

**WOMEN OF THE DROUGHT:
A STUDY OF EMPLOYMENT, MOBILIZATION AND CHANGE
IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL**

by

Adélia de Melo Branco

**A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology**

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ADELIA DE MELO BRANCO

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Adelia de Melo Branco 1997 (c)

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ABSTRACT

Women's role and potential in popular or community-based drought mitigation measures in northeastern Brazil have been underestimated. This study attempts to demystify the idea that women are passive beings in drought by showing women's attempts to mitigate drought through rural-urban migration and mobilization in rural action groups. Fieldwork was undertaken in both rural and urban settings. Data were collected from fifty women, from men, and from members of grassroots organizations.

Several theoretical themes are amalgamated and applied to women's agency and gender relations: dependency models, a political economy paradigm of disaster, Freire's problem-formulating method of conscientization, and Foucault's analysis of knowledge and power.

Attention is centred on women who migrate intra-regionally to the city of Petrolina. This place of migrant destination benefits from large-scheme irrigated agriculture mostly devoted to export. The study also includes women from a rural drought-prone village who never migrated and return migrants who have mobilized in a rural action group.

Analysis of different life conditions women face in their attempt to mitigate effects of drought leads to a focus on conscientization (*conscientização*). Employment in the city and action group mobilization in the rural areas are responsible for changes which expose women to a process of transformation.

The transformation women go through is closely related to exposure to *conscientização* and is associated with exposure to new knowledge and to implicit power becoming explicit. New life conditions and experiences allow women to break out of domestic sphere confinement and to enter the public sphere, the traditional territory of men.

The transformation is a limited one; women's actions are constrained by the character of capitalist relations of production and the globalization of the local economy. Despite the

limited benefits women derive from this transformation, women's agency is clearly visible in the context of a disaster situation. Inclusion of women is crucial for the understanding of disaster phenomena. The process of *conscientização* offers powerful insight into research focussing on popular mitigation measures.

for

Rejane, a strong woman who always cared;

Ceição, a leader from the favela, whose struggle will always be remembered;

Naná, whose encouragement will never be forgotten;

my mother and my sister, who, in one way or the other, have always been by my side;

my father, whose life taught me the first lessons;

George, for making me believe once again;

Victor and Sophia, my sources of inspiration, encouragement and hope;

and

all the people of Sertão, women and men, migrants or not, for their admirable courage,

faith and hope: a luta continua! ...vamos gente, um dia, quem sabe, chegaremos lá!

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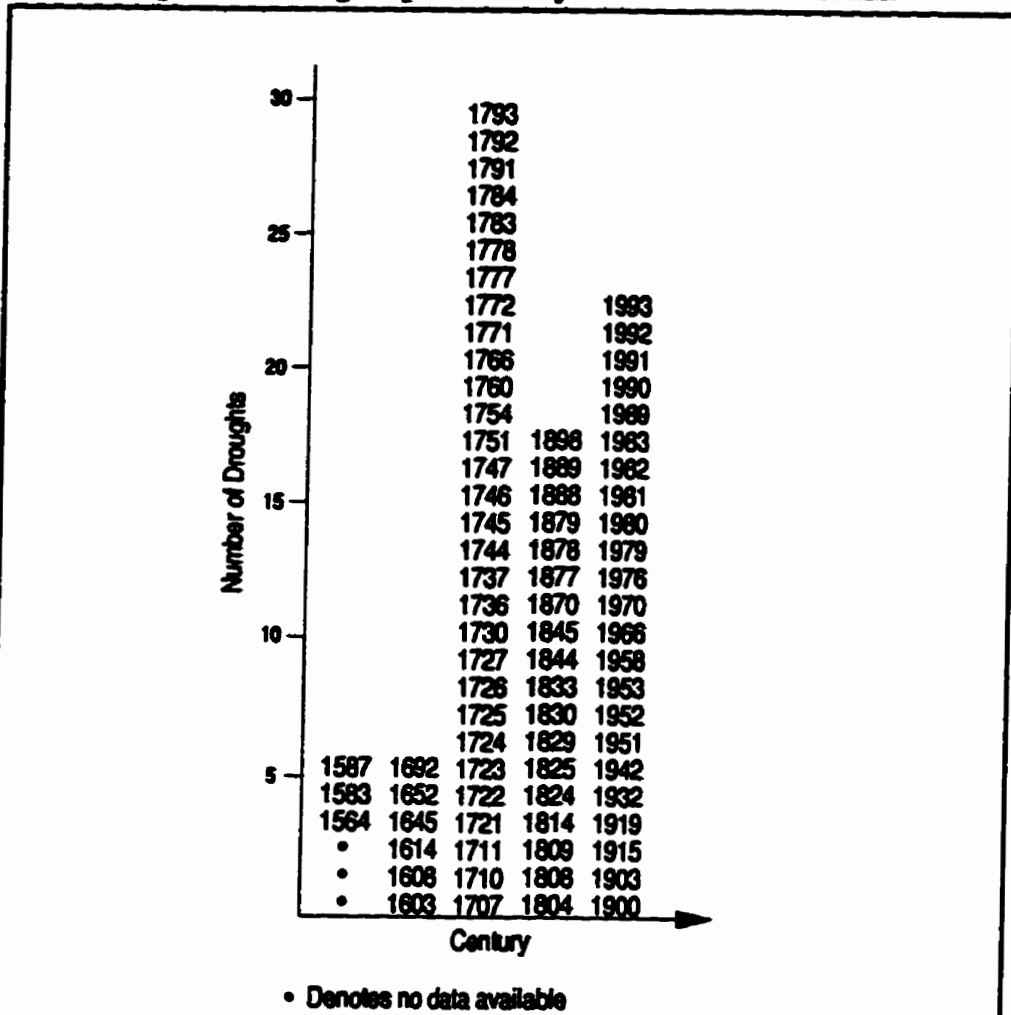
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The drought phenomenon has been affecting the northeastern region of Brazil for centuries. According to available historical records, the first drought ever reported took place in 1587 (SUDENE, 1981) (see Figure 1). These droughts affect the region on a periodic basis and have been considered a hindrance to the regional development process. The analysis of the drought has attracted the attention of many scholars. Although that has been the case, research findings have played a minor role at the level of policy making and the governmental measures towards the problem have been primarily based on political decisions. In such a context, it is important to note that the region has been ruled by a political and economic elite which is not only able to influence the government at the policy-making level, but also to benefit from the measures introduced to minimize the effects of the drought. Attention to the poor sector of the population of the region has been limited to times of severe drought when the government implements short-term emergency measures to deal with the problem (Pessoa et al., 1983; Andrade, 1985; Coelho, 1985; Medeiros, 1995).

The majority of the population in the drought-prone region has been poverty stricken. The regional economy is primarily based on cattle raising, hence wage labour opportunities are severely limited. Furthermore, during drought periods, those who engage in agricultural production, i.e., the small landholders and sharecroppers, face a reduction in production capacity, and wage labour becomes virtually nonexistent. In this context, women have limited or no access to wage labour opportunities and are confined to the domestic sphere, engaging primarily in activities devoted to the reproduction of the domestic unit. In a society affected

Figure 1: Droughts per Century in Northeastern Brazil



Sources:
MINTER/SUDENE *As Secas do Nordeste: Uma Abordagem Historica de Causas e Efeitos*. Recife, 1981.
MINTER/SUDENE *Secas no Nordeste 1979-1983: O Longo Flagelo e as Acoes do Governo*. Recife, 1983.
Branco, A. M. *De Vulnerabilidade a Capacidade: O Papel da Mulher do Campo e da Mulher Migrante Urbana na Mitigacao da Seca no Nordeste Brasileiro*. Paper Presented at the Simposio Internacional Sobre Meio Ambiente, Degradação e Gerencimento de Desastres, Campina Grande, Brasil, 1995
Reboucas, Aldo Da "O Piauí na Problematica das Secas" Pp. 7-26 in *A Seca. Ciclo de Conferencias Sobre os Aspectos da Problematica Piauiense e as Perspectivas de Solucao*. Teresina (Abril), 1985

by such disaster, a cash income is given high priority, and less importance is attached to domestic activities such as cooking, caring for children, and cultivation of subsistence crops for household consumption. Income from employment represents a form of security in such a disaster-prone context.

The undervaluation of subsistence crop production is not only a consequence of the non-remunerative nature of this activity, but a result of the threats posed by the drought to this economic activity. The harvest of the crops planted is usually uncertain and in severe drought periods the producers are frequently unable to harvest what they had planted.

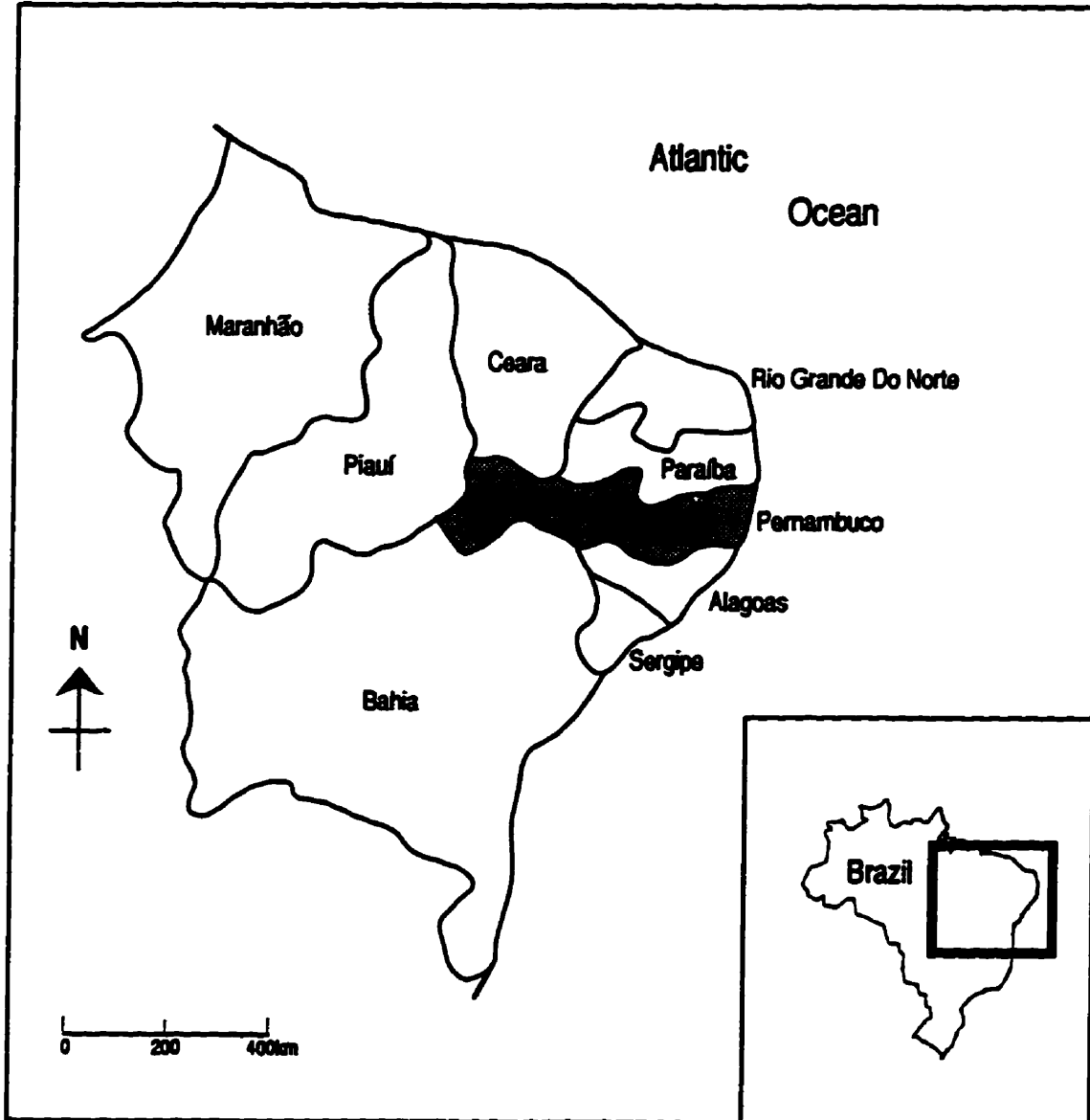
In the context of the northeastern Brazilian patriarchal¹ society, particularly in rural areas, women are subordinate and basically assigned to the domestic sphere. Beyond the ideological basis for women's subordination founded in the idea that women belong to the fragile sex and consequently cannot perform certain activities, the non-recognition of women's economic contribution also plays a major role in their subordination. Despite the important role women play in the household and society, their contribution is considered of little or no importance since it is usually related to non-remunerated domestic activities directed towards the reproduction of the household unit (Mackintosh, 1981; Benería, 1982; Oliveira, 1991; Spindel, 1987, Branco Lima, 1985; Bruschini, 1994). Despite being subordinated, women's contribution is central and important; hence they are not without a source of power.

As a result of the ineffective measures undertaken by the Brazilian government towards the solution to the drought problem, the *sertanejos(as)*, as the population of the *Sertão* is referred to,² have used various means to cope with the drought problem. One of the

¹ In the study, I utilize the broad definition of patriarchy provided by Mies (1986) and treat it as the rule of fathers, husbands, sons, as well as of men in politics and economics (Mies, 1986:37).

² The term *sertão* means "the backlands". However, in the context of northeastern Brazil the term is applied to the semi-arid area located in the innermost region affected by periodic droughts in the states of Pernambuco, Bahia, Sergipe, Alagoas, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Piauí and Maranhão, which comprise the northeastern region (see Figure 2) and are also affected by periodic droughts (this is discussed further in Chapter IV).

Figure 2: Location of the State of Pernambuco in the Brazilian Northeast



most important measures has been out-migration. The local population has, therefore, been engaging in migration to several regions of the country and has contributed to the consolidation of capitalism in many regions, such as the southeastern and the southern portions of Brazil. Mobilization in community based organizations such as women's action groups and small-food producers' associations has increased in importance in recent years as measures to cope with the drought.

The poverty and underdevelopment of the *sertão* is not only a consequence of the periodic droughts, but of the politics involved with that phenomenon within the context of the regional development process (Andrade, 1985; Coelho, 1985). Within the semi-arid region itself there is a high level of socio-economic development (Andrade, 1982). While the government gives attention to the drought-prone regions through emergency measures only in severe drought periods, in some areas of the semi-arid region, such as the *sertão do São Francisco*, it has implemented a developmental model based on irrigated agriculture primarily devoted to export.

This study is an attempt to contribute to a better understanding of the drought and the semi-arid region by showing the different faces of the semi-arid. The development approach under which certain areas are favoured over others has benefited tremendously from the drought since it utilizes the labour power of those who migrate from drought-prone regions to engage in capitalist wage-labour. Thus, the development of the irrigated *sertão* takes place at the expense of the underdevelopment of the drought-prone *sertão*. The drought is therefore a problem embedded in the development process of the region.

The situation taking place within the semi-arid region itself is not an isolated phenomenon, but is intimately related to the globalization of the local economy. The irrigated semi-arid region is linked to global capital in the production of crops for export and the employment of wage workers who depend on wage work for their survival. The poor population of the drought-prone semi-arid region is also related to the global economy as a labour reserve for the irrigated region and also in terms of the underdevelopment taking place in their place of origin. The poverty of the semi-arid area is a result of its relation to the capitalized semi-arid and the global capitalist system.

Women play a very important role in the context of the drought even though they have been discriminated against in both regional development planning and in drought relief efforts. Subordination of women's roles and discrimination against them in regional development planning and in drought relief efforts have led writers to depict women as "invisible" and within the domestic sphere. This invisibility has increased women's subordination particularly in the rural context (Ramalho, 1995; Fischer and Melo, 1996). Women consequently have been marked as one of the most vulnerable populations in the rural drought-prone society of northeastern Brazil.

The lack of attention women have received from policy makers and scholars from the social sciences and technical fields is another expression of women's "invisibility" in the context of the drought. Despite the vast literature on the drought, there is virtually no study investigating the role of women in that context. Women have been neglected and taken for passive beings. In order to have a complete assessment of the drought, however, studies must focus on women and gender roles in such a context.

The important role of women in both the rural and urban context is acknowledged when attention is centred on women. Although withdrawn to the domestic realm in rural society, women play an important role in that sphere and have considerable power in that context, despite the cultural construction of women in that society which assumes their invisibility. Women also play an important role in dealing specifically with the drought; they not only migrate for wage employment, they also assume the headship of the rural household when it is necessary to do so in the absence of men and they mobilize in rural women's action groups.

In looking at the gendered division of labour utilized in irrigated agricultural work in the *sertão do São Francisco*, women account for over half of the labour utilized in most of the crops. The migration of women and their engagement in wage labour exposes them to life conditions which they never experienced before, and gives women public visibility.

Women also play an important role in the rural context, despite their common subordination to men. By assuming the headship of their families so that their husbands can migrate in drought crisis, women can clearly assert themselves. This is particularly the case

when women participate in rural action groups and become exposed to a process of *conscientização*³ which makes them aware of the problems affecting their lives – including the drought – and the socio-economic and the political implications of these problems. By migrating and having access to wage labour, as well as participating in rural women’s action groups in search of measures to mitigate the drought, women are exposed to a new set of knowledge and power relations and engage in a process of transformation that may involve an attempt to construct a “new” self. Such a transformation is partly a result of the entry of women into the public domain.

My study centres on women’s roles and their responses to the drought hazard in northeastern Brazil. I attempt to demystify the idea that women are passive beings who play a limited role in face of the drought. The study illustrates the great potential women have in dealing with the difficulties brought by the drought and in fulfilling their needs in times of crisis. The focus of the study is not on the drought itself, nor on migration, but on the relationship between the migration and non-migration of women in the context of the drought and on the transformation women go through in their search for measures to mitigate that hazard.

Attention is given to migrant as well as non-migrant women. Four different categories of women comprise the population studied: (1) young migrant women who migrate unaccompanied to the city and engage in the domestic services sector; (2) middle aged and elderly women who have migrated to the city along with their close family members and who engage in irrigated agricultural labour; (3) young as well as elderly return migrant women who have settled back in their place of origin and participate in a rural women’s action group; and (4) women who never left their place of origin despite the drought hazard, who have been dealing with the drought on a permanent basis, and who also participate in a rural women’s action group.

³ The term *conscientização* is utilized in the context of Paulo Freire’s problem formulating method. The utilization of the word in Portuguese as well as the implications of its use will be fully discussed in Chapter II.

Beyond attempting to show the distinct faces of the semi-arid region, the study also shows the distinct faces of women. In contrast to the idea that women, in the context of the drought, are passive beings destitute of any potential to deal with the hazard and consequently dependent on men, the analysis calls attention to the major role played by women in face of the drought as they have been capable to cope with the most severe crises. Besides engaging in rural-urban migration, women have been able to mobilize in action groups and engage in measures to deal with the drought in rural areas.

Because the study gives attention to migrant and rural women, the collection of data took place in a rural village located in the drought-prone region and in the city of Petrolina, which stands in the irrigated portion of the semi-arid in the state of Pernambuco. This allowed me to understand the situation of women in the rural as well as the urban context.

A brief summary of the chapters to come provides an overview of the organization of the thesis.

Chapter II focusses on the theoretical framework of the analysis presented. It focusses on the situation of women in face of the drought hazard at the local level and then places it in a global context. Utilizing Michel Foucault's approach to knowledge and power and Paulo Freire's approach to *conscientização*, the study demonstrates that although subjugated, women have considerable power at the local level. This power, however, may not be explicitly seen in some contexts as it is embedded in the regime of knowledge of the society, and the ideological construction of gender roles may not allow for such a power to be explicit. Foucault's approach to knowledge and power coincides with Freire's approach to *conscientização* (primarily through informal education). As women experience the process of *conscientização*, they enter changed relations of knowledge and power and, through that, engage in a "new" construction of their selves. Particular attention is paid to the implications of the domestic and public domains in the changes women go through. Attention is given to structural constraints impinging on women's role in society. The analysis of women's agency at the local level is placed within the political economy paradigm of disaster research and of the globalization of the local economy.

Chapter III presents a discussion of the methodology and research tools utilized in the study. It also deals with the challenge and difficulties of collecting data in two different sites – a rural village located in the drought-prone semi-arid and a developed urban centre located in the irrigated semi-arid region. Particular attention is paid to the complex dynamics involved in ethnographic research done in distinct sites and the limitations this presents.

Chapter IV offers an analysis of the drought, migration, mobilization and the conditions of life of the population in northeastern Brazil within the national context. In this chapter the socio-economic and political nature of the drought is analysed.

Chapter V is based on the empirical analysis of the situation of migrant women in their place of destination. Attention is drawn to the changes they go through by being exposed to new life conditions such as access to wage labour, and the implication of that for their entry into the public sphere and their self affirmation.

Chapter VI presents an analysis of the conditions of life faced by women who deal with the drought on a permanent basis but have never migrated, as well as to return migrant women in the rural context. This chapter focusses particularly on the mobilization of women in an action group. It calls attention to the *conscientização* of those women as they attempt to mitigate the drought, enter the public sphere and assert themselves.

Chapter VII presents a conclusion to the analysis undertaken in the distinct chapters, reiterating the importance of the inclusion of women in investigations of the drought, in disaster research and in policy-making. Since the majority of studies about the drought, capitalist labour processes, the migration of the *sertanejo(a)* and political mobilization have been undertaken by demographers, economists, geographers and sociologists, I hope that this anthropological analysis contributes to the literature on response to drought and provides new insights into the problem.

