagued

with survivor guilt for having fled and saved themselves when others could or would not.

I have found in my own work, as well as that of a variety of mental health professionals who treat political refugees, that the traumatized states of mind from which they suffer assault the core self by compromising its important components of agency, cohesiveness, continuity and affectivity (Boulanger, 2007). These migrants often experience wide ranging symptoms, including disorientation, confusion, acute self-doubt, nightmares, insomnia, the inability to focus, depression, paranoia and dissociation. Sometimes psychological conflict is displaced onto the body and psychosomatic problems emerge. Language is a significant domain in which ambivalence about migration is elaborated. Frequently, guilt about abandoning home is symbolized through an inability to learn the language of the host culture because it represents an abandonment of the “mother” tongue. In the treatment setting, language becomes a signifier of trust in the therapeutic relationship. I have often begun, for example, treatments in Spanish, which, with some patients who are able to move through an adaptation process to the new culture, slowly evolves into short exchanges in English and then eventually into an ongoing intersubjective experience expressed in English, which is based on increasing trust and a less conflicted acceptance of one’s insertion into a new society articulated through the newly acquired language of the host culture.

The ability to learn to express one’s emotional life in a new language is one reflection of the immigrant’s capacity to positively resolve the crisis of exile. It is an achievement that requires a working through of the splitting between idealization and devaluation of objects and parts of the self. This process is reflected in the more flexible relationship to language and the growing ability to accept the different developmental aspects of self that are expressed through one’s native (mother) tongue and the language (of separation-individuation) acquired as an immigrant. The ability to mourn what has been lost or left behind prepares the way for the growth of the refugee’s capacity for mutuality in the recognition of and concern for the good that characterizes aspects of both past and present life.

The psychological dynamics I have described for the political refugee can be characteristic of economic refugees as well. In the past 30 years, the neoliberal free market project imposed throughout Latin America has represented an intensification of social, economic and psychological impingements on women's lives. Even with the expansion of progressive governments throughout the region in the past decade, the invasion by global capital and the austerity measures imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund represent growing economic crises that give rise to repression of working peoples' struggles to defend their jobs, schools, homes, and access to medical care and education. Further, the corporate monopoly over access to capital, machinery, fertilizers and marketing imposes a concentration of land ownership that forces the outmigration of small farming families and rural workers. This process also increases work responsibilities of women and children that often eliminate the possibility of schooling for the next generation of girls. Women in the urban middle and working classes suffer the erosion of public employment as well as the loss of social services in education, healthcare and housing. Moreover, the growing destructive impact of climate change assaults local eco-systems and destroys traditional means of earning an income. Governments in countries such as El Salvador, Mexico and Guatemala cannot or will not provide small farmers and entrepreneurs with financial support to develop alternative ways of sustaining a livelihood (Parenti, 2011). As traditional family structures and gender roles are forced to change in response to these large social forces, intrapsychic and intersubjective losses and challenges frequently problematize family relationships, often manifested in rising misogyny and male violence toward women. Economic female refugees thus reveal histories that have been profoundly impacted by a traumatogenic social environment in which the very survivability of oneself and one's family have been threatened. The encounter with the loss of the ability to provide basic functions, including shelter and food, constitutes the material basis for the psychic threat to a sense of going on being. From my perspective, the global neoliberal paradigm responsible for the imposition of these conditions constitutes an existential failure of the social third (Gerson), the construction of

a pathogenic transitional space (Ogden) that inevitably exacerbates paranoid/schizoid states of mind, including annihilation anxiety. Female migrants arriving in this country with such histories bear invisible scars that approximate those born by political refugees.