Pseudonyms are used in this study to protect the privacy of consultants, the identity of organizations involved with the population, and the identity of small communities.

CHAPTER II

LABOUR, POWER AND MOBILIZATION: A THEORETICAL REFLECTION ON WOMEN AND THE DROUGHT

Based on Michel Foucault's approach to knowledge and power and on Paulo Freire's approach to *conscientização*, this study demonstrates that the women under investigation are neither passive beings nor destitute of power. On the contrary, the study shows that although subjugated, women hold power and become important actors as they are exposed to a process of transformation by engaging in a new construction of their "selves" in their search for measures to mitigate the drought and to improve their lives.

The process of transformation these women go through is a result of women's exposure to new life conditions – employment in the city and action group mobilization in rural areas. Access to wage labour in the case of migrant women, and to income-generating activities in rural contexts, play an important role in this transformation process but are not the only factors involved. Also important are women's changes in attitudes and behaviour as a result of *conscientização* with respect to their standing as workers and as women. Thus, the transformation women go through involves a variety of factors that cannot be isolated from one another. The changes entailed in this transformation – which lead women to a construction of new selves – are nonetheless limited by the reality of continued exploitation as well as a new regime of exploitation.

Although the analysis focusses on the demonstration of power at the local level, it also accounts for structural factors and conditions shaping the transformation those women face as they accumulate knowledge through rural action group mobilization and *conscientização*,

and through exposure to capitalist labour processes. The study shows that the lives of these women in both the rural and urban sphere are shaped by the globalization of the local economy. Thus, attention is given to the implications of the local gendered division of labour in the global context.

Beyond incorporating the analysis of structural factors, the study will also utilize the political economy paradigm of disaster research in an attempt to explain the drought hazard and its implications for the conditions of life women face. Although the transformation women go through is beneficial to them to a certain extent, providing opportunity for them to realize power, the transformation is limited in the sense that women in both the rural and urban sphere continue to be exploited within the household and in the society more generally.

2.1. The Domestic and Public Domain

The first step in the discussion is to explain the use of the domestic/public divide in the study and the reasons behind the notion of rural women as “invisible” when the theoretical basis of the analysis shows the power these women possess. The objective of this discussion is to clarify the use of the domestic and the public domains in the study, a controversial theme dealt with in feminist anthropology, yet a pertinent model to the understanding of women’s role in some societies, including that of rural northeastern Brazil.

The division between the domestic and the public spheres and women’s association with the domestic sphere has been dealt with by many scholars interested on gender relations. Association of women with the domestic and men with the public sphere has been utilized as an important tool of analysis in some societies. The underlying basis for this approach is that women are seen as closer to nature (especially in terms of their reproductive roles) while men are seen as closer to culture. The domestic/public opposition, therefore, stands like that of nature/culture. The relationship of women to nature is the basis for relating women to the domestic rather than the public. The association of women to nature, based on woman’s role as mother and the rearer of children, has led to the posited universal confinement of women

to the domestic realm (Ortner, 1974 in Moore, 1988). Under those circumstances, women's main sphere of activity is within familial relations, as opposed to men, who operate in the political and the public domain of social life (Moore, 1988).

In dealing with the domestic/public divide, Moore criticizes the idea of a universal model of the domestic and the public divide:

Nature and culture are not value free, unmediated categories; they are cultural constructs in exactly the same way as categories woman and man. The notions of nature and culture, as they are used in anthropological analysis, derive from western society, and, as such, they are the products of a particular intellectual tradition and of a specific historical trajectory. Just as we cannot assume that the categories "woman" and "man" everywhere mean the same, so we must also be aware that other societies might not even perceive nature and culture as distinct and opposed categories in the way that western culture does (Moore, 1988:19).

The relationship of women to the domestic sphere was formulated in Victorian society where middle and upper class women were responsible for the running of their households and rarely worked outside the domestic sphere. Although that was the case, many of those women relied on nannies for care of their children. The reliance on nannies shows that despite being confined to the domestic domain, women as mothers were not necessarily the primary caregivers for their offspring. This raises the idea of motherhood as socially constructed (Moore, 1988).

The contribution of feminist scholarship has been to demonstrate the complexity and variability of these formerly taken-for-granted categories, and that the use of certain sets of analytical distinctions, like nature/culture, domestic/public, can be problematic and potentially distorting. However, there is no easy consensus among feminist anthropologists themselves on these issues, and different scholars take up different positions with regard to the utility and appropriateness of cross-cultural frameworks of analysis (Moore, 1988:30).

In some societies women have power in the domestic sphere since certain cultural activities are the domain of women. Within that domain women exercise considerable power, and construct for themselves an arena of social action which demonstrates their value, such

as the case of the Trobriand Islands (Weiner, 1976). The authority of women at the domestic level is also seen in rural Chinese society. In that context the women are the ones who make important decisions such as finding a good marriage match for a child. Nevertheless, Chinese women commonly show deference to men's decision-making power (Judd, 1990:49). In rural northeastern Brazil, women have authority especially in regards to domestic activities such as cooking, caring for children, and cultivation of subsistence crops for household consumption. Women also participate in household decision-making; however, the men, the heads of the households, are the ones to receive the credit and societal acknowledgement for decision-making.

The construction of the domestic and public domains in northeastern Brazil, particularly in rural areas, reflects the strong patriarchal basis of that society since colonial times (Freyre, 1975). In the sugar cane producing colonial society, men had absolute power and were associated with the public domain of life. Women were confined to the domestic domain and were expected to demonstrate a subservient behaviour. The supremacy of men over women has led to the subordination of women throughout time (Freyre, 1875). This has been a phenomenon present in all social classes. As a product of the colonial era, the domestic/public divide remains an important tool for the analysis of gender relations in rural northeastern Brazil although the society as well as patriarchy have gone through changes since those times.

Among small-scale food producers, the domestic/public dichotomy is clearly visible through the division of labour. The man, head of the household, is the one who has authority over the family members and the control over resources (Aguar, 1984). According to Aguar (1984:260), the concept of patriarchy refers to male appropriation over the work conditions of the workers. Men perform tasks rated of greater importance in agriculture such as, the cultivation of crops devoted to commercialization and the cultivation of subsistence crops which are used not only to fulfill the household needs, but the surplus is also commercialized. Men's actions are seen to be in the public domain and women's in the domestic domain. In

such a context the men are considered to be the providers for their households (Heredia et al., 1984). This is so although women also contribute. The public domain of men is considered to be outside the domestic sphere, outside the *casa* (home) in the *roça* (field). Women's contribution, however, is not considered "work", but merely as "help" (Heredia et al., 1984; Fischer and Melo, 1996). The domestic/public divide in rural northeastern Brazil is constructed around the boundaries of the *casa* and the *roça* and reflects the division of labour based on gender roles.

The domestic/public dichotomy in these small-scale agricultural societies may not be clearly visible since both women and men engage in agricultural production. Under these circumstances, the boundaries between the *casa* and the *roça* may not be clearly apparent. However, the *roça* (which is considered to be outside the *casa*), is related to the public domain. Activities undertaken in the *roça* sphere are considered extra-household activities and are traditionally men's activities, these include the marketing of products. Men, therefore, operate in the intersection between the *casa* and the larger society, i.e., in the *roça*. The *roça* is then the intermediate sphere between the *casa* and the larger society and is considered to be in the public domain.

In rural northeastern Brazil, the domestic/public divide illuminates some important aspects of gender relations and the roles of women. The division of labour is drawn along these lines with women largely confined to the domestic sphere. Women seldom have direct access to employment but are occupied with non-remunerated domestic activities. Although the availability of wage labour varies between sub-regions in the northeast, such as the *zona da mata* (the humid coastal area) and the *sertão*, in the *zona da mata*, men are not happy to see their wives and daughters working for wage in the sugar cane fields (Scheper-Hughes, 1992:50-55). In the case of the semi-arid *sertão*, a society afflicted by disaster, the entry of women in wage labour, especially outside the area is not only welcomed but supported by the men.

In the drought-prone semi-arid area, the severe poverty associated with limited access to productive means and commonly experiencing low levels of productive output, is increased by the impact of periodic droughts. Hence, access to alternative income-generating activities (typically wage employment) is considered of great importance. The severely limited local wage labour market in the drought-prone semi-arid area, together with the culturally-constructed subordination of women and their assignment to the domestic sphere, means virtually no local alternatives for women. Consequently, women remain dependent on men. However, in times of crisis, this situation changes and women are recognized as valuable contributors by the male heads of their households. In drought times, women are less constrained by domestic role assignment (although sometimes only temporarily) as they may assume household headship or may migrate for wage work to enhance the survival chances of the household unit.

In the rural drought-prone zone, women are not powerless, but they have low self-esteem. Women's productive activities in drought crises become visible, although where patriarchy is very strong, women are not expected to express the power they hold. By being unexpressive about their potential, women may appear as if they have not recognized their valuable contribution. Although men are aware of women's potential, they also do not acknowledge it explicitly, especially in relation to the role of their own wives. This situation clearly shows that the subordination of women and their low self-esteem are culturally constructed and operate to the detriment of women.

In the *sertão* region of northeastern Brazil involvement outside the household is considered more important than domestic duties. Activities considered public, such as a wage labour job, cultivation of crops for market, or political mobilization, are considered important, but these are not typically the arena of women.

Despite the important contribution feminist anthropology has provided to the domestic/public debate, the debate continues to be unresolved; Moore points to the fact that

this issue continues to appear over and over again. Moore then poses a very important question:

... if we want to see women as effective social adults in their own right, is it enough to say that they have power in those areas of social life which have so often been presented as the public, political domain of men? This issue is essentially a transposition of the “domestic”/“public” debate, in that it uses the “domestic”/“public” distinction as a means of constructing the problem which it seeks to resolve (Moore, 1988:39).

Women’s importance becomes recognized as they enter the public sphere, the territory of men, through wage labour migration and/or mobilization in rural action groups. This reinforces the domestic/public dichotomy by rendering the importance and visibility of women as a result of their entry into the public domain, i.e., the territory of men.

2.2. Knowledge, Power and *Conscientização*

This section provides a discussion on the theoretical structure of my work and its objectives in regard to the situation at the local level in northeastern Brazil. The main points presented in this section will be further elaborated in the remainder of the chapter and in the subsequent empirical chapters as they are applied to the analysis of the concrete situation.

According to Cooper (1995:8-9):

the paradigm of relational power based on M. Foucault can explain further the subordination of women to men as it is based on the premise that people are unequal and that power is concerned with domination and subjection - an above and below. However, neither power nor subjectivity has meaning or existence outside a particular relationship between social forces. In this case, it does not make sense to talk about men holding power as if this capacity exists independently of women.

Although we are dealing with the unequal relationship between men and women, it is important to have in mind that the exercise of power does not simply take place by one party upon the other party (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:219). The exertion of power, thus, takes place by the dominant as well as the subjugated. According to Foucault (in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:217):

What characterizes the power we are analyzing is that it brings into play relations between individuals (or between groups). For let us not deceive ourselves; if we speak of the structures of the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others. The term "power" designates relationships between partners (and by that I am not thinking a zero-sum game, but simply, and for the moment staying in the most general terms, of an ensemble of actions which induce others and follow from another).

The exercise of power, therefore, does not simply imply a relationship between individuals but involves actions, that is, it is a way in which certain actions modify others (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). In utilizing Foucault's paradigm of relational power to explain the relationship between men and women in rural northeastern Brazil, it is important to acknowledge that women, although subordinate, are not powerless. They engage in important actions as a result of the needs of their households, especially in crises situations, and their actions are influenced by and taken along with the actions of men through the decision-making process. Women may either migrate for wage jobs or may assume the headship of their rural households as a result of decisions made within the household to which they relate. The decisions are based upon the needs of the household and women are not forced to engage in one or the other option. They do so out of awareness of the importance of these measures to address the immediate impact of the drought and to increase the survival chances of their households. It is important to take into account that:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized. Where the determining factors saturate the whole there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains (in this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint) (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:221).

Besides involving the actions of free subjects, an important characteristic of power is that it is not fixed, but may change according to the context in which it operates (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). Under those circumstances, the subordination of women to men does not exist outside of the relationship between the two genders. The entire complex of

power relations in each social, economic and historical context must be taken into account. Hence, the relationship between men and women is better understood within the constraints of the broader system. The migration of men or women and access by women to headship of the rural household in the absence of senior men depends on the availability of resources such as employment for either men or women outside the household.

Foucault also points to the importance of power at the grassroots level, which comes through subjugated knowledge, i.e., *le savoir des gens*. By subjugated knowledge, Foucault refers to blocs of historical knowledge of struggles which comes from the grassroots and consists of local popular knowledge (Foucault, 1980). He not only points to the importance of power, but argues that power should not be seen only as repressive and only as exercised by the dominant. According to his own words:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, 1980:116).

Although women in the rural northeastern region of Brazil may appear powerless due to their subordination to men, that is not the case; their knowledge, which is seen through their contribution to society, is of great importance even when it is not explicit. Power and relationships of power should not only be seen as a negative force, but as a positive force, particularly because the exercise of power is not only engaged in by the dominant but by the subjugated as well. In this sense and in the context being investigated, power involves the above, i.e., men, and the below, i.e., women, and thus comes from both the dominant and the dominated. According to Foucault, "power comes from below, it is induced in the body and produced in every social interaction. It is not exercised negatively from the outside, though negation and repression may be one of its effects" (Martin, 1982:6). The task set by Foucault is therefore, "the task of a political anatomy to analyze the operation of these micro-powers"

that come from below, in this case from women (Martin, 1982:6). The power of the subjugated women under investigation is explicitly exercised when they participate in rural action groups or migrate for wage employment.

By demonstrating the importance of subjugated knowledge in the exercise of power, and the importance of analysing these “micro-powers”, Foucault (1980:119) argues the limitations of orthodox Marxism insofar as it does not acknowledge the importance of subjugated knowledge; at the micro-level (or grassroots level), people also hold power. He points out that:

Power in western capitalism was denounced by the Marxists as a class domination; but the mechanics of power in themselves were never analyzed. This task could only begin after 1968, that is to say on the basis of daily struggles at the grassroots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power. This was where the concrete nature of power became visible, along with the prospect that these analyses of power would prove fruitful in accounting for all that had hitherto remained outside the field of political analysis.

While calling attention to what he finds to be the Marxists’ neglect of the political importance of the power held at the grassroots level, Foucault acknowledges the importance of structural forces in shaping and contributing to the exploitation of subjugated individuals:

I know what objections can be made. We can say that all types of subjection are derived phenomena, that they are merely the consequences of other economic and social processes: forces of production, class struggles and ideological structures which determine the form of subjectivity. It is certain that the mechanisms of subjection cannot be studied outside their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination. But they do not merely constitute the “terminal” of more fundamental mechanisms. They entertain complex and circular relations with other forms (Foucault, 1980:213).

Foucault’s approach to the analysis of power goes beyond those based on structural forces as determining people’s behaviour and as limiting their potential; he accounts for agency at the grassroots/local levels. Although recognizing the implications of structural factors in shaping the subjugated’s responses at the grassroots level, Foucault recognizes peoples’ potential to mobilize at that level by focussing on the importance of “micro powers”.

Foucault does not deal explicitly with the gendered aspects of forces at the structural level. This becomes, however, an important point in Foucauldian feminism and an important aspect in my analysis. In my study, attention is paid to the implications of power at the grassroots level within the whole social structure and political economy as gendered, including the exposure of migrant women to capitalist labour processes and the limitations of these labour processes affecting rural women who mobilize in women's action group in the drought-prone regions.

Based on Foucault, Scott (1986) states that knowledge is the means by which relationships of "power" – of "domination" and "subordination" – are constructed. Knowledge refers not only to ideas but to institutions and structures, everyday practices as well as specialized rituals, all of which constitute social relationships. Knowledge is a way of ordering the world; as such, it is not prior to social organization but it is inseparable from social organization. Such a knowledge is not absolute or true, but always relative; it is the "understanding" produced by culture and societies of human relationships, in this case, of those between men and women in specific contexts. Depending on the social structure and on the knowledge in which it is embedded, a society can either view women as subordinated, or view them as having some type of autonomy (as it is the case when women are able to access the public domain). However, in either case, women are placed in relationships in which they are at the same time powerful and subjugated. This can explain the situation of rural women in northeastern Brazil, of migrant women in the urban context of the same region and also of women mobilized in rural action groups.

Knowledge, therefore, does not only characterize individuals' responses but is embedded in the society and culture of which it is part. As it is part of culture and of the social structure, the low self-esteem rural women may have as a result of their subordination takes place not only in gender relations, but is a product of the social understanding of the society more generally. Such a situation changes as a result of changes in women's ways of life as they are exposed to new sets of knowledge. Once women acquire "new" knowledge,

it becomes embedded in the structure of the society. The acquisition of this “new knowledge” is a complex process linked to women’s actions and responses. One may expect new knowledge to be associated with distinct action, therefore the role of women reflected in their actions may change; women’s relationship to men may also change.

Knowledge and power are intimately related. Changes in knowledge, which are embedded in the social structure and which lead to societal understanding of behaviour, have implications for the way power is viewed and expressed. This is not, however, a simple and unilinear process, but a complex one in which knowledge and power are intrinsically related. Changes in knowledge and power occur along with changes in the conditions of life of the women in the study. The exposure of women to new knowledge constitutes new social relationships, including gender relations. These changes in gender relations also have implications to the knowledge acquired by women in new life circumstances. Power relations are then redefined. The redefinition of power relations is part of the changes taking place in women’s behaviour and attitudes. In the study, the acquisition of new knowledge by women is related to changes in power such as the demonstration of implicit and explicit power and to the ways these changes challenge patriarchy. The intimate relationship between knowledge and power come together in several instances in the text when the implications of their relationship are addressed.

Another aspect of Foucault’s approach, which complements women’s acquisition of new knowledge in new life conditions, is viewed through attention to the relations between “power relations and relationships of communication, which transmits information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium”. Education, both formal and informal (which I consider to be in the realm of relationships of communication), is seen as an important vehicle in the transformation women go through as migrants in the city or as members of rural action groups. The transfer of knowledge through education is a complex process and impacts on the various women in the study in different ways. According to Foucault (1983:217-218):

No doubt communicating is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons. But the production and circulation of elements of meaning can have as their objective or as their consequence certain results in the realm of power; the latter are not simply an aspect of the former, whether or not they pass through systems of communication, power relations have a specific nature. Power relations, relationships of communication, objective capacities should not therefore be confused. This is not to say that there is a question of three separate domains. Nor that there is on one hand the field of things, of perfected technique, work and the production of meaning; finally that of the domain of the means of constraint, of inequality and the action of men upon other men. These relationships always overlap one another, support one another reciprocally, and use each other mutually as means to an end.

The above passage by Foucault – about the importance of relationships of communication and their implications for power, power relations and action – can be related to the argument developed by Paulo Freire in his problem-formulating method of literacy education based on the *conscientização* of those involved. According to Freire (1980:26):

the process of *conscientização* is based on the idea of “human praxis”, that is, it is necessary to understand reality and to reach a critical stand about it. In such a case, the process of *conscientização* cannot exist outside of praxis, i.e., outside the “action-reflection” act. The process of *conscientização* is thus a dialectical process which constitutes, in a permanent manner, the way of being or of transformation of the world in which human beings live”.

Freire’s approach to *conscientização* emphasizes action and reflection upon reality. This approach can be interpreted as consistent with Foucault’s argument on the flexibility of power as well as the idea that power is found in actions. Women’s learning process entailed in *conscientização* is a participatory action through which women are not only exposed to new knowledge, but their own action becomes part of it. This leads women to develop a critical stand about their condition as women and as workers, the society in which they live, and the conditions of life to which they are subjected. Through the process of *conscientização*, women may experience a transformation based on a new construction of their “selves”; through such a process women’s power and knowledge become explicit. This new knowledge may complement prior knowledge and power, or may contradict it. *Conscientização* is not only seen as a vehicle for the transmission of power but involves power itself which comes

through the actions of the women who participate in the process. As such, *conscientização* not only empowers women but entails changes in power relations between women and men.

In this study, *conscientização* is utilized in reference to the changes women face through their responses to the drought hazard. Women's attempt to mitigate that hazard is based on their critical stand towards the ineffectiveness of governmental actions. The concept of *conscientização* is therefore utilized within the perspective of the "political economy" paradigm of disaster research. *Conscientização*, in this context, is a mechanism through which women learn about the problems affecting their lives, develop a critical stand toward reality, become aware of their own potential to deal with the problems, and attempt to achieve solutions to them. According to Freire (1980:37), "the response a human being gives in face of a threat not only changes the reality through which the threat comes, but modifies the human being herself/himself". Women's responses to the threats posed by the drought through rural-urban migration and/or rural action group mobilization are considered by these women to be attempts to mitigate the impact of drought. The engagement of women in these measures is responsible for changes in women's lives as they become exposed to an array of life conditions which lead to their own transformation, but these actions may not, in fact, mitigate drought effects.

It is important to acknowledge women's attempts to deal with problems posed by the reality of their life circumstances, even if the measures in which they engage may not be sufficient to solve the drought problem. Women's critical response to the threats posed by the drought is an important step toward the demonstration of women's potential in a society characterized by a strong patriarchy. As women change through *conscientização*, they themselves acknowledge their potential, but that potential also comes to be recognized by other members of society, including men. Power relations within the household are subjected to redefinition, which challenges patriarchy.

The process of *conscientização* changes women's lives in many ways. Women are not only able to recognize their potential and benefit from empowerment but are also able to

recognize their own limitations. This is part of women's critical stand about reality and of the attempts to change it. According to Maskrey:

If the origins and causes of vulnerability lie in social and economic political forces beyond people's control, then any attempt at reducing vulnerability must involve empowering people, if it is to be truly effective (Maskrey, 1989:35).

Women's *conscientização* of the roots of the problems affecting their lives contributes to specific actions dedicated to problem-solving. The utilization of Freire's concept of *conscientização* in the context of disaster research is in line with the importance of the involvement of people to take control over their own lives at the grassroots level.

Freire's ideas also have been widely utilized by western feminists and have had particular methodological implications for feminist research (Mies, 1986; 1993), however, there is some ambiguity in the use of the terms "consciousness raising" and "conscientization" – Mies (1986) appears to differentiate the two expressions. The Portuguese *conscientização* will be adopted in this study, rather than "consciousness raising" or "conscientization", in order to reduce this ambiguity and to express the process in what I believe to be Freire's terms.

According to Mies (1986, 1993), these terms have been used for different stages of the feminist struggle in the West. "Consciousness raising" has been applied to women's groups in the early stages of feminism when the movement was taking its shape and women collectively discussed the problems affecting their lives (Mies, 1986:15, 25). Mies, however, points to the fact that "the emphasis in 'consciousness-raising' groups was on group dynamics, role-specific behaviour and relationship problems, rather than the social relations that govern the capitalist patriarchal societies" (Mies, 1993:41-42).

Mies adds that "the problem formulating method (as it is presented by Freire), however, sees individual problems as an expression and manifestation of oppressive social relations. Whereas 'consciousness-raising' groups often tend to psychologise all relations of dominance, the problem-formulating method considers 'conscientization' as the subjective

precondition for liberating action” (Mies, 1986:227; 1993:42). It becomes apparent from these passages that the differential use of the terms “consciousness-raising” and “conscientization” lead to some ambiguity and to oversimplification of process. Therefore, I will employ the Portuguese *conscientização*.

Conscientização in my study refers to the process of women learning about reality and the threats imposed by such reality. The process leads women to have a critical stand about reality. It entails women’s participatory behaviour in the transformation of reality as women become aware of their own potential to effect change and experience a self-transformation. In the context of disaster research, *conscientização* also entails women’s awareness of their own limitations to change reality completely. Women who migrate or mobilize in rural action groups come to realize that their actions are not enough to mitigate the impact of the drought. Women’s awareness of their own limitations demonstrates that, although they recognize the importance of their agency to deal with the drought problem, they realize that support from the government is essential. Women’s participation in the Rural Labourers Union and rural action groups are ways to pressure the government to take action to transform their reality. My use of *conscientização* is that it is a gradual process that brings people collectively to call for participatory long-term development planning in disaster mitigation.

After discussing the dynamics of *conscientização* as part of the process the women in this study are exposed to, and how it relates to Foucault’s approach to knowledge and power, the next step is to explicate the differences between formal and informal education and their use in the context of the study.

By formal education I mean the traditional education acquired in schools and which does not involve the political dimensions of the process of *conscientização*. Through formal education individuals do not participate actively in the learning process, neither do they acquire the awareness of the implications of the problems affecting their lives (poverty, drought and subjugation). Knowledge is imposed on the individuals. Formal education maintains the status quo; it is not based on action and reflection about reality. It can lead to

“magic consciousness” (Freire, 1969), which is characterized by fatalism. Fatalistic attitudes lead human beings to attribute their problems to facts beyond their control and resign to the impossibility of resisting the power of facts. Magic consciousness inhibits people’s capacity for human growth and inhibits their creative power to intervene in reality and change the world as subjects. It prevents people from adopting a critical attitude to reality and from perceiving causes as they really are (Freire, 1969:45).

Despite the limitations of this type of transfer of knowledge, the knowledge acquired through formal education can also be viewed partly as a vehicle for women’s transformation and access to an explicit and visible power. Through access to formal education some migrant women encounter new employment opportunities in their place of destination. However, the process which underlies formal education is limited and lacks the political implications of what is referred to in my study as informal education, i.e., the transfer of knowledge through *conscientização*. Informal education, i.e., *conscientização* in the context of the study is not achieved by the women in a school setting, but is transmitted through labour unions and/or grassroots organizations.

The process of *conscientização*, acquired by women through informal education, can be seen as a vehicle for women’s acquisition of a new dimension of knowledge and power to which they never had access before. It is important to mention that this is not a process to which all of the women in the study are exposed and participate in the same way. Therefore, different women may or may not benefit from it in the same manner. However, the process of *conscientização* not only makes women’s power visible; it is also a way of enhancing the empowerment of women. This is present not only in the transformation migrant women go through in face of their exposure to distinct life conditions, including access to labour in a capitalist economy, but also in the transformation rural women go through as a result of their mobilization in action groups.

The process of *conscientização* is a historical commitment (Freire, 1980:26). The human being cannot participate actively in history, in society and in the transformation of

reality if (s)he does not achieve a *conscientização* about reality and about his(her) own potential to transform it (Freire, 1980:40). The transformation of reality is only possible when the human being realizes that (s)he can do it. In order for this to be realized, the human being has to have a critical attitude and engage in action (Freire, 1980:40). Through the awareness of their potential as well as of the underlying causes of their vulnerable situation women go through a transformation. Along with women's awareness of their potential, women are also aware of the limitations they face in their attempt to transform reality and being transformed. Women's transformation is therefore limited.

Such a transformation entails considerable changes for women. By breaking away from the domestic sphere devoted to household logistics and subsistence tasks in rural areas and by entering the public sphere, women may have their potential recognized and taken into account. The transformation some women go through in the rural area via action group mobilization and in the city, i.e., the destination of some migrants, can be well explained by Freire's approach to *conscientização* and by Foucault's approach to power. According to Freire (1980:35), "the more individuals reflect upon their reality and their concrete situation, the more conscious and committed the population is to intervene in that reality in an attempt to change it". This is clearly seen in relation to rural and migrant women's stand in regards to the drought problem as they search for measures to mitigate that hazard and, as a result of that, either mobilize in rural action groups or are exposed to the process of *conscientização* through Labourers Unions as they engage in wage labour.

According to Foucault (1983), "'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised) has to be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results and possible inventions may open up" (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:220). This can be clearly seen in the measures engaged in by women. Their potential to develop mitigation measures and, as a result, change reality, is not only recognized by the men who receive the credit for making decisions about women's role, but the potential becomes recognizable by

women themselves. As women gain *conscientização* through the acquisition of new knowledge, they are faced with a new relationship of power with men, which challenges patriarchy. This is intrinsically related to as well as part of the transformation process women go through.

In the case of migrant women, the migration process gives them visibility in the city, the most important factor being access to wage labour and education (both formal and informal). Young migrant domestic workers are the ones who engage in and benefit from their exposure to formal education, whereas migrant women involved in irrigated agricultural wage labour, especially the officially documented workers, benefit from the process of informal education. These wage labour workers acquire a new knowledge, a knowledge which complements that previously held, a knowledge based not only on their potential but on their actual experiences as women migrant workers. This new experience and knowledge also enables them to better understand the situation of those who remain in the countryside.

Non-migrant rural women achieve access to *conscientização* by mobilization in action groups, and the support they receive from NGOs and other grassroots organizations and the Rural Labourers Union for their participation. Women's articulation in an action group provides them with the opportunity to share their difficulties with other women, to engage in income-generating activities as well as to achieve a *conscientização* of the roots of the problems affecting their lives, such as the political and socio-economic dynamics of the drought and patriarchy. Action group mobilization exposes women to a *conscientização* process that provides them with a critical knowledge of their reality as their lives become transformed. It also exposes them to another regime of knowledge and power which is of great importance for enabling them to assert themselves. The changes experienced by women at both the urban and the rural spheres lead women to liberate themselves from a strong patriarchy as they become partly transformed, breaking in the public sphere, renegotiating power relations and having their potential and agency acknowledged.

The relationship between disaster and development is also addressed in the *conscientização* process and in people's participation in changes (Maskrey, 1989). A critical understanding of their reality enables women to turn their vulnerabilities into capacities and have their contribution become visible to the development process. It does not mean, however, that women break out of exploitation and subordination; they face another kind of exploitation, that imposed by capitalist processes. At this juncture, it is important to acknowledge Freire's (1980) argument that "the response a human being gives in face of a threat not only changes the reality through which the threat comes, but modifies the human being herself(himself)". The human being, therefore, becomes transformed through the responses (s)he gives. This is clearly seen through the transformation migrant and non-migrant women go through as they engage in a new construction of their selves through their search for measures to mitigate the drought hazard.

Foucault's approach to knowledge and power and Freire's approach to *conscientização* provide the basic structure for the analysis of rural and migrant women and their responses to the drought phenomenon. The exposure to new life conditions and the distinct *conscientização* processes opened to these women can be seen as vehicles which make explicit the micro power and the agency of women in northeastern Brazil. Women's exposure to new knowledge is added as well as juxtaposed to the knowledge and power those women had before and make the power of these women explicit and visible. It is important to reiterate again that although the process of transformation brings some benefits to the women involved, it is a complex process as it involves the dynamics of their exposure to capitalism. Thus, it does not liberate women from exploitation.

2.3. Women, Drought and (Under)development

There has not been much consensus on the meaning of development. The question of "development for whom?" has been present in discussions and is constantly asked when the subject is capitalist development. One of the problems is that on top of the lack of consensus

on research methodologies and policy initiatives, lie very distinct approaches to change. As a matter of fact, criticisms on the utilization of western models of development as well as of measures of change as appropriate standards for developing societies have contributed to the field of gender and development (Bourque and Warren, 1987). As Bourque and Warren (1987:193) state:

For some scholars, “development” simply refers to the patterns of change that countries are undergoing. For others, the concept involves state intervention and planning to achieve higher gross domestic product or other macrolevel changes measurable with aggregate statistics that reflect changes in standards of living.

This second view reflects the governmental approach to development undertaken in Brazil. The preoccupation is more with high domestic product and macro-level changes than with the changes in standards of living, particularly that of the poorest sectors. It can be seen that the target in capitalist development is not the poor since this sector is not seen as having potential, except as a reserve labour force.

Bourque and Warren (1987:193) go further and point to the fact that:

For many scholars, the issue of development is both improving standards of living and widening poor households’ active participation in agendas for change. In this case, development is not fully measured by conventional statistical indicators but rather by structural changes to broaden equity, widen women’s economic and political participation, recognize women as agents rather than as targets of change, and empower local groups to engage in grassroots development focussing on their perceived needs. The measurement of successful development – that is, increased productivity and efficiency – may be different for these alternative perspectives on change.

Beyond being shared among scholars, this view also appears to be shared among NGOs and other grassroots organizations in the developing world, including those organizations operating in the context of Brazil.

In dealing with development in the Brazilian context, specifically in the northeast, the different views towards development discussed above stand side by side and contradict one another. While the government is concerned with higher gross domestic product, scholars and

political activists stress the importance of the engagement of the grassroots and the empowerment of local groups in the development process. Given those different orientations towards development, the drought, therefore, can be seen as a socio-economic and political problem embedded in the regional development process (Wijkman and Timberlake, 1984). In such a case, the drought cannot be seen solely as a physical and environmental problem, but as a human-made hazard.

The measures in which women engage to mitigate the drought, i.e., rural-urban migration and mobilization in rural action groups, not only reflect migrant women's close relation to capitalist development, since those women are attracted by a fully developed capitalized economy present in their place of destination, but reflect the fact that those women who stay mobilized in action groups in their place of origin reach a *conscientização* of the roots of the poverty in the rural drought-prone regions. As such, they become aware of the problems of capitalist development and acquire a potential to develop mitigation measures in their rural society.

Being a human-made hazard, the drought is clearly seen as a problem embedded in the development model implemented by the government in the semi-arid region of northeastern Brazil. While the government introduces large scale irrigation schemes in some areas, most of the land in the semi-arid region does not benefit from such a scheme and is characterized by extreme poverty. In order to understand the drought as a disaster and the role of women in such a context, it is important to turn our attention to the analysis of the drought in the disaster research paradigm.

2.4. Women, Drought and Disaster Research

The role of women in the context of a disaster situation is attended to by analysing the drought from a political economy perspective in disaster research. The analysis focusses on the role of women in a disaster situation, i.e., the drought in northeastern Brazil, to explore the power the subjugated women hold in that context. According to Anderson and Woodrow

(1989), disaster crisis offers an opportunity for development to take place. Hence, the situation of women in northeastern Brazil has yet another component, which is the paradigm of disaster research. This dimension is conjoined with the feminist, the *conscientização* and development paradigms addressed above.

To initiate the discussion of the drought as a disaster phenomenon, it is important to call attention to the difference between sudden onset disasters and slow onset disasters. In contrast to sudden onset disasters, such as floods and hurricanes, which often have a dramatic impact on the population, the drought is a slow onset disaster, which occurs cyclically (Winchester, 1992; Branco, 1995). That being the case, it becomes important to differentiate the drought according to the ways through which it is manifested. In the analysis, the drought is understood to be a hazard when it takes place in normal and expected drought periods, when the absence of rainfall occurs during the summer/dry season. It becomes a disaster when it reaches extreme proportions.

Natural hazards such as droughts cannot be treated as the result of natural and physical forces solely, but should be seen as the result of a combination of socio-economic and political forces (Cuny, 1983; Maskrey, 1989,1993; Rogge, 1992; Wiest et al., 1994; Wilches-Chaux, 1993). This is clearly apparent in the fact that a disaster usually does not equally affect a population as a whole but rather tends to affect more profoundly the most vulnerable. Vulnerability is the factor which determines the impact of any disaster (Rogge, 1992). According to Wilches-Chaux, vulnerability is the lack of capacity of a population to cope with the effects of a certain change in its environment, that is, its inflexibility or incapacity to adapt to the change (Wilches-Chaux, 1993).

It has been shown that attention to the physical aspects of vulnerability leads only to a limited understanding of disaster phenomena. A thorough understanding, therefore, cannot be reached unless attention is given to a wider historical analysis of the evolving relationship between people and the forms, means and relations of production (Maskrey, 1989:34).

Vulnerability is the result of a combination between social, political and economic factors (Wilches-Chaux, 1993). The most vulnerable segment of the population in the context of northeastern Brazil consists of those who have limited or no access to or control over the means of production and are therefore marginalised by social relations of production which perpetuate dependency and inequality. In such a context, women and children have been considered the most vulnerable. Although that is the case, it is important to point to the fact that being vulnerable does not necessarily mean that women have no power.

The elderly also comprise a vulnerable population in northeast Brazil, however, they receive a retirement pension and, as such, their situation changes. In the context of a poverty stricken region affected by the drought, access to a cash income decreases people's vulnerability. Beyond class-based limited access to or control of the means of production, women in rural areas do not have access to employment and are thought to have a secondary role in agricultural production (Aguiar, 1980; Spindel, 1987; Ramalho, 1995; Fischer and Melo, 1996).

The vulnerability of women should be understood to be cultural and organizational rather than biological or physiological (Wiest et al., 1994:3). The subordination of women is closely related to the notion of their vulnerability since it is embedded in the knowledge of the society concerned. This is intrinsically linked to the fact that the social structure of most societies formally relegates women to inferiority and dependency, increasing their vulnerability (Wiest et al., 1994:6). Studies have shown, however, that the actual performance of women in production and distribution differs significantly from gender ideology and role stereotypes in most societies (Wiest et al., 1994:6). Such a view clearly shows that the vulnerability of women, particularly in the Brazilian northeast, is culturally constructed and increased by gender ideologies and stereotypes which are also largely responsible for the undermining of those women's power and capacities (Ramalho, 1995; Branco, 1995). This ideology, along with the fact that women's contribution is primarily restricted to the domestic

sphere, serves to perpetuate the invisibility of women in the larger society, including government policy-making.

In this study, attention is focussed on the power and knowledge women have despite their vulnerability and on their potential in regards to the mitigation of the drought. This is seen through the attempts of women to mitigate the effects of the drought through migration and articulation in rural action groups. Women come to play an active role in a disaster situation through these strategies.

Several studies have indicated that the goal of mitigation is to reduce vulnerability (e.g., Wilches-Chaux, 1993:39). According to Maskrey:

mitigation refers to measures which can be taken to minimize the destructive and disruptive effects of hazards and thus lessen the magnitude of a disaster. Mitigation measures can be of different kinds, ranging from physical measures such as flood defences or safe building design to legislation, training and public awareness. Mitigation is an activity which can take place at any time: before a disaster occurs, during an emergency, or after disaster, during the recovery and reconstruction (Maskrey, 1989:39).

Rogge suggests that it is worth drawing attention to the need that there be a more universally acceptable definition of the term “mitigation”, and especially one that more readily and clearly distinguishes between “mitigation” and “preparedness” (Rogge, 1992:39). He points out that:

The concept of mitigation, as widely used in disaster studies, is not always a clear one. To some it implies all risk-reduction and preparedness actions taken prior to an onset of a hazard event. To others, it has a much more specific meaning, such as activities undertaken specifically to lessen the human and socio-economic impact of a hazard; engineering and technocrats, on the other hand, may use the term to refer solely to technological and/or structural interventions aimed at containing the physical impacts of particular hazards (Rogge, 1992:29).

Both Maskrey (1989) and Rogge (1992) contribute to the understanding of the concept of mitigation. Mitigation can be formal, i.e., governmental or popular. Formal mitigation measures are usually top down in approach whereas popular or community based mitigation measures are undertaken by the affected population at the grassroots level (Maskrey, 1989).

In a critique to formal mitigation measures, Maskrey recognizes that this type of mitigation is associated with professional and high technology and local know-how is distrusted; he states: "(Governmental) programmes are inherently uneconomic because they exclude the principal resources available for mitigation in most contexts: people themselves, their local knowledge, skills and organization" (Maskrey, 1989:86). As a result, Governmental mitigation measures are generally ineffective. Under the same critical stand to Formal mitigation measures Maskrey notes:

Autonomous community organization is controlled and inhibited and its role restricted to innocuous self-help activities, thus avoiding the emergence of political consciousness and any challenge to the existing power structure (Maskrey, 1989:87)

Formal mitigation measures therefore not only fail to include the needs of the affected population but also hinder the participation of the affected population and their view about the hazard itself. In order to be effective, mitigation measures have to involve long-term objectives and goals. Thus, measures which are addressed to fulfill the immediate needs of a population are not effective. The engagement of the affected population in mitigation is, in many cases, successful because the population affected by disasters is usually aware of its needs. This is the case particularly when the population is conscious of the root of the problems underlying the disaster. Therefore, the process of *conscientização* in regards to the needs of a population is of great importance for the development of popular effective mitigation measures. According to Maskrey (1989:87), who refers to popular mitigation measures as community based mitigation, the importance of these measures are present:

Where natural hazards are a serious and frequent threat to lives, livelihoods and homes, then hazard mitigation can become important for CBOs (Community Based organizations). Only local people know their own needs and therefore only they can define their own priorities for mitigation, within a given context.

Stressing on the importance of the participation of the local population in mitigation, Maskrey calls attention to the fact that:

While some CBOs may have a very limited objective such as building a defence wall, and once that is achieved, lose momentum, others may develop a wider ideological perspective and go on to struggle for a redistribution of resources and quite wide-ranging social changes (Maskrey, 1989:88).

Popular or community mitigation measures therefore imply the importance of political mobilization and consciousness of peoples needs and rights. The introduction of these measures calls for participatory action of those affected by disaster. Another important aspect of community based mitigation is that it does not exclude the government. Instead, its purpose is to pressure the government to change policies and to engage in negotiations for effective support (Maskrey, 1989:88-89).

This study focusses on women's potential to develop popular mitigation measures toward the drought hazard. Attention is given to women's engagement in rural-urban migration and participation in rural action group in an attempt to mitigate the drought. Maskrey's approach to community based mitigation implies the need for participatory action by the affected population. In this regard Freire's approach to *conscientização* is an important theoretical basis and is utilized in the analysis.

The level of attention to disaster mitigation by governments, donors, other agencies, and local populations is invariably related to prevailing or perceived levels of risk (Rogge, 1992:29). Mitigation is, therefore, closely related to risk perception by governments, donors, other agencies and the local populations. Although formal or government sponsored mitigation programmes are supposedly designed to mitigate disasters, these programmes involve, in the majority of the cases, short-term solutions. These measures are usually top-down approaches that, instead of decreasing people's vulnerabilities, actually aggravate them by increasing people's dependence (Maskrey, 1989). One of the problems with formal mitigation measures is that they usually deal with the physical and material aspects of vulnerability, not the socio-historical conditions.

An example can be seen through the measures implemented by the government in northeastern Brazil. During critical drought periods the government provides some temporary

wage earning activities, i.e., emergency work fronts, for the affected population to engage in work in the construction of wells and dams, along with distribution of food and water. Those actions then focus on the physical/material vulnerability instead of dealing with the historical roots of the problem such as the unequal distribution of land and the lack of educational programmes designed to deal with the drought problem in times of crisis.