Many young women who were either brought to the U.S. as children or were born to immigrants forced to leave their countries of origin often manifest the symptoms of the multigenerational transmission of trauma. So, for example, my patient Alicia: her mother brought her to the U.S. following traumatic losses provoked by a military dictatorship and she made many personal sacrifices to assure her daughter's education. Her experience of mothering Alicia was permeated by profound conflict over the opportunities she was providing for her daughter and her own defeated life's ambitions manifest in her downward social mobility and exploitative work situations. Although Alicia grew up able to take advantage of the possibilities provided by her mother to become a professional, she cannot permit herself to fully realize her ambitions or to sustain a positive relationship with a partner because of her unconscious guilt for being the daughter who robbed her mother of a fulfilling life. Or Carmen, who came to this country from Central America when she was three with her impoverished parents who were so emotionally regressed that she became the bridge between them and the host culture. Carmen's precocious maturity and innate capacities were a benefit and a curse: she grew herself up, continually the object of her mother's bitterness and identifying with her mother's victimized position viz a viz her dominating but emotionally absent father. Now an adult in a romantic relationship with a middle-class Anglo-Saxon professional man, Carmen's inability to rely as a child on her traumatized immigrant parents for protection and guidance keeps her defensively alienated as an adult in her primary relationship, one manifestation of which is her unconscious envy-driven attacks on her boyfriend's close relationship with his parents, upon whom he relies unquestioningly for advice and comfort, which she translates into an ideological attack on him for being a weak and a dependent sissy rather than a "real man". Or Maria, who has immigrated to the U.S. from a South American country where she grew up during a ruthless military dictatorship, and who has married a

Jewish U.S. citizen from the same country. Maria's pregnancy ignites deep anxieties when her husband's family pressures her to be agreeable to circumcising her male child when he is born, which she describes in linguistic terms as a persecutory army surrounding her from which she cannot escape. Following a particularly difficult session, Maria calls her mother in South America, with whom she has an unprecedented discussion about her own birth. In subsequently sessions we discover that the persecutory anxieties she suffers related to the pressure to circumcise her baby are related to an unconscious identification with her mother who, when giving birth to Maria during the military dictatorship in her country, suffered drug-induced hallucinations that she, like other women she had known, was in a military hospital giving birth to a baby whom the military would steal after assassinating her.

So, trauma experienced and trauma inherited from one generation to the next are the legacies with which many female migrants and their daughters struggle. Such psychological challenges are experienced and negotiated in the context of the political culture and economic structures of the host country. In the case of the contemporary U.S., female immigrants from Latin America are caught in the maelstrom of multiple crises that ironically have begun to resemble those from which they have fled. Indeed, many of the political and economic policies of impunity supported and financed by the U.S. south of the border are now being implemented in the heart of empire. As citizens in the U.S. become more anxious about their own life conditions and futures, about the loss of political and economic democracy, as well as about cascading ontological terrors that Sigmund Bauman calls "liqued fears", too many can be mobilized through an impoverished displacement from the real systemic sources of their fears onto the ethnic other and women.

Thus the gendered experience of migration among Latin American women must be understood both in terms of the traumatogenic features of their countries of origin as well as those characteristic of the society to which they have immigrated in hopes of reconstituting their lives. For analysts in my country who have occasion to treat these women, it seems to me that we are best able to be engaged witnesses to trauma if we know something about the

social matrix of their anguished states of mind. By confirming their external as well as their psychic reality, we best help them to integrate and live within all realms of their experience. In so doing we can constitute a “live third” (Gerson) that can potentiate their ability to live with a sense of continuity and meaning.

I want to end my comments today by reminding us of the striking evidence of resilience in this population despite its traumatic experience of migration. In the U.S., many undocumented immigrants have braved the insecurity of their situation to collectively organize for better working conditions and the right to form and belong to a union that represents their rights as laborers and as contributors to the economy through their payment of taxes and consumers of goods and services. As U.S. political interests struggle to fix a broken immigration system, young immigrants, many of them Latinos who were brought to the U.S. as small children by their parents now face the threat of expatriation. Most of them are students wishing to attend university, and they have stood up to confront the state and demand that the Obama administration accord them temporary legal status so that they can pursue their educations without living in constant fear that they will be swept up in an immigration raid, imprisoned and then deported. Before the last election, Obama yielded by granting them temporary rights to remain in the country while both political parties, equally enmeshed with nativist and corporate interests, fashion out a compromise piece of legislation that will do little to constrain existing patterns of exploitation of immigrants in the U.S. who are forced to work in the most menial jobs with the lowest pay and least security. Meanwhile, these young women and men – appropriately called “the Dreamers” -- are saying “basta” to being passive objects of U.S. racism, anti-immigrant laws and economic exploitation. They are willing to exchange a posture of passive endurance of their illegal and marginal status, which brings inevitable insecurities and fears, for an activist stance that boldly confronts Power. This shift does not eliminate psychic states of anxiety and depression, but it embodies the experience of agency that is foundational to the achievement of a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives. As psychoanalysts we can only applaud the resilience with which they confront the trauma of migration and othering by asserting a subjectivity based

on the principle of their human right to a life of dignity and equal opportunity.

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