Furthermore, wells and dams are usually constructed on private properties and thus benefit only a few, the majority of whom are large landowners (Andrade, 1985; Coelho, 1985). Under these circumstances these measures do not reduce the vulnerability of the affected population who is in the great majority poor. It usually satisfies the interests of the political and economic elite (Maskrey, 1989:87). Medeiros (1995) mentions that these measures, including the distribution of food and water to the affected population, are developed to protect the population from starvation, and thus, they are palliative and have no long-term goals (Medeiros, 1995). Besides the limitations of these programmes, they had excluded women - women were not employed until the 1983 drought (Pessoa et al., 1983). The absence of women in such programmes exemplifies the invisibility of women to the government, not only in a development context, but in a disaster context as well.

Although the drought as a disaster is part of the ineffective development of the region and can actually be seen as a problem embedded in the development process requiring long-term solutions (Wijkman and Timberlake, 1984; Maskrey, 1989), the programmes implemented by the government have not had long-term goals. Instead of dealing with the causes of the problem and attempting to decrease the population's vulnerability, these measures are not incorporated into regional development planning (Coelho, 1985). They therefore serve to maintain the status quo as the government is unwilling to introduce the necessary structural changes involved in a long-term planned mitigation, such as changes in the land tenure system, along with effective extension programmes to inform and educate the rural population about adequate measures to cope with the drought problem (Andrade, 1985; Coelho, 1985; Pessoa, 1985).

Despite the fact that women constitute one of the most vulnerable groups, they have not been specifically targeted by any of these governmental programmes in northeastern Brazil (Pessoa et al., 1983). As already indicated, this is based in an ideology and social structure that renders them “invisible” in regards to their actual contribution to society and the role they play in a disaster situation and their potential to engage in mitigation measures towards the drought. The “invisibility” of women is culturally constructed and, to some extent, underlined by the subordination and subjugation of women in that social context. By drawing upon the work of Foucault (1980, 1983) and Freire (1980), this study will attempt to demonstrate that, although subjugated, women are powerful and have a great potential to engage in mitigation measures.

In face of the neglect of the government to introduce realistic and effective mitigation measures in the last decades, the population of the region has been receiving attention from NGOs’s, religious grassroots movements and the Rural Labourers Union in the implementation of long-term community mitigation measures to improve their conditions of life and develop mechanisms to cope with the drought. Through the support women have been receiving from those organizations they have been able to overcome the drought problem, particularly by mobilizing in action groups in rural areas. One of the most important measures achieved by the women to provide a basis for the development of effective mitigation measures has been *conscientização* of the root of the problems affecting their lives, particularly in times of crisis, and the awareness that they have a potential to develop measures applied to mitigation of the drought. Through such *conscientização*, rural women have been articulated with action groups, and in that context they also have become recognized (visible) actors in search of mitigation measures. The lack of such a *conscientização* may lead the population to have fatalistic attitudes about the disaster phenomenon and have their potential inhibited.

The mobilization of women in rural action groups, as well as their engagement in migration, are very important to the women. By searching for mitigation measures, women

engage in an attempt to decrease their vulnerability (Maskrey, 1989). By doing so, their power is made explicit even though social conditions may continue their subjugation.

The political nature of the drought is clearly seen when we consider the high socio-economic growth of the irrigated portion of the semi-arid region, the *Sertão do São Francisco*, the place of destination of many migrants who flee from poverty stricken regions of the *Sertão* affected by the drought. Migration has been a measure utilized by the rural population to mitigate the drought. As those migrants offer their labour power for a low price, they contribute greatly to the development of the region while the non-irrigated areas where they come from face poverty and underdevelopment. It can be said, therefore, that the irrigated *sertão* develops at the expense of the underdevelopment of the non-irrigated *sertão*.

The question to be asked is whether rural-urban migration of women and rural women's involvement in action groups are indeed mitigation measures. Although migration can be considered a flight from poverty and a consequence of the drought, the rural-urban movement is considered by the population involved in it as a measure to minimize the impact of the drought. Whether, or to what extent, it mitigates the drought is another matter. Although migration takes place as an attempt to mitigate the drought, it is also a survival mechanism; through migration, women contribute not only with monetary help for those who stay behind but help other family members to migrate. Migration is an important mechanism particularly for the women who engage in it, as it gives them the opportunity to be exposed to new conditions of life and to participate in a new regime of power and knowledge.

2.5. Globalization of the Local Economy and the Gendered Division of Labour

Attention will be now given to the role of women in face of the globalization of the local economy. The situation which characterizes the lives of northeastern Brazilian women and the process of transformation to which they are exposed are placed within the capitalist world system. It is therefore a result of the relationship between local development and the globalization of the local economy. The lives of these women are closely connected to the

capitalist world system. Thus, in order to understand the dynamics involved in the exploitation of women, it is important to turn our attention to the relationship between the local economy, the gendered division of labour and the globalization process.

In order to understand the situation of women in the Third World it is important to look at the world system as a whole and not try to understand women's problems in underdeveloped societies independently of those in overdeveloped societies. By dividing and simultaneously linking these different parts of the world, capitalist patriarchy has created a worldwide context of accumulation that involves the manipulation and appropriation of women's labour. The sexual division of labour thus plays a crucial role (Mies, 1986:34).

The analysis of the gendered division of labour has to be placed in the context of the capitalist world system since they are interrelated. In such a context, the situation of women in the semi-arid region of northeastern Brazil can be understood in light of the relationship between the northeast as a periphery and the core of developed countries as centres. The relation between the two poles shows that one develops at the expense of the underdevelopment of the other pole. The underdevelopment of the periphery, therefore, is not due to backwardness, but is a result of the unequal relationship between the centre and the periphery. Through this we can see the global accumulation process of the world market (Cardoso and Faletto, 1976; Mies, 1986; Wolf, 1982:22-23).

Such a situation also reproduces itself within the periphery (Cardoso and Faletto, 1976). Through the political dynamics of the drought, the irrigated modern area of the semi-arid develops at the expense of the underdeveloped drought prone area. The situation within the semi-arid region is a local reproduction of a global process and can be best understood within the global context. While the modern irrigated region produces for export and for the national market, the underdeveloped peripheral drought-prone area provides the cheap labour supply to make possible and profitable the exportation of crops.

Once the dynamics of the relationship between the local economy and globalization have been understood, it is important to analyse the reasons underlying the reliance on

women's labour and the benefits of that to the capitalist sector. According to Mies, two-thirds of all labour in the world is done by women (Mies, 1986:117). Mies' explanation of the preference for women workers is based on what she calls "housewifization" of labour. She points to the fact that:

Women are the optimal labour force because they are now being universally defined as "housewives", not as workers; this means their work, whether in use value or commodity production, is obscured, does not appear as "free wage labour", is defined as an "income-generating activity", and can hence be bought at a much cheaper price than male labour (Mies, 1986:116).

The point Mies makes is an important one as it calls attention to the association of women to men and to the way such an association works to the detriment of women. Being considered "housewives", women's income is supposedly a complement to that of their husband's, and thus of less importance. Beyond the housewifization issue, Mies also asks the question of why the attraction of third world women to international capital is higher than that of the men. Based on Grossman and others (1979), Mies points to the fact that "women in Asia and Southeast Asia are considered to be the most docile, manipulable labour force who, at the same time show a very high degree of productivity of work". In fact "most governments who want to attract foreign investors advertise their attractive low-paid women with their 'nimble fingers'" (Mies, 1986:117).

Women are thus considered better workers due to biological characteristics as well as their fragile nature. These circumstances are clearly seen in the context of the employment of women in fruit and vegetable production in the *São Francisco* valley. By employing women in the fruit and vegetable industry, the industry is able to cheapen its labour (Collins, 1995).

Along with the explanation given by Mies, Valdés (1992) points to the fact that the technical division of labour, which is highly arbitrary, acquires the characteristics of a gender division of labour. Much of the literature on women's work in labour intensive production systems argues that they possess unique capacities (whether innate or socialized) for the tasks they perform. Valdés' distinction between these two concepts makes it possible to see how

a rather arbitrary assignment of tasks (with tenuous links to a real physical difference) becomes rationalized in terms of prevailing gender norms. For example, women's jobs are held to be repetitive, manual tasks that require delicacy and efficiency. Where employers require women to monitor and make judgements about the quality of the fruit, this is held to be akin to "cosmetology" demanded by the consumer in the external market (Valdés, 1992:109, cited in Collins 1995:187-188).

According to Collins (1995), the women hired in irrigated agricultural labour comprise a vulnerable population in the sense that they are in "need" (besides being women, they are migrants), they are willing to sell their labour power and this benefits tremendously the capitalist sector. Cultural constructions of gender lends a sense of "naturalness" and inevitability to the labour arrangements which absorb women's labour. This will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter V where I analyse the distinct types of labour arrangements involving migrant women in the *São Francisco* region.

Women's labour is preferred over men's labour in an array of activities in Petrolina. Consequently, women do not have to compete with men for jobs. Yet, women's work is still rated as inferior to that of men. The tasks executed by women are considered of less importance than those performed by the men (Valdés, 1992, cited in Collins 1995:187-188). Women therefore experience discrimination in the work place, but its impact is lessened because women's labour is deemed essential. Women prefer life in the city since the discrimination they face in the countryside is much greater. In the city they are visible to themselves, their relatives, the Labourers Union and even the capitalist sector through the wages they earn. They face exploitation, but of a less apparent kind than the pronounced discrimination they experience in rural areas and the severe pressures brought by the drought.

Paid domestic service is an important sector in the absorption of women in the urban sphere in many developing/industrializing economies (Moore, 1988:85). In the case under investigation, it constitutes the sector which absorbs the migrant women's labour power quickly after their arrival in the city. In some contexts domestic work absorbs the labour

power of men (Moore, 1988:85), but that is not the case in Brazil. The availability of domestic work in Petrolina is related to the globalization of the local economy because the underlying reason for women's employment is the fast socio-economic growth of the city which is related to the coming of investors interested in the export sector of the economy. Domestic workers also subsidize the labour costs of the households for which they work because these women constitute a cheap labour force (Mies, 1986).

As the discussion has demonstrated, the lives of those women – either in the rural underdeveloped areas or in the city – are intimately related to the capitalist world system. In the case of women who work in the irrigated fields devoted to the production of crops for export or for the national market, as well as in the domestic service sector, their relation to the global economy is clearly seen as they depend on the jobs they perform to survive in the city and to help those left behind. By abandoning the underdeveloped rural areas and being absorbed by the capitalist economy, women are closely related to the development process and become important actors in such a process.

Rural women who stay on a permanent basis in rural areas are also related to the world system. The very permanence of these women in the rural drought-prone region takes place so that some of their family members can migrate to fulfill the labour demand of the capitalist sector. According to Mies (1986:106), this situation is part of her discussion of housewifization . As housewives, women play an important role in reducing costs related to the reproduction of the labour force and, as such, benefit the capitalist sector. As Mies points out: "...housewifization means the externalization, or ex-territorialization of costs which otherwise would have to be covered by the capitalists" (Mies, 1986:110). The permanence of these women in rural areas is also a result of the lack of opportunities for them outside that sphere. The poverty these women face is closely related to the world sphere as the drought and the underdevelopment of the regions affected by the drought are a product of the internal colonialism within the northeastern semi-arid region and its relations to the global sphere.

In the case of women who engage in women's action groups located in the poverty stricken regions of rural semi-arid Brazil, they are linked to the world system through the funds they receive from international grassroots agencies devoted to financing income-generating activities for women. Although such a relation is not direct between the women and the agencies, the local NGOs and other grassroots organizations appear as intermediaries between them. The relationship is nonetheless present; the results from such a relationship are seen in the crafts women produce and commercialize, activities which gain particular importance during drought crisis (CAATINGA, 1994; Portela, et al., 1994; Branco, 1995).

The analysis of the situation of women in face of the drought in northeastern Brazil calls attention to the power and knowledge and their relation to *conscientização* these women have in the local context as well as to their relation to globalization. Understanding the agency of these women necessitates attention to the relationship between the local setting and the global capitalist system.

2.6. The Public Domain and the Construction of Women's "New" Selves

The process of transformation women face in their search for measures to mitigate the drought is a meaningful one to the women themselves. By participating in *conscientização* and new life conditions, women become exposed to a reality ignored by them previously and acquire a critical stand about it. This, therefore, leads women to escape the normative constraints of the domestic sphere and enter into the public sphere.

The participation of women in action groups and their access to wage labour are certainly important steps towards the rupture of the "self" as it is constituted in the domestic sphere and is inserted into public space. The discovery of women's rights become a reason for the mobilization of women into public life where they begin to exercise a political will and to intervene in their fate (Souza-Lobo, 1991). The assertion of power by women is certainly seen in this process. In the context of the study the exertion of power is clearly seen by the dominant, i.e., men, and the subjugated, i.e., women. The relationship between women and

men, which once clearly rendered more power to men, has to be reevaluated as women gain access to an explicit power and to new processes of knowledge.

In the case of migrant women who migrate along with their husbands, their absorption into the labour force is relatively easy. According to Bruhl (1988):

Even though the importance of women to the rural family is clearly seen, this is well recognized only after the migration process towards the city. This is also realized by the interviewed women. The experience that the female sector “saves” the family in the city contributes to the fact that the desire of self-defence is transformed into the consciousness about the importance of the woman to the family: in the city the women perceived themselves with more frequency than in the countryside (Bruhl, 1988:38).

As Bruhl points out, it is during the rural-urban migration process that women become visible, and the main reason for that, as the migrants in my study suggest, is their engagement in wage-labour, their access to employment and, particularly, their access to formal education (in the case of young migrant domestic workers) and informal education (that based on the *conscientização* of the workers in the case of the migrant women who work in irrigated agriculture).

The engagement of rural women in social movements, i.e., women’s action groups, is responsible for an improvement of life conditions in the countryside, for the rise of women’s consciousness about their role as women workers and as rural dwellers. By mobilizing in action groups in rural areas, return migrants and widows of the drought attempt to change reality. Despite their permanence in rural areas, where the invisibility and the subordination of women are high, the mobilization of women in action groups, takes place as an avenue for the transformation of women’s own lives and empowerment.

The grassroots women’s group I studied is a community based organization treated as a social movement, and analysed as such. According to Pinto (1992):

An interesting aspect in the formation of social movements is that they are usually based on balanced relations, that is, the initial nuclei of a social movement share with the “other” the same condition of exclusion and, due to this pertinent principle, the reinvidicating movement is organized. The

differentiation principle and the rise of the group are one and the same thing: the excluded community considered by the concrete existing conditions become the basis for organized actors to fight against their exclusion (Pinto, 1992:131).

In the case of the action group I studied, the excluded community – women – is based on concrete existing conditions; “hunger, misery and discrimination, particularly in periods of drought, are the essential conditions for organization, which is devoted to fight the women’s exclusion” (Pinto, 1992:131). This is the case even considering the stratification within the group; return migrants are not only financially better off, but have a higher status. These women also face the impact of the poverty faced by the other women group members. A detailed discussion of this is provided in Chapter VI.

It is important to mention that migrant women have an easier time finding work in the city than men. This is particularly the case of Petrolina, due to the high demand for women’s labour in vegetable and fruit production. Although the engagement of women in the labour market benefits the whole family, it can also cause problems and tensions between women and men at the household level. Accustomed to total control of their households in the rural areas, men are faced with the reality that, in the city, women have an easier time finding jobs, which enables them to enter the public sphere as well as become responsible for fulfilling the household’s needs. Although women are exploited, this is often seen as a threat to previously unchallenged domination by men who were the only ones to have access to an income in rural areas.

Tension also characterizes the integration of rural women in the group. The participation of women in the movement always breaks their condition of public invisibility. Such a rupture does not, in the majority of the cases, take place without tensions within the family. The decision of women to participate in the movement is almost always accompanied by resistance by fathers, husbands and even sons to their participation. This is understood as resistance, and the breakdown of the traditional and of the moral patterns found within the family and the rural society. Taking leave of the private space and entry into public space

involves the participation of women in a network of relations which implies new knowledge and new information when put into practice. This new knowledge redefines the power relations in the domestic sphere. The position of women is “redefined not only in regards to the direct relation with their partners, fathers and kin, but also provides a different position in regards to their relations of friendship and neighbourhood, hence, there is redefinition of the relation in the public sphere” (Pinto, 1992:133-34).

By being absorbed in the capitalist economy and being exposed to new living conditions, migrant women go through many changes and a process of transformation. Despite the benefits provided by their involvement in the Labourers Union as they become politicized, they cannot avoid the exploitation they go through as wage workers. Their access to an income, while enhancing their self-esteem, is also a way through which their exploitation can be seen. As men have a more difficult time finding jobs in Petrolina, women usually become responsible for the survival of their households in the city.

Exploitation is also experienced by daily labourers who are underemployed and have no official tie with their employers. In the case of domestic workers, exploitation is also apparent, but the work conditions they face are distinct from those of other types of workers. Instead of being the providers for urban households, domestic workers experience the exploitation of being expected to provide for their rural households.

The lives of the women in this study, regardless of whether they are migrants or rural women, are closely connected to the drought problem and to the politics involved with it. As women search for measures to mitigate the drought, they experience changes and engage in the construction of their new selves. As a result of a new regime of power and knowledge, the change processes to which women are exposed offer some benefits to the women. The benefits are tempered, however, as women face continued – and even new forms of – exploitation. The exploitation they face at work adds to that they face in the household; hence, women face a double exploitation. Despite these difficult conditions, these migrant women do not want to return to the countryside. According to them, the situation there is

worse, particularly in drought periods. By their participation in rural action groups and in wage labour in the city, women's agency is recognized and this is very important to the women themselves.

In order for a total transformation to take place, changes would not only have to come from women, the subjugated, but from their oppressors, in the case the capitalist sector (Freire, 1980). In the context being investigated, however, women's agency in regards to attempting to mitigate the drought is not only visible but possible. This is the case because by migrating and/or mobilizing in rural action groups, women become aware of their potential to transform reality. By attempting to modify reality women's self-awareness about their potential is visible.

Solution to the drought problem requires at least two things: women's and men's *conscientização* about their potential and their action, and serious action from the government for adequate development planning that involves the participation of the affected population. This kind of broad disaster mitigation solution to achieve effective changes in response to drought at the local level would necessitate major structural change in the larger society.

CHAPTER III

FIELD RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter is focussed on the methods and fieldwork devoted to the analysis of women in the face of drought in northeast Brazil. It deals with the two ends of the migration stream: the rural poor drought-prone area (the place of origin of some of the women under consideration) and the urban developed sphere (their place of destination). In order to deal with the problem being investigated, the collection of data took place in both rural and urban spheres.

A rural and an urban site were selected within the semi-arid region of the state of Pernambuco. This enabled me to manage more effectively the data collection in both sites since the trips did not involve long distances, and the semi-arid region of the state of Pernambuco itself offered appropriate conditions for the collection of data. Part of the semi-arid in Pernambuco is located on the margins of the most important river in the region, the *São Francisco* river, an area that benefits from irrigation and migrants from the drought-prone portions of the region.

The remaining of the areas in the semi-arid region of Pernambuco do not benefit from large-scheme irrigation; they are severely affected by drought and are characterized by underdevelopment. By dealing with the irrigated and non-irrigated areas, I was able to analyse the distinct levels of development within the same geographical region and to explain the socio-political and economic dynamics of the drought hazard.

Dealing with different research sites was a difficult and a challenging task. The traditional orientation undertaken in ethnographic fieldwork has tended to focus extensively

on the collection of data on one site, in many cases a small village. Furthermore, when the analysis involves migrants, it usually deals with their situation at their place of destination or at the place of origin, when the focus is on return migration (Scott, 1995), but rarely deals with both sites. Two sites – a rural and an urban one – involved distinct dynamics and levels of complexity. The difficulties with this were minimized by focussing the research problem. The analysis demonstrated that the drought is not a phenomenon affecting only the rural sphere of northeastern Brazil, but also the urban sphere (Barbosa and Booth, 1996), the region and the nation as a whole.

Data collection at the two ends of the migration stream facilitated comparison; the situation of migrant women in the urban sphere is better understood in the light of the data collected among women who reside in the rural areas, both return migrants, as well as women who never left the rural areas despite the drought. Attention was also given to the families of the migrant women who stayed in the countryside. The data collected at both sites not only complemented each other but explained the overall situation. This two-site study thus offers a more complete view of women's involvement in drought hazard mitigation and their attempts to improve their life.

The fieldwork was accomplished in the period of eleven months, from January to December 1995. The first phase was devoted to the selection of the research site(s), undertaken in January and February 1995. The second phase was devoted to the collection of data. The collection of data started in the rural area, then moved to the urban and continued changing from rural to urban. The alternation of data collection in the two sites enabled me to deal with the fact that weekends were very important for the collection of data in both locations in terms of the availability of the consultants. Thus, I spent some weekends in the rural site and others in the urban site. This phase of data collection was undertaken in eight months, from March to November, 1995. The third phase, which took place in December 1995, was devoted to a brief visit to both sites to recheck some of the data and to

conduct a bibliographic search on the topics being investigated, part of which was done simultaneously with the collection of data in the second phase.

3.1. The Selection of the Sites

3.1.1. The First Contacts

The contacts which led me to the selection of the site were initiated in January 1995 in Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco, prior to my entrance into the field setting. At that time, I contacted an ecumenical grassroots organization led by the Catholic church⁴, which supports the struggle for land and better living conditions throughout Brazil⁵. The first step I took was to contact the organization's regional coordinator in the headquarters office in Recife. The contact with this organization was made by myself because I was aware of its emphasis on the political mobilization of the people it worked with. This was in line with my expectations since the main objective of my research was to study people's mobilization and actions towards the mitigation of the drought. Knowing about the political agenda of the organization, I explained my research objectives to the coordinator and the need for me to be

⁴ This organization is politically engaged in the struggle for land by the landless and for social justice throughout the country particularly in rural areas. Its involvement, however, varies from region to region. This organization is active in several parts of the drought-prone semi-arid region, including the Sertão do Araripe, but not necessarily in all of the areas in the semi-arid region.

⁵ The distinction between religious grassroots organizations and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) is important in the study. I not only received the support from both types of organizations but their relationship and support to the population studied have implications for my research. Religious grassroots organizations are church-based movements with a political agenda based on social justice, but they also reflect religious interests. NGOs are autonomous non-profit secular organizations which represent civil society. NGOs are closely related to the Catholic church. However, NGOs do not include religious interests nor interests of political parties in their agenda. The main objective of NGOs is to promote social justice, therefore their interests overlap not only with those of religious grassroots organizations but also with those of leftist political parties. NGOs are usually funded by international agencies. These organizations have been playing an important role in the democratization process in Brazil in the last decade (Landim, 1988).

impartial in regards to the struggle of the people I was about to investigate. I made it clear, however, that despite taking an impartial stand, I was supportive of the organization's actions towards the people's struggle for land and better living conditions.

The regional coordinator understood well my situation and was of great assistance to me. I was encouraged to select the rural site in the *Sertão do Araripe*, one of the poorest regions in the drought prone semi-arid due to its concentration on agriculture and the constant threats posed by the drought to that economic activity. I learned that the area benefited not only from the involvement of ecumenical grassroots organizations but from the involvement of a local NGO and of the STR (the Rural Labourers Union). Since that time I knew that the rural communities in the area were not representative of all of the rural communities located in the drought-prone *Sertão* since the stages of mobilization of the local population was more advanced than those of other rural communities. My findings therefore could not be generalized. Beyond the interesting nature of the region, I would also benefit from contacts with local people and leaders who were engaged in the organization's movement.

At that time, there was an exhibition on a museum in Recife about women from the *Sertão do Araripe*, particularly the so-called *viúvas da seca* (widows of the drought). The exhibition was promoted by a local NGO, the Araripe NGO, which assists the population of the *Sertão do Araripe* and was supported by various organizations such as UNICEF and OXFAM. The material presented at the exhibition included videos, poems, photographs and sculptures. The ecumenical grassroots organization coordinator, whom I contacted previously, encouraged me to contact the personnel involved in the exhibition, including artists, journalists and members of the Araripe NGO. I was able to contact them in Recife and had the opportunity to explain my research objectives and my need to be impartial in regards to the political action and involvement of the NGO aside from my general support to their stand. I received full support from the contacts I made at that stage and decided to take a trip to the *Sertão do Araripe* region.

Prior to the time of this research I had been involved in the collection of data in different parts of the semi-arid, but I had never visited or worked in the extreme northwestern portion of the semi-arid in the state of Pernambuco, the location of the *Sertão do Araripe*. Largely due to the characteristics of the area as well as to contacts I had made and the support I was receiving, I considered the area appropriate for my research.

It was also in Recife that I made the first contacts regarding the selection of the urban research site. In discussions with scholars and NGO activists, I learned that Petrolina, a medium sized city located in the *Sertão do São Francisco* (in the southwestern portion of the state) was the most important urban centre in the region of the *Sertão do São Francisco* and not only attracted, but relied heavily on, the labour force of the *sertanejos(as)* fleeing from the drought and poverty in the non-irrigated *Sertão* to work in the modern irrigated capitalist enterprises. Due to the high socio-economic development found in that region, the migration flow had changed. In the last two decades, instead of migrating to the industrialized centres of southeastern and southern Brazil, the *sertanejos(as)* have been migrating to Petrolina. Besides finding work there, the city is located within the semi-arid and the expenses involved in the migration movement are much less than those involved in migration to the south of Brazil.

The contacts I made in Recife were very valuable. In February 1995, I travelled to the sites to become familiarized with the region, to make the first contacts there, and also to develop rapport with the population to be studied (see Figure 2, page 4).

Despite the interesting characteristics of the two sites and my intentions of working there, I was aware of the fact that the trips from Recife to both research sites not only involved long distances (Petrolina lies 770 km away from Recife, and Ouricuri, a city surrounded by several rural villages in the *Sertão do Araripe*, is 630 km from Recife), but were also dangerous since there was violence on the highways. The region of the *Sertão Central*, which stands between the coast and the *Sertão do São Francisco* and *Araripe*, has been an illegal marijuana plantation zone and there were several gangs related to narco-traffic

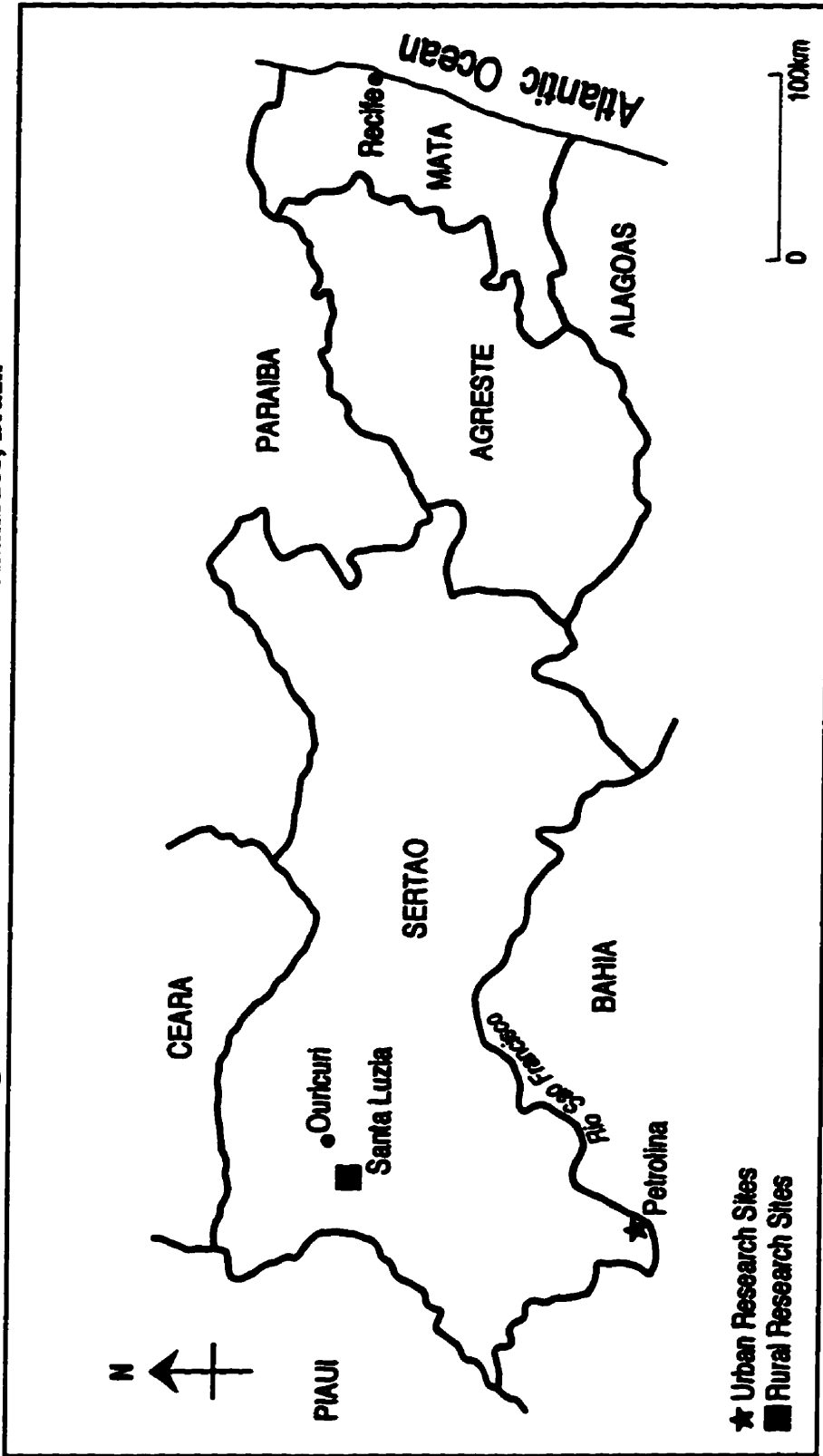
in the area. Those gangs attacked buses and cars to rob the passengers and they engaged in dangerous fights with the police; consequently, the trips by bus or car were very dangerous. In case I indeed selected those sites to collect the data, I knew I would have to face the trips constantly since I could not settle in the sites on a permanent basis during the collection of the data.

To deal with two different sites, it would be difficult to settle down during the collection of data. Another factor was that I had no one to rely on to care for my two children in either of the research sites. I therefore decided to base myself in Recife and leave my children there while I undertook the trips to the research sites, despite not being able to avoid the risks associated with the long and unsafe trips to the *sertão* whenever I went to Recife to visit my children. I nevertheless took the challenge and luckily was not victimized by violence during the whole fieldwork period.

3.1.2. Entrance into the Field Setting

My first trip to the *sertão* was an exploratory trip, although by then I had a clear idea about the conditions I expected to find in the rural and urban regions. During that time, I visited the *sertão do Araripe* as well as the *sertão do São Francisco*, including the cities of Ouricuri and Petrolina (see Figure 3). Since I had never been to either of the places, I was enthusiastic, but did not really know how my first contacts in the field were going to be. That was the case despite the full support I had from the organizations I had contacted in Recife. I visited several rural communities in the drought-prone *sertão* and cities on the margins of the *São Francisco* River, including Petrolina. I was struck by the differences between the two areas despite the fact that they were both located within the same geographical region. Petrolina seemed to be an oasis in the desert. It was a fast growing middle-sized city, with a population of 175,506 inhabitants (IBGE, 1991 - the municipality is much larger) surrounded by sophisticated modern irrigated estates, while the *sertão do Araripe*, particularly the municipalities, i.e., the rural villages in the surroundings of the city of Ouricuri, was very dry

Figure 3: Location of Research Sites in Pernambuco, Brazil



and poor. It became very obvious that I had two distinct and interesting sites and decided to engage in research there.

In Ouricuri, a small city with a population of 73,530 (IBGE, 1991) located in the *sertão do Araripe*, I met members of the Araripe NGO who provided room and board for me in the organization's facilities. During the ten days I spent there I visited several rural communities and realized that, despite the important role the Araripe NGO played in educating the population about the limitations imposed by the ecosystem and in the transferring of appropriate technology to them, the migration of both men and women appeared to be common, particularly in times of severe drought.

I also learned that in several of those rural communities, women were organized in groups and those action groups received the support of the local NGO. The women's action groups met on a regular basis and the members engaged in a variety of activities devoted to commercialization, in the discussion of problems which affected them and also problems which affected women and workers in the region as well as the nation. The women from all of the action groups I met were very satisfied with their articulation with the groups, although they faced problems in the commercialization of the products.

Based on the contacts I made prior to the first visit to the field setting, I decided to select the community of *Santa Luzia* as the rural site (see Figure 3). Beyond having contact with persons associated with the ecumenical organization contacted previously in the community – including women, among them one of the leaders of the local women's action group – and the fact that the women's action group was very active, *Santa Luzia* was also interesting in other respects. The community was a small rural village with several members politically engaged in PT (the leftist national Labourers Party), ecumenical grassroots organizations, small-food producers association, and the Rural Labourers Union. Although the number of women engaged in the women's action group was small in relation to the population, those involved in the action group were highly conscious of the problems affecting their lives. Despite the fact that out-migration was common during drought crisis,

the number of return migrants is high within both the community and the women's action group.

Another reason why I decided to select the community as the rural site was because during my first visit there I was able, through the women's action group leader, to find accommodation for myself at the Catholic church facility. Since the priest only went there once a month, I was able to adjust my schedule so my stay would not coincide with that of the priest. By staying in the church facility I would not only be able to keep my privacy, but to have an impartial status within the community. This was the case because the priest himself was not politically involved despite the support he gave to the population's struggle.

The selection of *Santa Luzia* was also based on meeting a woman who owns a grocery shop in the village and helps young women from the community to find jobs in Petrolina. Dona Fernanda (a pseudonym) lives in Petrolina and travels to *Santa Luzia* every weekend to run her own business (Sunday is market day and the time when most of the rural dwellers come to the market to sell, barter and buy what they need). Dona Fernanda, a middle class widow, also owned a truck – the most reliable weekly transportation from *Santa Luzia* to Petrolina – which carried those willing to migrate as well as those in need, such as the sick, to Petrolina.

Dona Fernanda appeared as a valuable contact person for me; through her, I not only had access to the domestic workers in Petrolina, but to their families who lived in *Santa Luzia*. Furthermore, the fact that there was not a Domestic Labourers Union in Petrolina would have made my access to the domestic workers problematic, if it had not been for Dona Fernanda, it would have been virtually impossible to reach my consultants – they lived in their place of work and their employers would have become suspicious of my interest in them.

Another advantage of contacting the domestic workers through Dona Fernanda was that she also knew the domestic workers' family members who stayed in the community, which enabled me to have access to them as well as to analyse the impact of the domestic migrant workers in the city helping their households in their place of origin. This helped

greatly to understand the dynamics of the migration of young single women. Therefore, with the support of Dona Fernanda, I was not only able to develop rapport with the domestic workers in Petrolina, but with their families in the rural area. Dona Fernanda played a very important role in the community and among the domestic labourers; she even found jobs for those women she took to the city.

As the other shop owners in Santa Luzia, Dona Fernanda belongs to the elite in the community. Dona Fernanda benefits from finding jobs for the domestic workers in Petrolina since once young migrant women are employed, they are able to send remittances home and enable their rural families to purchase what is needed from the shop. However, Dona Fernanda is considered a “good woman” as opposed to the other local shop owners. Despite benefiting from the situation, Dona Fernanda is considered to be a caring woman who helped those in need. She not only finds jobs for young domestic workers but takes the sick and the needy in her truck to Petrolina even when they have no money to pay for the trip.

Due to my interest in migrant women from Santa Luzia, I not only contacted families of the domestic workers in the community but also several families who had relatives engaged in irrigated agricultural wage labour and who lived in Petrolina. Through the contacts I made, I was able to have their names, addresses and work places so that it would be possible for me to contact them in the city. During my stay in Santa Luzia, I also had the opportunity to attend a women’s action group meeting. This was a good opportunity to explain my research objectives and to stress my impartiality despite the fact that I had contact with the ecumenical grassroots organization and the Araripe NGO. I made them aware that I supported their struggle, however, I made it clear that I was not a member of any of the grassroots organizations nor was I engaged as a political activist. I stressed that I was not involved in the political agendas of either of the organizations contacted.

During the women’s action group meeting I limited myself to the role of an observer as much as possible and I was impressed with the discussions the women engaged in and with their high level of political consciousness about their role as women workers. These women

talked about their limitations through their engagement in subsistence agriculture and about the dynamics of the problems affecting their life in the rural sphere, such as the drought. They were able to express themselves in a very clear manner. After the meeting, I also had the opportunity to talk with the women on an individual basis, and to have access to names of women family members engaged in agricultural work in the irrigated estates and who lived in Petrolina. From the women's action group meeting, I was aware of the high political consciousness of those women and I thought the community, and specifically the women's action group, offered interesting conditions for an analysis of the development of mitigation measures at the grassroots level.

The community has some similarities with the other rural communities in the municipality of the city of Ouricuri as a consequence of the involvement of the Araripe NGO and of religious grassroots organizations in the region, but it cannot be said that *Santa Luzia* is representative of all of the rural communities in the *Sertão* region; not all of the areas of *Sertão* or even of other geographical regions in the northeast benefit to the same extent from the involvement of grassroots organizations.

After I had selected the rural research site and initiated the development of rapport with the rural community members, I turned my attention to Petrolina and went there. Petrolina lies about 200 km from *Santa Luzia*. My first contacts in Petrolina were made with people I had been referred to by the Araripe NGO of the *Sertão do Araripe*. After my arrival, I contacted the members of ecumenical grassroots organizations led by the Catholic church, which are involved in the transfer of technology to small food producers. From this contact I met a woman who was well acquainted with the reality of migrants in Petrolina and was helping poor women from the outskirts of the city to form mother's clubs.

As my intention was to have all of the migrant women I identified in Petrolina from *Santa Luzia*, I decided to contact them in the city and, therefore, visited several peripheral neighbourhoods in the city. During my search, I realized that it would be very problematic to focus only on those who came from *Santa Luzia*. I had problems finding the women at the

addresses provided by their family members in Santa Luzia. Many of those migrant women had moved; to find them in the irrigated estates where they worked was even more problematic since they were scattered in many different establishments. Access to those women at their place of work would be very difficult or even impossible since the employers would probably not allow me to enter the enterprise. I therefore decided to focus my attention on the largest and the poorest peripheral neighbourhood in Petrolina and look into the possibility of selecting my consultants there.

Santo Antônio has a population of 21,994 inhabitants and migrants accounts for 89% of the total population (UNICEF, 1994). My first contact in *Santo Antônio* was with the members of the *Associação dos Moradores* (Neighbourhood Association). The Association was strong with migrant women in the leadership positions. Actually the majority of the Neighbourhood Associations I contacted in peripheral neighbourhoods in Petrolina had women in leadership positions.

The president and vice president of the Association were very helpful and, as I explained my research goals to them, they introduced me to migrant women who engaged in irrigated agricultural wage labour. Although there were also migrant women engaged in domestic services living in the neighbourhood, by that time I had already decided to concentrate my attention on young and single domestic workers who live in their place of work since, through Dona Fernanda, I not only had access to them, but to their families who lived in *Santa Luzia*.

Through the contact I made with the Association, my entry into the community was much easier. Despite the fact that *Santo Antônio* is a poor neighbourhood lacking many public services and having serious infrastructural problems such as sewage problems, I do not refer to it as a *favela*, i.e., slum. The majority of its inhabitants invaded public land in 1987 and were successful in pressuring the local government to give them ownership of the plots. Furthermore, the local municipal government, with support from local NGOs also provided the inhabitants some services such as day-care, schools, a medical station and a police station.

The neighbourhood also has services such as running water and electricity, although shortage of water is common. While I do not refer to Santo Antônio as a *favela*, I admit that, with the continuous coming of migrants and the invasion of surrounding areas, Santo Antônio and other peripheral neighbourhoods will face a process of *favelização*, i.e., a process which would lead it to become a slum. This is the case because Santo Antônio will not be able to provide the services available to the whole population; along with the illegal occupation of public land, this is likely to result in the deterioration of the neighbourhood.

My interest at the level of Santo Antônio was to identify and select migrant women consultants who engaged in irrigated agricultural work to research the process of transformation they were exposed to in the city as they migrated in an attempt to mitigate the drought, and how they related to their kin in the countryside. As I initiated the development of rapport among migrant women, I became aware of two important implications for the research: first, that there were two different types of labour arrangements in irrigated agriculture, which would have implications for the selection of consultants as well as the site; and second, that migrant women living in those peripheral neighbourhoods did not have the strong ties the young migrant domestic workers had with their families in their place of origin. Ultimately, the selection of consultants from rural communities other than Santa Luzia did not pose limitations to the study.

In regards to the distinct labour arrangements migrant women engaged in, one was referred to by the labourers as *fichado*. This arrangement involved an official tie between the employer and the employee. The other was referred to as *avulso*, and involved workers who were hired on a daily basis and had no official tie with their employers. In the former type of arrangement, the workers were unionized and had their rights protected and respected; in the latter type, the workers had no rights as workers.

At Santo Antônio, I was able to contact both *fichado* and *avulso* migrant women workers. The hiring procedure for these distinct labour arrangements varied as well. While the *avulso* workers were hired on a daily basis by being “picked up” from a gas station

located near Santo Antônio, the *fichado* workers were hired on a permanent or a semi-permanent basis and the selection was based on their skills to perform the task. Although I had no problems to select my *avulso* worker consultants from Santo Antônio, the selection of the *fichado* workers from the neighbourhood became problematic since they would work for different enterprises and I could not have access to them at their place of work as the employers would be suspicious of my presence in the fields.

I thought it would be very important for me to associate with the *fichado* women workers at their place of work so I could observe their involvement and role in capitalist relations of production and thereby more fully understand their situation as migrant workers in the urban context. Since that was the case, I decided to select the *fichado* worker consultants from one capitalist enterprise to which I was allowed access – a modern agricultural establishment which concentrated on the production of grapes and mangoes for export.

Even though I selected an urban and a rural site for the study, my consultants were selected on the basis of their availability in three different locations: *Santa Luzia*, a rural village and the place of origin of women who never migrated, and location of return migrants and migrant domestic workers; *Santo Antônio*, a peripheral neighbourhood, and residence of *avulso* workers; and *Fazenda Campo Verde*, a capitalist enterprise located near the city of Petrolina, and the place of work of the *fichado* consultants. The collection of data, however, did not only take place in those settings, as I will discuss below.

3.2. The Study Population

The focus of the analysis is on women and most of the data were collected from women, but the study also included men as well as grassroots organization activists in the research sites. The inclusion of men and members of grassroots organizations allowed a deeper understanding of women's roles in their search for drought mitigation measures and how they viewed the drought. Selection of women consultants focussed on four main

categories of women, one of which is subdivided: 1) migrant domestic workers in Petrolina; 2a) migrant irrigated agricultural *avulso* workers in the city of Petrolina; 2b) migrant irrigated agricultural *fichado* workers in the city of Petrolina; 3) return migrants members of a women's action group in the rural village of Santa Luzia; and 4) women in Santa Luzia who never have migrated and who are members of an action group. The total number of women consultants was fifty, ten in each of the categories and sub-categories investigated (see Figure 4). Data were also gathered from two households of migrant domestic workers found in the rural site.

In the preliminary stages of the fieldwork I was exposed to a larger number of women and collected preliminary data on them. Through informal interviews I selected fifty women who met the conditions of the study for more intensive work. The total number of consultants reflects the nature of the research (primarily qualitative and involving a detailed collection of data), time limitations and difficulties.

In order to broaden the understanding of migrant women in the various employment categories, I made an effort in my selection of consultants to reflect variability in age, marital status, experience in migration and place of residence in the city. The range of variability in some categories of employment, such as age of domestic workers, was not very great because I selected all of them from a single rural village. I did so to analyse the linkage between them and their rural households of origin. The choice of such a variety of individuals enabled me to gain a deep understanding of the situation of migrant women, of the mechanisms which led women to migrate or not and of the decision making process in regards to the options involved in migration, which affected not only the lives of the migrant women themselves, but those of their household members (see Figure 5).

The selection of rural women involved fewer variables because there was greater uniformity in their involvement in economic activities. The consultants varied in age, marital status and experience in migration, even though those who never migrated had never engaged in economic activities other than agricultural work and craft production. I selected women

Figure 4: Categories, Location and Number of Women Consultants

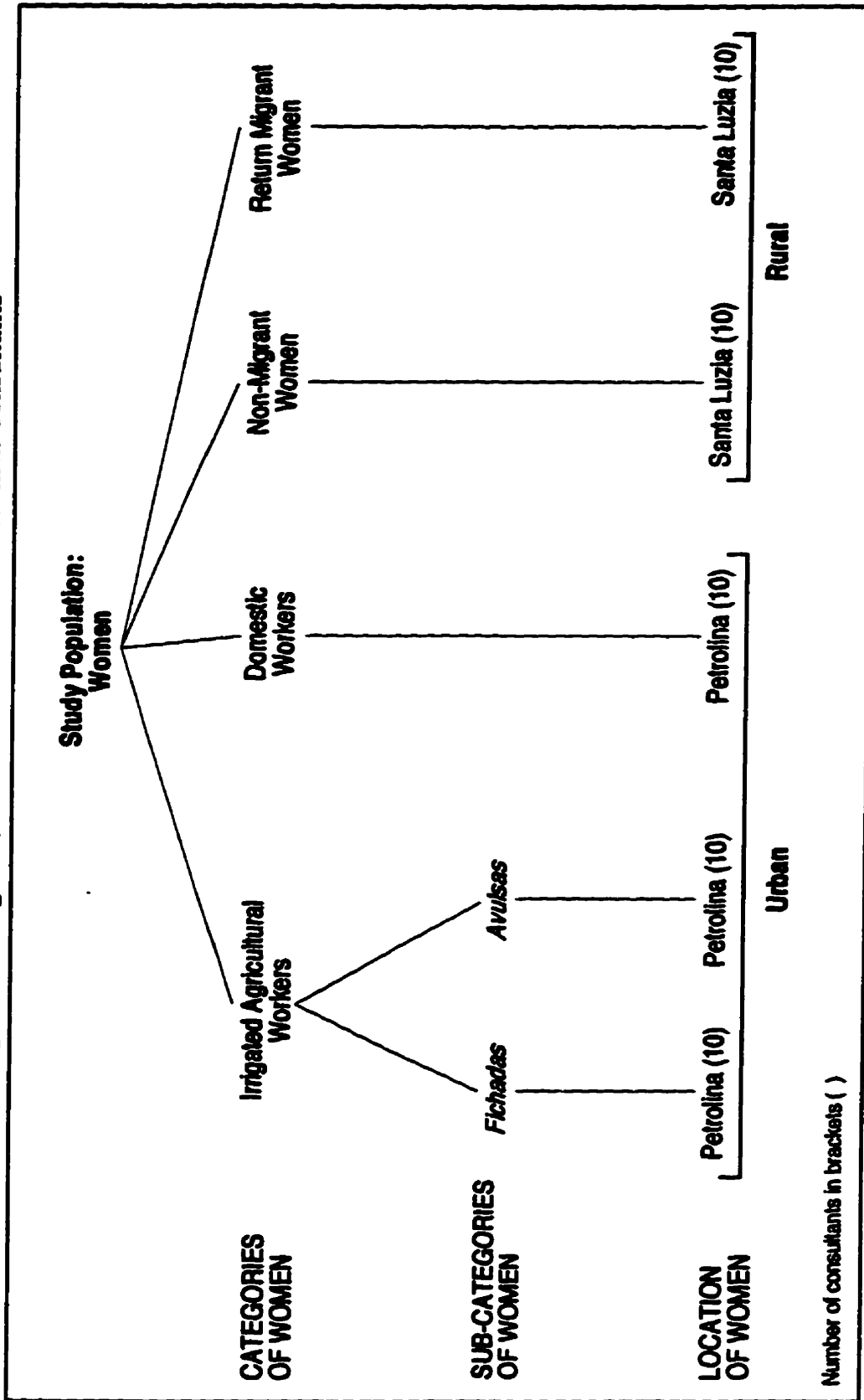
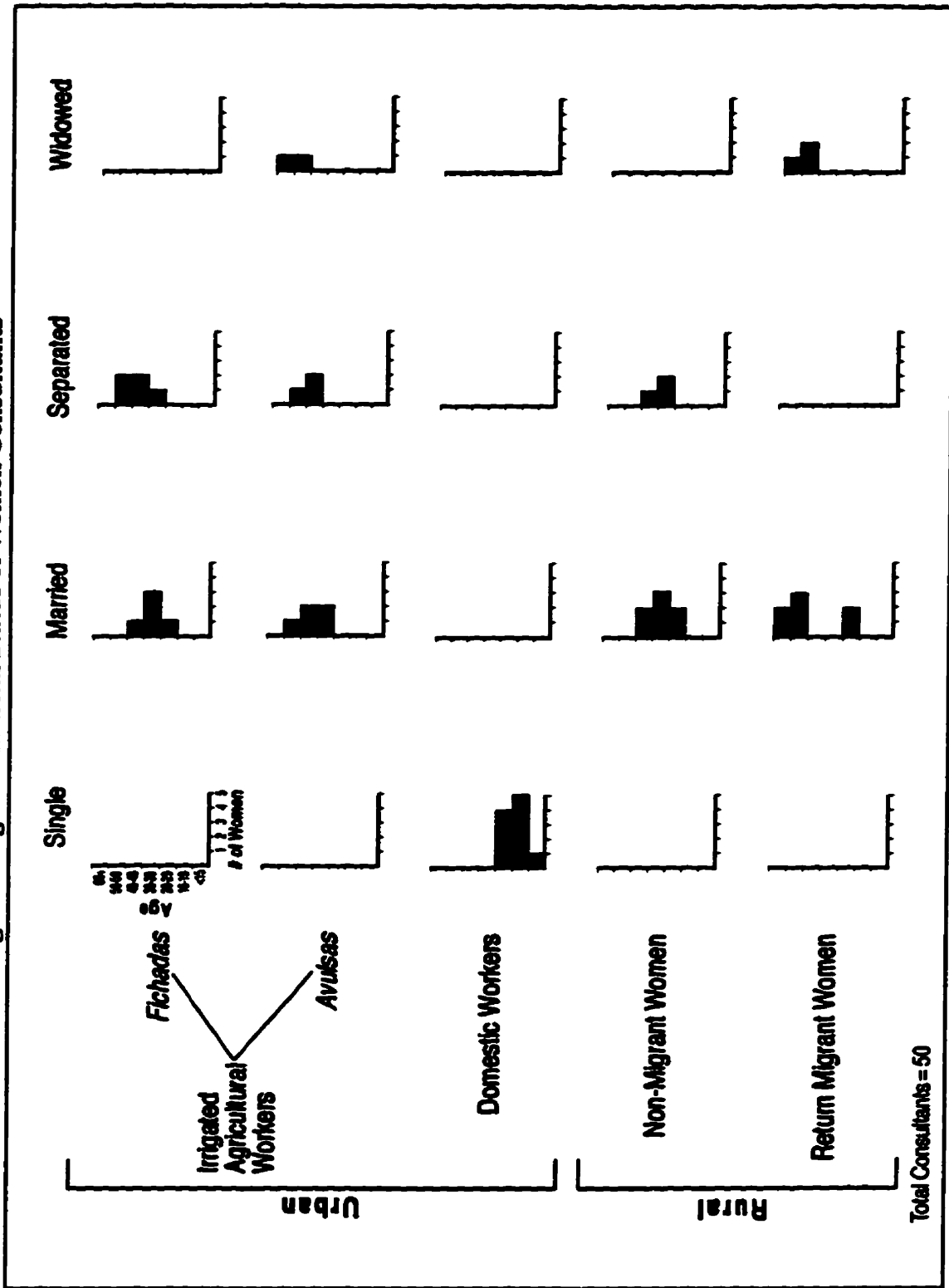


Figure 5: Age and Marital Status of Women Consultants



who were members of the local women's action group – both return migrants and women who never left the countryside.

My interest in the women's action group was primarily to enable me to research the changes women went through as they mobilized in one action group in their search for measures to mitigate the drought. I also collected data from women who were not members of the action group, which introduced me to the differences between action group members and non-members, but I did not systematically select non-group members for the study. Since the action group had not existed for more than eight years, prior to their engagement in the action group those women faced the same conditions faced by the contemporary non-member women. Thus, the mobilization of women in one action group, as well as the engagement of women in migration, were the bases for the analysis of whether or not those women were engaging in drought mitigation measures and undergoing a transformation in the process of searching for those measures.

In the case of the collection of data among men, the number of men consultants was fewer than that of women and the process of data collection among men did not involve the techniques involved in the collection of data among women. I attempted to select migrant men for the study to represent some variability in economic activity, age, marital status and role in decision making regarding their migration. In the case of men in the rural site, I selected men who had differing experiences in migration (in the case of return migrants), men who had no desire to engage in migration (in the case of those who never migrated), and men who might offer different perspectives on the basis of their age, and their marital status.

As a parallel to the situation of young migrant domestic workers, I selected young single men from Santa Luzia who migrated to engage in agricultural work to help their household members who stayed back in the countryside. Furthermore, I selected older and married men who engaged in both *avulso* and *fichado* labour arrangements in irrigated agriculture and lived in peripheral neighbourhoods, including Santo Antônio. I utilized two men consultants for each of the categories. These men consultants not only gave me a better

understanding of the situation of migrant women, but they made me aware of the very distinct views towards migration based on gender.

In the rural area I selected two return migrant men consultants and two men who had never migrated and who lived in the rural community permanently. The selection of these men who live in the rural area was seen as a way to better understand the situation of women in the countryside and in the city as well. The men were closely related to rural and migrant women, yet their views of life in the city as well as in the countryside were different from those of women. Although women (mothers) participated in household decision making, these men were responsible for decisions about their own migration as well as decisions regarding migration of household women, especially daughters.

Beyond the selection of men consultants, I also selected two rural households from which domestic workers had migrated. The selection of only two households was because they were not only representatives of the overall situation of other households in the community, but also because access to them was very difficult; they lived in their small remote plots of land where they were difficult to reach (most of the data was collected in their homes, although I also collected some data from members of those households in the village on market day). One of these households benefited from the contribution of four daughters working as domestic workers in Petrolina; the other from only one. These households were taken as examples and their analysis enabled me to present contrasting situations in regards to the importance of the material contribution from the domestic workers in Petrolina to their rural households.

Data were also collected from members of grassroots organizations, the Araripe NGO and the Rural Labourers Union assisting the population. The information available from those individuals facilitated my understanding of changes women experienced in their search for measures to mitigate the drought and helped me appreciate the impact of those organizations in the lives of women and of the population in general. The political consciousness of the population they assisted was seen as an important complement to the transfer of appropriate

technology as well as the transfer of information regarding the measures on how to cope more efficiently with the limitations imposed by the ecosystem, and/or to the adaptation of migrant workers to the labour conditions in the city.

3.3. Field Research Techniques

The techniques utilized in the collection of data were participant-observation, standardized interview schedules, in-depth interviews, work with key-informants and life histories. The application of these techniques varied in relation to the objective and the situation.

3.3.1. Participant-Observation

This technique has been traditionally used by anthropologists engaging in ethnographic research and has actually characterized anthropological fieldwork as distinct from that undertaken by other social scientists (Pelto, 1970; Bernard, 1995). The utilization of participant-observation requires a direct involvement of the researcher who is expected to become a participant in people's daily lives. By participating, the anthropologist has access to the world of everyday life from the standpoint of a member of the society under study, or an insider (Jorgensen, 1989).

Participant-observation allows the anthropologist to uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meaning (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives. By "participating", the researcher is able to observe and experience the interactions of people from the role of an insider. However, while playing the role of an "insider", the anthropologist is expected to maintain a certain distance and at the same time become a mere "observer" in the field. "Participation" is used for the purpose of data gathering, but it is an important way through which the anthropologist develops rapport with the people studied (Jorgensen, 1989).

Direct observation is the most important method of gathering information, but the participant observer usually uses other strategies. Depending on the extent of participant

involvement, the researcher's immediate experience can be an extremely valuable source of data (Jorgensen, 1989:220). The participation in people's lives and the observation of the way things are done are, therefore, intimately related and crucial for the successful role of the ethnographer in the field. Participant-observation is a technique which encompasses both views and this is one of the reasons why it has been largely used by anthropologists.

3.3.2. Standardized Interviews, In-Depth Interviews and Key-Informants

Standardized interviews have been used significantly in ethnographic fieldwork. As it has been pointed out, "an interview is never an isolated event, but is almost always linked to the participant-observation process, an encounter with an individual whom one has observed in a variety of other contexts as well" (Becker and Geer, 1957 cited in Crane and Angrosino, 1992).

The standardized interviews utilized consisted of prepared "interview schedules". As such, they provided a stimulus to the respondents and projected the likely range of responses with precoded alternatives. According to Bernard (1995:237), "the idea is to control the input that triggers each informant's responses so that the output can be reliably compared". The anthropologist should have some experience in the culture before trying to formulate such questions, since matters that may be "obvious" to people from one culture may be quite puzzling to those from a different background (Crane and Angrosino, 1992:58).

Standardized interview schedules consist of useful means of collecting survey type information, that is, information of a more general nature (Pelto, 1970; Bernard, 1995). The use of standardized interviews is an important way of cross-checking key-informant data.

Key-informants have been of much importance in anthropological fieldwork since certain individuals in society appear to have a deep knowledge about the culture and are also able to provide information about ways of living that no longer exist, or have been highly modified, by the time the fieldworker arrives on the scene (Pelto, 1970). According to Bernard (1995:166):

Key-informant interviewing has been an important tool in ethnographic research. Good key-informants are considered people who can talk easily, who understand the information you need and who are glad to give it or to get it for you.

In-depth interviews also comprise an important tool to supply information not gathered through standardized interviews. The use of in-depth interviews will depend on the extent to which key-informants provided the needed information or not (Pelto, 1970).

3.3.3. Life-History

The life history technique allows the anthropologist to understand the life cycle of the people in question, which gives the anthropologist a broader understanding of society (Crane and Angrosino, 1992). The use of this technique has been important, especially in studies which emphasize personality and culture, the role of the individual in society or developmental history (Crane and Angrosino, 1992). The use of life histories is of particular importance in the present research as a source of more detailed understanding of the overall situation and history of rural as well as migrant women from the drought-prone *sertão*. This technique also provides important information about the transformation process women are exposed to as it dealt with their present and past life circumstances.

In regards to the usefulness of life history, Pelto calls attention to an important point:

To the objection that life-history data frequently cannot be checked against objective observations of real behaviour, L.L. Langness (1965) replies that very frequently a chief anthropological concern is the patterning of people's beliefs and conceptualizations of past events, rather than the truth or falseness of these accounts. For that point of view, life history materials may be more useful for examining the patterning of general values, foci of cultural relationships than as "true histories" (Pelto, 1970:99).

Through the accounts of life history, therefore, the anthropologist learns about the consultant's account of their own life experience and how they perceive that within the context of the culture in concern.

In utilizing this research technique, the interaction of the interviewer and consultant is of crucial importance to the successful collection of the information. Crane and Angrosino have called attention to the fact that:

The interviewer and subject conspire to construct a version of the self – and the strategies they employ in their conspiracy will probably derive from the shared, unspoken regularities of interaction expectations in their culture (Angrosino, 1989 cited in Crane and Angrosino, 1992).

In order to collect life histories, it is important that the interviewer and the consultant have met before and have some degree of mutual trust in their relationship.

3.4. The Collection of Data

This section will deal particularly with the collection of data in the research sites since the first contacts made in Recife prior to the selection of the sites were based on informal discussions and conversations about the problem to be investigated, the possible research sites to be selected, and the implications of the political agendas of the grassroots organizations involved in the sites. In that preliminary phase, the discussions did not involve structured research techniques.

Although the dynamics of the collection of data in the rural and urban sphere were not the same due to the variables involved in the lives of the consultants in the distinct sites, the techniques utilized in the data collection among women in the different sites were basically the same. Some of the techniques, such as participant-observation and life history, were inappropriate in the collection of data among domestic workers and were limited in some cases due to the circumstances under which data were collected. Furthermore, the utilization of standardized interview schedules did not prove useful to the collection of data in the rural area; in-depth interviews proved to be more productive. This will be discussed further below as I will deal with the utilization of each of the techniques in the context of the research.

In the case of the men, I based the collection of data on in-depth interviews. I also utilized in-depth interviews in the collection of data among members of grassroots

organizations. Through the utilization of this tool, I was able to acquire general as well as more specific kinds of information from the men and grassroots activists and the collection of data went smoothly and informally. I experienced no limitations in interviewing men. They treated me as a professional and an outsider and were willing to respond to my questions. By collecting data from men, I was also able to learn about the very different views between them and women. Furthermore, the focus on members of grassroots organizations provided me with information on the important role those organizations play and on the influence they have with the women. In addition to the use of in-depth interviews, my reliance on key-informants also provided me with data on the men and their role as well as on grassroots activists. Lastly, the data gathered from women through the various techniques utilized also offered insight into the men's roles and the roles of grassroots members.

The selection of the consultants as well as the places where data were collected were very much determined by the consultants' schedules and availability. In the first phase of the data collection, I became aware that I had to adjust to my consultants' schedules in order to be able to collect the data. To deal appropriately with the collection of data among the different categories of women, it is important to discuss each of them separately.

3.4.1. Domestic Workers

As I pointed out previously, the collection of data among domestic workers was complicated because of the difficulties in accessing them. The initial collection of data, therefore, took place at Dona Fernanda's house. Although their association of me in this setting with Dona Fernanda may have been limiting, this was minimized because by the time I contacted the migrant domestic workers I had already met most of their families in the rural community of Santa Luzia. Having met their family members in advance was an asset for the development of rapport among the migrant women domestic workers. Some of these women still had problems in understanding my research objectives and my interest in their link with

their families. As time progressed, however, they were able to understand my goal and my position as a researcher.

Dona Fernanda's house was a meeting place for those young migrant domestic workers. They usually came on Monday afternoons to receive letters from their families or simply to learn from Dona Fernanda about the news from their community and on Friday afternoons to send letters and/or remittances home. Besides the fact that knowing their families prior to meeting them worked to my own benefit, initially I only engaged in informal conversations with these migrant women. During the first four weeks, I only met these women on Monday or Friday afternoons since they lived in their place of work. They were busy with their work, so their employers would be suspicious of my going there.

The informal meetings I had with these women in Dona Fernanda's house in the initial phase of the research were crucial for the selection of the consultants in this work category. I became aware that many of those domestic workers were sisters and, knowing that, I decided to purposively select consultants who represented distinct situations instead of selecting the domestic workers randomly. I also selected consultants who had no sisters working in Petrolina. This allowed me to better understand the migrants' material help provided to their rural household. The higher the number of domestic workers per family the higher the level of help in the form of remittances they are able to provide to their rural household.

After the selection of the consultants in that initial phase, I pursued a more structured collection of data. Limited access to these consultants and limited time to spend with them did not permit participant-observation. Instead, I utilized standardized interview schedules in order to gain an overall account of the situation characterizing those women's lives in the city.

The key-informant I selected was Dona Fernanda. Even though she was not a domestic worker she was not only well informed about the situation of migrant domestic workers in the city but also about the situation of their families in the rural community. As a

key-informant, Dona Fernanda also offered me insight into the overall society and culture of the rural community of Santa Luzia.

After having access to the general type of data gathered through standardized interview schedules, I undertook in-depth interviews among the selected migrant domestic workers. By that time, I also started having access to my consultants during the evenings, in their school setting. These young migrant women attend evening school and this is one of the reasons they appreciate their stay in the city. I met them prior to classes and during the breaks. I did that because I wanted to avoid the limitations of collecting data in only one setting – Dona Fernanda’s house. Furthermore, meeting with consultants in a different setting benefited tremendously my collection of data as I became an observer in a different context in their lives and was able to acquire knowledge about how they interacted with one another. The limited access to domestic workers meant that I not only had to adjust my schedule to theirs in order to be able to collect accurate information, but “to adapt my research tools to the requirements of the local cultural scene since there are no ready-made instruments” (Pelto, 1970:90; Bernard, 1995).

Despite the fact that these migrant workers were young and their age ranged from 14 to 27, I attempted to make use of life histories as well so that I could understand their life conditions in the city and the possible transformation from their previous condition as rural dwellers. As I initiated the collection of their life histories, however, I learned that the information I was gaining through the life histories was not different from that I gained through in-depth interviews, due to their youth and their limited life experience. Among the most important information was their view of their present contribution to their families in rural areas as well as to how they perceived their change in status as migrant women, particularly in relation to their household of origin in the rural community.

The view of these young domestic workers about their role as migrants and their attitudes towards the changes they were undergoing as a result of their migration demonstrated that they had not experienced *conscientização* about the reality they faced and

the role they played in that reality. This became clear through in-depth interviews. In fact, these domestic workers were not exposed to the process of *conscientização* like other migrant women in the city, neither through labour unions nor through formal education.

During the collection of data from the domestic worker consultants I was able, through them, to contact the young migrant men, all single, who migrated from Santa Luzia in search for work. Some of these young men were kin of the domestic workers and very close to them. These migrant men seldom found jobs in Petrolina; the majority of them worked in the irrigated fields and usually lived on the farms where they worked. I selected two of these young men to be my consultants.

The collection of data among these male consultants took place in Dona Fernanda's house whenever these young men had some spare time or went there to send or receive letters from their families. It would be very difficult to access these migrant men in their place of work since many of the farms and agribusinesses where they lived and worked were located outside the city limits and were quite far from Petrolina. The collection of data among these young men was done through the use of in-depth interviews.

The limited contact I had with the men and my research focus on women made it difficult to achieve the same level of rapport with them as I did with women. I nonetheless attempted to deal with their past experiences in the in-depth interviews and to focus on detailed information about their lives and views of the drought. The view and responses of these young migrant men and women towards the drought problem and their migration itself were very distinct. A thorough analysis of that will be provided in Chapter V.

3.4.2. Agricultural Workers

The collection of data among agricultural workers took place along with the collection of data among domestic workers. Availability of domestic workers on Monday and Friday afternoons and, later on, some evenings, meant that I could interview agricultural workers during the time domestic workers were unavailable. My first exposure to agricultural workers

took place in Santo Antônio. Through the neighbourhood association, I met several agricultural workers who engaged in both the *avulso* and *fichado* labour arrangement. After the first contact, I realized that access to these women was problematic since the *fichado* women workers were only at home during the evenings and, sometimes, during weekends (sometimes they worked overtime during the weekends). In the case of *avulso* workers the schedule was not so tight; they engaged in daily labour and sometimes did not have a job for several days in a row. *Avulso* workers sometimes had work contracts for several days, including weekends. Therefore, I had to adjust my schedule to theirs.

My *avulso* consultants came from Santo Antônio and my *fichado* consultants from an agribusiness to which I was allowed access. By collecting data in the *fichado* women's place of work I was able to analyse their interaction in the work setting and also the way they interacted with their supervisors, who were all men. Beyond that, I was able to realize the importance of the Rural Labourers Union in the *conscientização* of these women workers, particularly in regards to their role as wage labourers in a capitalist economy. I could also better adjust to their availability schedule since it was regular. In the case of *fichado* women workers I then collected data on their work setting and, later on in the fieldwork, I also had access to them in their homes during weekends and evenings.

The selection of the ten *avulso* women workers was made after I became acquainted with them in Santo Antônio. As I was exposed to many women under this type of work arrangement, I initially engaged in informal interviews and conversations among them. In order to select the ten consultants I took into account their steady involvement in this type of work arrangement. I ended up having women who worked quite often with Dona Maria, a leader in this type of work arrangement, who formed "work teams" to work under temporary contracts. After the selection of the *avulso* women worker consultants, I initiated the collection of data among them. About ten days after I had been on the site observing the women and engaging in informal conversations with them, I developed a rapport among the *avulso* workers, and I began to employ the standardized interview schedules among the ten

women I had selected. I not only observed the consultants in their cultural setting, but also participated in some of the activities performed by them such as the preparation of meals. I did not live in their neighbourhood, however, as it would not have been safe for me to live there by myself; the conditions were also inhospitable.

During the fieldwork period I stayed in a hotel, but had most of my meals either with the *avulso* women workers in Santo Antônio or with the *fichado* women workers in their place of work, the *Fazenda Campo Verde*. Due to the limited resources those women had available, I took my own food and would prepare it together with my consultants as well as share it. Since I did not engage in their tasks and in other activities performed by them, my role as a participant was limited.

In the case of the *avulso* women workers, I had the opportunity to walk with them to the station where they would be “picked” by those in need of daily labourers and was able to observe the terrible uncertainty as to whether or not they would have an income for the day. I was able to observe them in the field only one time, when the employer allowed my presence there. Furthermore, through my exposure to Dona Maria, an *avulso* worker leader, I was able to observe how she contacted the workers and to witness the great solidarity among them.

The use of standardized interview schedules (see Appendix B) enabled me to gather general data on the experience of those women in the city and also basic information on their decision to migrate and the problems they found in the city upon their arrival. I collected data during the weekdays when they did not find work, during the weekends when they were available and also during the evenings. The reliance on standardized interview schedules and participant-observation enabled me to have basic knowledge about the life conditions of these migrant women and also about how they related to the drought problem and to the members of their family who stayed in the rural areas.

Beyond engaging in the two techniques discussed above, I also made use of a key-informant to collect general information about the society and information I was unable to gather through the use of the other techniques. My key-informant in that setting was Rita, the

president of the neighbourhood association. Although she was not an *avulso* worker, she had a deep knowledge of the situation of migrants, particularly women. She also had knowledge of the previous conditions migrant women faced in rural areas since she was a migrant herself. My reliance on a key-informant was of particular importance for information about events which had taken place in the past. It is important to acknowledge the fact that my interaction as a fieldworker with consultants and my key-informants was a complex social process, and the limitations I faced were moderated by my role as a participant-observer. Participant-observation was a way of cross-checking the information I gathered from my key-informants.

I used in-depth interviews to provide detailed data about the past and present situation of the *avulso* migrant workers and to learn about their views towards the migration process as well as toward the countryside and the drought. Although in-depth interviews provided insight into the lives of these migrant women and the reasons for their migration, life histories provided another way of cross checking the data I had acquired through in-depth interviews. By the time I collected life histories I had the trust of the consultants and they did not have any problems in sharing with me the difficulties of their lives and the richness of their life experience.

Through the use of life histories I was not only able to understand the life cycle of the women in question, but to have a broad understanding of their society and of the transformation in their lives as they gained new experience through migration in their struggle with the drought. The use of life histories was of particular importance to the work as a source of more detailed information of the overall situation of migrant women. Furthermore, during the collection of life histories, the women consultants had the opportunity to talk spontaneously about their lives without being directly questioned; this gave a richness to the information acquired. I learned about the lives of these women from their own perspective.

Both life histories and in-depth interviews allowed me to understand the changes which had taken place in women's lives in the city and the extent these *avulso* women workers benefit from *conscientização* about their role as migrant women workers in a

capitalist economy as well as about the socio-economic and political implications of the drought problem affecting their place of origin. These research tools enabled me to have access to both present and past life conditions. Therefore, I could discern the nature of the changes taking place in the transformation of these *avulso* women workers and the limitations they faced as migrants attempting to mitigate the drought.

In the case of the *avulso* worker migrant men, I interviewed only two men consultants and collected data through in-depth interviews. The attitudes of these men towards migration, the drought and their place of origin were very distinct from that of the migrant women. Both consultants were married and had migrated to the city with their wives, who also engaged in the same type of work arrangement. These men engaged in *avulso* work whenever they were unemployed and had a harder time to find work because women were preferred. Their desperation to find work was such that they would work in anything available, even in tasks predominantly for women, such as the picking of tomatoes. However, these men were unhappy when they had to do it. The solidarity among the women *avulso* workers also limited the chances for men to find work. Dona Maria, for example, included men in a “work team” only in the last instance as she thought “they were not as good nor as responsible as her fellow women”.

The collection of in-depth interviews among the *avulso* men consultants was undertaken in their home either in the evenings or in the days they returned home without finding work. Besides relying upon in-depth interviews, I also engaged in participant-observation among the men *avulso* workers. Since their wives also did the same type of work and were also my consultants, I would often go to their houses for meals and during those periods was able to observe and collect very useful data.

In the case of *fichado* women workers, although the techniques utilized were the same as those in the collection of data from *avulso* workers, the collection of data took place primarily in their place of work. I was among *fichado* women workers during the days of the week when I did not gather data from either *avulso* workers or domestic workers.

While attempting to establish rapport with *fichado* women workers, I learned that these women were very mobilized as labourers. At that stage I met the *delegada*, i.e., the representative of the Rural Labourers Union at the enterprise, who was a migrant woman herself. During the first ten days among these workers I conducted informal conversations and observed the way they interacted with one another in their work place, and with the men employed to supervise their work.

The selection of the ten *fichado* women workers was based on the length of time they were engaged in this type of labour arrangement. The permanence of these workers in a capitalist labour arrangement was deemed important to the study since such women appeared to develop distinct responses toward their job and their stay in the city. After this initial period, my women consultants felt comfortable with my being around and my next step was to conduct standardized interviews. I conducted these interviews during the time they were working in the vineyards. Whenever my schedule allowed, I would have lunch in the fields with them.

My reliance on participant-observation among *fichado* women workers was limited, especially during the time I collected data in their place of work. Although I was able to perform the role of an observer since my initial entry in the setting, it was complicated for me to participate in their tasks. The women had several tasks to perform during their work shift and were constantly monitored by the male employees. I attempted to resolve this problem later in the fieldwork when I spent time with those consultants in their homes.

Despite the limitations I had, the access to these women in their work place was very important. It allowed me to adjust my schedule to the collection of data among the other consultants. Without access to *fichado* women consultants in their place of work I would not have been able to collect data among them. Their work schedule during the week days was tight, and my access to them on the weekends was limited or even impossible. Then I had to collect data among rural women and, sometimes, *avulso* women workers. The key-informant I selected in the setting of the *fichado* women workers was the *delegada*, i.e., the Union

representative. She was representing the Rural Labourers Union, but she was also very knowledgeable about the situation of her fellow women workers as well as that of the men workers. Once I finished the survey type of data collection through the standardized interview schedules, I conducted in-depth interviews to collect more detailed information on issues that arose in the standardized interviews. These in depth interviews helped tremendously to fill in gaps.

The in-depth interviews led me to the collection of life histories from my consultants. By the time I engaged in life histories, I had developed trust among my consultants and they had no problem in sharing their history with me. Due to the length and involvement of the consultants in this technique, the collection of life histories took place in the women's homes during the time they were available. My presence in their homes made them feel closer to me which was an asset to the collection of life histories. Being at their homes was a useful way of approaching the collection of data and of cross-checking the data gathered previously. The consultants felt more comfortable in their own homes and sometimes criticized the type of labour arrangement they engaged in and their employers. The collection of life histories was a very important means of gathering information, especially because I was able to acquire knowledge about women's situations prior to coming to work in the city. Access to their past life experiences in rural areas enabled me to understand the changes these women have been going through in the city and was very important for me to analyse as well as to comprehend the importance of the Rural Labourers Union in the *conscientização* of these consultants about their conditions as wage labourers in a capitalist economy and about their limitations to mitigate the drought through their migration.

Despite the limitations of collecting data in the women's place of work, I benefited tremendously from that. Beyond being able to adjust to the schedule of other migrant women, being in that context enabled me to observe and learn about the *fichado* women's mobilization as a work force and to witness their exposure to new relations of production. I was also able to observe meetings with the employer as well as with the Rural Labourers Union directorship

as they often visited all agribusinesses once a month to talk to the labourers, as part of the *conscientização* of the labourers.

I had access to all of the *fichado* worker *delegadas(os)* at the Rural Labourers Union headquarters and was frequently invited by the directorship to attend the meetings of *delegadas(os)*. During those occasions I was able to take in their discussion about the problems they had in the work context and the way labourers were treated at the various capitalist enterprises. By attending those meetings, I was able to learn about the work conditions in different enterprises and about the difficulties of *delegadas(os)* to resist the pressure of their employers and report irregularities to the Rural Labourers Union.

My access to the two *fichado* men consultants also took place at their work place. As in the case of the *avulso* male consultants, the collection of data was done through in-depth interviews. Although the collection of life histories would have provided useful information about the men consultants, the interaction we had was too superficial for that. However, I collected as much data as possible on their migration process and concluded that the men consultants had very distinct views towards migration, drought and their urban experience in comparison to the views of the women consultants.

Although the work benefits for men and women *fichado* workers were the same, and most men earned a higher salary than women workers, the two men consultants not only had distinct views and attitudes about their working conditions, but performed different tasks from that of the women. Both of the men consultants were married, but one of them was in the city by himself. Their impatience about being in the city had much to do with the strong bond they had with their place of origin and they looked forward to returning home. Furthermore, they both engaged in the *fichado* type of arrangement because they were interested in the severance pay they would receive for being laid off and returning to the rural area.⁶ Consequently, they did not perform the tasks well. The distinct views men and women

⁶ Workers officially employed have the right to receiving severance pay when being laid off by their employers. However, the longer they work, the higher the benefits they

consultants have about their place of destination and willingness to return to their place of origin reflects the different status men and women have in the rural areas, as will be discussed in Chapter VI.

3.4.3. Rural Dwellers

The dynamics of the collection of data in the countryside were different from those in the urban sphere, although the research techniques were basically the same as those utilized among migrant women in the urban sphere. The main difference in Santa Luzia was that it involved women members of the action group. This was the case even though women who were not members of an action group also were contacted. The consultants of this portion of the study were selected from a women's action group, comprising ten return migrants and ten women who never migrated. Some of these women are referred to as "widows of the drought". Data were also collected in this context from households sending migrant domestic workers.

During the initial phase of data collection among rural dwellers I engaged in informal conversations with community residents and started learning about life in the community. A woman leader who was a member of the ecumenical grassroots organization contacted in Recife accompanied me on my first visit to the rural community. I nevertheless disassociated myself from any particular grassroots organization or the Araripe NGO, and attempted to explain the purpose of my presence.

I readily came to learn that there were factions in the community. I considered it prudent not to become associated with any of the factions and attempted to demonstrate interest in associating with everyone, regardless of the faction the person belonged to. During this initial phase I employed only participant-observation and informal conversations. I was

receive. The financial benefit received for short-term *fichado* employment is usually limited. Most workers, however, particularly men, cannot stand working for long and end up receiving a meager amount of severance pay.

frequently invited to have meals with community members which was very important for the development of rapport among them. I became acquainted with both women from the action group and those who do not participate in the group. After I had developed rapport among community members, I attended a women's action group meeting.

Given my objective to study women's mobilization, consultants were selected from the women's action group and structured information was acquired from these members of the action group. During the action group meetings I limited myself to the role of an observer, although during the first meeting I attended I had the opportunity to explain my research goals. The focus of my inquiry was to examine the group as a potential vehicle for the development of mitigation measures towards the drought.

After my first exposure to the community members and attendance of a women's group meeting, I selected my consultants from two distinct categories of women, return migrants and women who never migrated. By doing so, I had a good representation of the action group members. Although my consultants were all group members, I continued to interact with non-group members and community members in general so that they did not feel excluded.

My contact with women non-group members was of particular interest to me and important to my objective to learn about the *conscientização* of women group members and how it was related to women's potential and willingness to mitigate the drought through mobilization. The life conditions and stand of women non-group members who never migrated despite the drought also shed light on the changes migrant women have gone through, and on how access to work and to *conscientização* opened avenues for migrant women and for their preference towards life in Petrolina.

Women non-group members' attitudes and views about the drought were very different. Non-group members were more pessimistic about a solution to the drought problem; some of them had fatalistic attitudes towards the mitigation of the drought. Another characteristic of non-group members was that they did not believe in their potential to

mitigate the hazard and believed that only the government could find a solution to that problem. Having access to women non-group members was very productive. However, I did not include these women as a separate category in the study because they faced the same life circumstances of women action group members prior to the latter's entrance in the action group. By utilizing life-histories and in-depth interviews I was able to learn about the life conditions and attitudes of women action group members prior to their involvement in the group and about the changes they had undergone once they joined the group. Data on the *conscientização* of action group members was collected on an individual basis and through observation of action group members in meetings.

By the time I attended the first women's action group meeting I had already become acquainted with many of the members. At the end of the meeting I was able to talk individually with the women I had not met before. As time progressed, I became quite close to the women and also able to associate with them in church. Many women in the community and in the group were devoutly Catholic and met in church on Sundays, even when the priest was not there. I frequently joined the women in those meetings and sometimes was asked to lead discussion.

My observation of women in the action group setting was very fruitful. It offered me an opportunity to observe the participation of women I contacted on an individual basis, in a collective setting and within a political context. Most of the women were vocal and participated actively in the discussions. They were also very interested in the discussions of issues previously unknown to them, such as information from the Rural Labourers Union in regards to policies which would affect their lives as women workers. These women action group members were vocal about their needs and the problems affecting their lives.

I initially intended to use a standardized interview schedule as I did among migrant women. But the distinct characteristics of the women and dynamics of life in the rural areas led me to rely on in-depth interviews instead. Through this technique, I was able to obtain

general information about the women consultants and their households, as well as data about the conditions of their lives and the importance of the group to them.

I interviewed in the women's homes since the group meetings took place only once a month. Even though the targeted population was women members of the group, from the beginning I had to consider the heterogeneous character of these women; the return migrant consultants' views differed from those of the women who never migrated. Their different experiences enriched my understanding, but these women had something important in common – they were all struggling to remain in their rural community and, through the action group, were attempting to develop drought mitigation measures that would hopefully improve their lives.

In this rural setting I had two key-informants, Dona Fernanda, the owner of the grocery shop who was involved with the domestic workers and who was also a key-informant in the urban setting, and Margarida, the women's action group leader. As I pointed out above, I selected Dona Fernanda as a key-informant for her great knowledge about the domestic worker situation and of Santa Luzia more generally. Margarida was not selected because she was leader, but because of her knowledge about women in the community in general, and her knowledge of the group dynamics.

The collection of life histories was, as in the other areas, the last technique I utilized; women needed to feel comfortable with my presence among them. Through the use of life histories I was exposed to the women's experience prior to their association in the action group. This differed a great deal whether they were return migrants or permanent settlers in the community. The differences between the lives of return migrants and the lives of women who never left the countryside became even more obvious as I turned to their life histories. This tool also allowed me to understand the importance of the action group to women's lives and to learn why some of my consultants had never engaged in migration.

Through life histories I was also exposed to the life experience of return migrants from São Paulo. This technique was of great importance to the understanding of women's lives and

experiences with drought. The collection of life histories was also important for me to have access to information of the situation and the conditions of life during severe drought crisis. Since the research was done in a normal drought year, the collection of life histories allowed me to learn about more severe crisis situations in the past. Life histories also gave me access to the richness and personalized nature of women's lives and on the changes they experienced through *conscientização* as a result of their life conditions and mobilization in the action group.

There was no men's group in which the men engaged despite the fact that many of the men were members of a small food producers association in the community. Nevertheless, I selected two return migrant men and two men who had never engaged in migration. As was the case with all of the men consultants in the study, my interaction with them was not as deep as that with women. Beyond participant-observation, I utilized in-depth interviews to collect data among the men consultants. The selection of the men who never migrated was difficult since the majority of the men in the community had, at some point in their lives, engaged in migration.

The experiences of the two return migrant men in their place of destination were distinct, even though the two men had migrated to the same place – São Paulo. While one of the men found work right after his arrival in that city and was able to pay for his family to join him later on, the other man had a difficult time in finding a job; for several months he was unable to send any material help to his family who stayed in the countryside. In both cases, however, the return migrant men stated that they never migrated with the intention of settling in São Paulo permanently. As a matter of fact, they both returned to their place of origin several times when they heard the drought was over. However, unable to stay permanently in their place of origin, they ended up returning to São Paulo several times.

Although the attitude of migrant women about returning to their place of origin can be seen as quite similar to that of the return migrant men, by joining the women's action group, the women return migrants actually attempt to change the reality in their place of

origin through a search for measures to mitigate the drought. The men return because of the strong bond they have with their place of origin, particularly when access to land is possible. These return migrant men consultants were both elderly and retired. Their financial conditions were, therefore, better than that of many in the village. As a result of their age and of their access to retirement pensions, these men no longer engaged in agricultural work to their regret. I was also able to collect data from middle aged return migrant men who have frequently migrated, but who never took their wives and offspring along. These informal interviews helped me understand better the reasons they migrated by themselves as well as the reasons for their return.

The case of the men who never migrated was exceptional for the community. Both consultants in this category were elderly men and, for them, they did not want to engage in migration because they had heard of people who had bad experiences in their destination; the collection of data among them was done through in-depth interviews. These men offered interesting insight on the drought in different years. Instead of migrating, these consultants engaged in emergency work fronts and, along with their large families, had tremendous difficulties coping with the drought crisis.

3.5. The Rural Domestic Groups and the Domestic Workers

One of my objectives was to examine the relationship of migrant women with their families in the rural areas, and whether there was an urban-rural support network that might function to mitigate the drought. Therefore, I collected data among rural households which received material support from their daughters. I selected two rural households characterized by distinct patterns of ties with their household members domestic workers. One that had four daughters in the city and the other which had only one. By doing this, I hoped to have representative cases for the overall situation as the cases were contrasting. I note again that the domestic workers were the only migrant women who maintained a close tie with their families.

The collection of these data involved trips to the plots of land and house sites of the two households selected. I also collected data from members of these households on market days in Santa Luzia. In-depth interviews were conducted with men (fathers), heads of the households, as well as from women (mothers). Despite my limited time among them, I engaged in some participant-observation by spending time in their homes and sharing meals with them.

3.6. Grassroots Organizations

The collection of data among members and political activists from grassroots organizations comprised an important aspect of the research. These organizations were my first contact in the research process and they also had a significant influence on the lives of women, especially in terms of political *conscientização*. Except for the Rural Labourers Union, the grassroots organizations were much stronger and active in the struggle of the rural population of the *Sertão do Araripe* than among the agricultural workers who lived in peripheral neighbourhoods in the city of Petrolina.

The strong presence of the conservative faction of the Catholic church in Petrolina interfered with the involvement of some of the ecumenical grassroots organizations. In contrast to rural areas where the presence of ecumenical grassroots organizations and NGOs are visible through the *conscientização* of the poor population towards their problems and needs, there was only one ecumenical grassroots organization involved with the struggle of the urban poor. This organization played a major role in supporting the neighbourhood associations so that they would pressure the municipal government to introduce improvements in the neighbourhood setting. In most cases the municipal government has responded to the demands in the provision of services, such as daycare centres, medical services, and running water. However, the role of the municipal government is certainly distinct from that of grassroots organizations, particularly in regards to the *conscientização* of the urban poor towards their rights.

In face of the limited role of grassroots organizations in Petrolina, the Rural Labourers Union played a strategic role among agricultural workers, especially among those in the *fichado* type of labour arrangement. Informal education through the Union assisted agricultural workers, particularly migrant women from the rural areas who had no experience with wage labour. The *avulso* workers did not benefit as much from informal education since they were difficult to reach by the Union. The domestic workers were the only ones who did not benefit at all from organized action groups; there was no domestic labourers union in Petrolina.

3.7. My Commitment towards the Women

The dual sites – rural and urban – were difficult to be dealt with. The trips were not only time consuming but tiring, and I had to deal with the complexities of the different sites. Despite my efforts to clearly explain my research and its objectives, at the beginning of the collection of data in the rural area some of the inhabitants came to me and asked whether my work was to find jobs for the migrants in urban areas. As time went on, this misunderstanding was reduced with repeated explanation. Most of my consultants from both the rural and the urban sites asked how my work would benefit them. I explained the limitations of an academic work, but I mentioned my willingness to help them by making my data available for the elaboration of projects to benefit them. The women from the rural group already had access to a publication of mine about the group and, with the help of grassroots organizations, have been using the information in the article to formulate proposals which have been submitted to funding agencies.

Some of my women consultants were very politicized and articulate, and they participated in broader political movements beyond those at the local level, i.e., Neighbourhood Association in Petrolina and Women's Action Group in Santa Luzia. Some of these women frequently participated in meetings outside their village/neighbourhood. Those meetings were periodic and took place in Recife and even in other states. The

participation of women in these meetings was very important for their struggle. They grew as women and as leaders and were able to share what they learned with the women in their place of origin. Whenever these women came to meetings in Recife and their stay coincided with mine in that city, they would meet me and even visit me in my home. Since I did not participate to the grassroots organizations to which they belonged, I would not attend the meetings although I was always invited by them. My absence from those meetings was a conscious choice I made; by participating, I would be engaging openly and consciously in their political struggle and committing myself to the objectives of those organizations. This could seriously affect the goals of my research, which were distinct from, although not at odds with, the ones of the grassroots organizations. My stand did not imply lack of support for their struggle, but only lack of direct involvement in it. My role was that of a researcher.

Despite the limits of my involvement, I met with women outside the interview occasions because I felt the need to make myself available to them. By developing such a relationship, I exposed myself to be a woman like them – a woman who had children as they did and who had feelings as they did. They came to realize that I shared a lot with them. My stance minimized the power difference between us and made me feel good not only as an anthropologist but as a woman. Only a few of my women consultants would come to Recife, but the ones who did would proudly report our meetings to the others.

My action was fulfilling because I received so much from them. Even when they were very busy they always found time for my interviews, gave me food, and were very patient with me. I felt the desire to give something to them and thus made myself available to them outside the field setting. My stance challenges the position that the anthropologist has to be distant from his/her consultants for the sake of scientific neutrality and objectivity. In the case of this research, the distance between the “other” and myself was diminished. Of course, I am not the only anthropologist to do this. According to Bernard (1995:153), “the power of the documentation is in its objectivity, in its chilling irrefutability, not in its neutrality”. In dealing with this issue, Bernard cites the case of Claire Sterk, an ethnographer who studied

prostitutes and intravenous drug users in New York and Newark and who was a trusted friend and counsellor to many of the women with whom she worked. According to Sterk (1989:99 in Bernard, 1995:153), "every researcher is affected by the work he or she does. One cannot remain neutral and uninvolved; even as an outsider, the researcher is part of the community".

As it will be noticed throughout the work, my voice will not be the only one to be heard; it is only one of the many voices since the voices of my consultants will also be presented. In an attempt to minimize the distance and power difference between myself, i.e., the anthropologist, and my consultants, I committed myself to provide them with copies of my thesis and of any publications I produce about these people. This will help in their empowerment, for which they were very excited.

In the final phase of my fieldwork I had a particularly interesting experience. Even though these women were very conscious of the problems involved in a patron-client type of relationship, after one of the group meetings I observed, the women came to me and asked for used clothing. They said that they were in such need that they could not be travelling to participate in meetings outside the village for lack of clothes. The grassroots organization to which they belonged pays for their trips and for their food when they are to participate in meetings, but does not provide clothes. I was astonished to hear this from such politicized women. We then discussed the implications of that and I decided to get as many used clothes as possible to take to the village. We decided to conduct a draw for the material I took in the last women's action group meeting I attended. They were all very happy with the outcome.

The situation which I faced in regards to the material needs of the population under study illustrates that, although the first step in a solution is to raise their consciousness about the roots of their poverty, the poor still have material needs and have to find ways to fulfill these needs before they can engage in correction action. In the chapters to come, this will be clearly seen. Women in many different settings do not become involved in political struggles

when they need first to fulfill the material needs of their families and find the time to become politically engaged.

3.8. Limitations of the Study

I attempted to minimize study limitations related to the support I received from grassroots organizations and the Araripe NGO. Although the support I received from these organizations can be seen as a limitation, especially considering their political agendas, it would not have been possible to learn about *conscientização* of the women under study without the support of grassroots organizations. Clear explanation of my role as a researcher reduced this limitation. Furthermore, the grassroots organizations as well as the Araripe NGO also helped to dissociate my study from them. As some of my consultants participated in meetings of those organizations, the political activists always referred to me as a researcher and not as one of them since they were aware of my role as an anthropologist.

Another limitation of this study is that the situation I investigated cannot be generalized for the whole semi-arid region of northeastern Brazil. Although the migration flow to Petrolina involves peoples from the drought-prone rural areas throughout the region, the situation of the rural community under investigation cannot be generalized to all rural communities in the semi-arid because mobilization of the population and of women in particular has been supported largely by grassroots organizations and by the Araripe NGO. Although that is the case in several other rural communities in the *Sertão do Araripe* and of a few other regions in the *Sertão*, it is not the case for the rural semi-arid as a whole. However, the tendency over time is likely an expanded involvement of grassroots organizations in other regions.

The access to women, particularly to domestic workers, through a local key-informant may be seen as yet another limitation of the study. This could not be avoided; it was the only way I could reach the young migrant domestic workers and their families in the countryside and gain access to the information I needed. Another limitation is that, since my research was

designed to reach different categories of women, I had no choice but to adjust to their schedule. This problem, in conjunction with dual sites, severely limited my time in any single site and among any particular set of consultants.

Finally, my interaction with women outside the field setting could also be seen as a limitation to the study. For me as a woman anthropologist, this was essential and was actually considered an asset for the study. Anthropology itself has changed not only theoretically but methodologically, and the role of the anthropologist in the societies being studied has been changing as well.

CHAPTER IV

DROUGHT, MIGRATION, MOBILIZATION AND THE CONDITIONS OF THE POPULATION IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL

Brazil is a vast country which occupies 8,511,996.3 sq. November 11, 1997 of land, and has a population of 146,917,459 inhabitants. The population density for the country is 17.26 inhabitants per km² (IBGE, 1991). It is characterized by a great regional diversity not only in socio-economic development, but in cultural and demographic terms as well. While the south and the southeast, the more developed regions where political power is concentrated, are characterized by the presence of Europeans and Asians, particularly, Italians, Germans and Japanese, the north is characterized by a massive indigenous population and the northeast by the presence of Europeans, Africans and, to a lesser extent, indigenous peoples (Wagley, 1963; Andrade, 1986). In light of the discussion of internal colonialism, the northern and northeastern regions, being less developed and exploited by the southern and southeastern regions, occupy the place of the periphery (Cardoso and Faletto, 1976).

The northeastern region of Brazil occupies 1,539,632 km², which comprises the states of Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Sergipe and Bahia and occupies 18.2 percent of the nation's territory (see Figure 2, page 4). The most recent figures indicate that the population of the region is 28.48 percent of the national population, or 42,470,225 inhabitants. The northeast is therefore one of the most populated regions of the country, with a population density of 27.29 inhabitants per km² (IBGE, 1991). The region is characterized by the occurrence of periodic droughts and is the poorest region

of the country and one of the poorest of the world. Income and wealth are very unequally distributed and the quality of life of the majority of the population is very low.

The state of Pernambuco, location of the research site, has a population of 7,127,855 and a population density of 70.50 inhabitants per km² (IBGE, 1991). It is comprised of three sub-regions: the *zona da Mata* which is the humid coastal zone, the *Agreste*, which is the transitional zone, and the *Sertão*, which consists of the semi-arid hinterlands and is the area most affected by droughts. Each of these sub-regions is unique not only in regards to its cultural and demographic aspects, but its economy as well (Andrade, 1986).

The *zona da Mata* economy is based primarily on sugar cane cultivation and sugar production and on large landholdings (*latifundium*); the *Agreste* is dominated by the production of agricultural crops and cattle raising and by small and medium sized landholdings; and the *Sertão* is made up of subsistence agriculture and cattle raising, as well as specific areas of irrigated agriculture mostly devoted to export. The *Sertão* is also characterized by the presence of large landholdings. The small landholdings outnumber the large throughout the area (Andrade, 1986). While the *zona da Mata* represents 6.10 percent of the northeastern region, the *Sertão* occupies 50 percent, which comprises 9 percent of the nation's territory (SUDENE, 1991). The inhabitants of the *Sertão* are known by the term *sertanejo(a)* and are also referred to by the term *retirante*.⁷

Since the northeast and, in particular, the semi-arid portion has been considered the poorest region of Brazil and one of the poorest of the world, poverty, famine and underdevelopment come to our minds when we think about the area. This is indeed the case for most of the *Sertão*, particularly the rural areas. It is striking, however, to realize that, within the limits of the semi-arid itself, there are pockets of development characterized by high levels of modernization and based on a sophisticated irrigation model (CODEVASF, 1993; Ferreira Filho, 1996).

⁷ The literal translation of the word *retirante* is "one who withdraws", this term is applied to the population that migrates to other areas in an attempt to survive the drought.

That being the case, it becomes clear that the drought, an old problem which has been affecting the region for centuries, is political and socio-economic in nature and not only based on physical and natural forces. Thus, attention in this chapter will be given to the discussion of the drought and of the politics involved with it, of migration and mobilization – measures utilized by many northeasterners to overcome the drought crisis. This general discussion will provide background to the two research sites – the rural drought-prone and underdeveloped one (the *Sertão do Araripe*) and the wealthy economically developed one (the *Sertão do São Francisco*, and more specifically, the city of Petrolina and its surroundings) – and the reasons why the *São Francisco* region attracts a large number of migrants, including women, from rural drought-prone areas within the *Sertão* itself.

4.1. The Drought in Northeastern Brazil

The northeastern region of Brazil has been exposed to droughts since the Portuguese first engaged in the colonization of the region in the sixteenth century. Although sources vary in regards to when the first drought took place, the first drought reported was in the mid sixteenth century, around 1564 (SUDENE, 1981). The drought is a threat in the sense that absence or irregularity of rain, aggravated by socio-economic and political causes, has long been a major concern for the local population, particularly since the majority depend on agriculture and cattle raising for their survival. Low levels of rainfall are not the only problem affecting the semi-arid region. The agricultural production model is not well adapted to environmental conditions. The situation is aggravated by monopolization of ownership, concentrated access to and utilization of land (the concentration of land is higher year after year), and by the absence of an adequate agricultural policy to assure the commercialization of agricultural products. Thus, the drought stands as a socio-political problem more than anything.

A regional oligarchy dominates the local political system, which leads to the appropriation of public benefits by a few. Corruption and patron-client types of relationships

are part of the misery in the semi-arid region perpetuating ties of dependence between the local poor population and the large and powerful landholders (Andrade, 1985; Coelho, 1985; Pessoa, 1987; Portella, 1995). Thus, the approach of this study is to view drought in northeastern Brazil within a political economy framework, which treats disasters not only as the result of physical and natural forces, but as the result of a combination of socio-economic and political forces as well (Maskrey, 1989; Rogge, 1992; Lavell, 1993; Wilches-Chaux, 1993; Wiest et al., 1994).

Although the semi-arid region, i.e., the *Sertão*, occupies 50 percent of the northeastern territory and usually is the first area to suffer the effects of droughts, the droughts can affect a much larger area than that, including parts of the *Agreste*. The drought-prone area has been referred to as the drought polygon (*polígono das secas*) due to its shape; it covers an area of 879,665 km². The *Sertão* receives a low annual precipitation (an annual average of 600-800 mm) and the rainy season is confined to only three months – March to May. About two-thirds of the population depends on animal-raising and engages in non-irrigated agriculture. The raising of cattle is an activity primarily engaged in by medium and large landholders. Studies have shown that the *Sertão* accounts for 72 percent of the cattle raised in the northeast (Andrade, 1986; Pessoa, 1987:471, cited in Haque and Branco, 1997).

In economic terms, subsistence agriculture plays a secondary role. However, it is the most important activity for the most vulnerable and most affected population, i.e., the small landholders, who are unable to pursue cattle-raising due to the costs involved; instead, they raise other animals, such as goats, that are adapted to the semi-arid nature of the environment. Among the poorest population, who are either small landholders or sharecroppers, subsistence crops such as beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris L.*), corn (*Zea Mays L. var. Indurata sturt.*) and manioc (*Manihot utilissima Phol.*) are the most important crops. They sell the surplus of these crops only in times of need, preferring to keep it for household consumption. They cultivate castor beans, which are utilized for the production of oil, and cotton is grown for market. During severe drought years, when the drought takes extreme proportions, small

food producers are unable to realize a harvest. In normal drought periods, when the absence of rainfall occurs in the non-rainy season, when the yield is high, low local market prices make it difficult to sell the crops produced. The latter situation occurs due to the absence of an effective policy to assure commercialization of the cultivated crops.

There are two types of dry period in the northeast: (1) the seasonal dry period which corresponds to the non-rainy summer season, which begins in August every year, and (2) the periodic droughts, which take place cyclically (Portella et al., 1994). The length of periodic drought is usually one year; however, there are cases when it can last from two to three years. Furthermore, there is usually a partial drought every four to five years that affects limited areas. There is a general drought every ten to eleven years that affects the total region, and an exceptional drought every fifty years. Among the most severe droughts affecting the northeast were the ones in the years 1710, 1721, 1736, 1777-78, 1825, 1845, 1877-79, 1888-89, 1898, 1900, 1915, 1951, 1958, 1970, 1979-80, and 1989-93 (SUDENE, 1985; Portella et al., 1994; Branco, 1995b) (see Figure 1, page 2).

550,000 out of the 2,600,000 rural landholdings in the semi-arid are in a permanent state of emergency. Even when the year is a normal drought year, the water reservoirs are usually empty two months after the rainy season is over, and there is no other water available. Those periods are usually referred to as the “green drought” because the vegetation remains green although there is no water available to fulfill the basic needs of the population. In periods of “green drought” the government provides water to the population. Trucks carrying water in large tanks (*carros pipas*) are viewed throughout *sertão*. This measure creates a dependence on the population (CPATSA, 1989, in Portella et al., 1994).

For the purpose of the study, which was undertaken during a normal drought year, and for the systematization of the understanding of the drought as a disaster, we differentiate the drought according to its duration and its impact on the population – it is either “hazard” or “disaster”. Periods of normal drought are hazards; a disaster occurs when the drought lasts a year or more, causing a catastrophic disruption of the socio-economic structure of the

population. This differentiation is necessary because institutional and popular responses differ according to the extent and severity of the drought.

Although the drought is an old problem and some have attributed it to environmental causes (SUDENE, 1981), the lack of serious political commitment to deal with it shows its political nature. This is clearly seen through the high development levels of parts of the semi-arid region. Throughout the years governments have shown a preoccupation to deal with the drought problem only during periods of crisis. During years of normal drought, governmental actions are limited and designed to benefit the large landholders, instead of being focussed on preparedness to avoid or minimize the effects of future droughts. Attention is devoted to large modern irrigation projects in favour of a few. While benefiting a small local elite, these measures tend to harm small-scale agricultural production by neglecting implementation of an effective policy to assure the commercialization of the agricultural products and the provision of permanent water resources for those affected. This leads to the marginalization of the majority of the population. In times of disaster, particularly when the local population suffers high mortality rates, the government opens “emergency work fronts” devoted to the generation of income for the affected poverty-stricken population and also sends trucks with water (*carros pipas*) to distribute water to the local population and food to the needy (Pessoa et al., 1983; Portella et al., 1994; Medeiros, 1995).

4.2. Governmental Responses and Mitigation Measures

For years the government has responded to the drought and tried to minimize its impact on the population through the creation of several institutions to deal with the problem. However, despite the efforts, those measures have not succeeded; they give priority to infrastructural and physical factors as well as to short-term assistance efforts. This has taken place since the beginning of the century, when the first institution, the Department of Works to Overcome Drought (Inpetoria de Obras Contra as Secas - IOCS), was created. In 1954, this institution was substituted by DNOCS (The National Department of Works to Overcome

Drought), which focussed mainly on the physical characteristics of the region. SUDENE (Superintendency of Northeast Development) and the Department of Natural Resources were also created in the 1950's. Both institutions also focussed on the physical aspects of the drought (SUDENE, 1980).

The government has emphasized the construction of dams and wells for centuries. In spite of the high number of dams constructed, these facilities have not been utilized for irrigation purposes (SUDENE, 1986). Furthermore, according to SUDENE (1985), 75.2 percent of water reservoirs are private and only 14.4 percent of the irrigated area in Brazil is located in the northeast. Several studies have suggested that the reason for the limitation of irrigation measures is related to the problem of land consolidation (Melo, 1980; GTDN, 1967; Pessoa, 1987, Haque and Branco, 1997). Most of the water reservoirs are private and serve only private interests. In this case, the majority of the regional population, the small landholders, cannot benefit from irrigation.

The land tenure system in the Ouricuri municipality, located in the *Sertão do Araripe* region in the state of Pernambuco, substantiates this point. The area is characterized by a substantial presence of small landholders (*minifundia*). Although that is the case, properties with less than 100 hectares, representing 94.3 percent of the total number of properties, occupy only 62.6 percent of the total land. Properties with more than 100 hectares, accounting for only 5.2 percent of the total number of properties, occupy 27.4 percent of the total area (IBGE, 1985). Moreover, since the large landowners are mostly interested in extensive cattle breeding, and do not rely directly on agriculture,⁸ their intent is to store water for animal consumption rather than to irrigate the agricultural land (Portella et al., 1994; Haque and Branco, 1996). The small food producers (small landholders and sharecroppers) who rely heavily on production of crops, would benefit considerably from irrigation. They are unable to do so because the costs involved are very high for the food producers to afford.

⁸ Usually they do not engage in agricultural production directly; their relation to that economic activity is through sharecroppers who work their land.

Subsidizing irrigation has low priority for the government; it is not interested in small scale irrigation schemes.

Demographic pressure on land has increased the problem of the drought in the northeast. From 1940 to 1975, the average area of the landholdings with less than 10 hectares fell by 33 percent. There was an intensification of the use of land and an increase in the utilization of labour since the families divide their land as their sons/daughters marry; they are unable to increase the size of their properties (Portella et al., 1994). Land is divided among sons as well as daughters when they marry. This is not the case when the other party owns land and there is no need to divide the landholding. In the region both sons and daughters have the right to inherit land.

Beyond the policies and programs focussing on the physical and hydrological aspects of the drought through the construction of dams and reservoirs as well as stimulating crop diversification, government initiatives also include “emergency” measures, which are generally palliative in nature (Pessoa et al., 1983; Branco, 1995a). According to Pessoa et al. (1983:30), the objective of the emergency work fronts is not to offset the lack of economic opportunities due to the drought, but to avoid starvation of the affected population. This is where mistake and injustice occur, because it is literally impossible for a large family to be fed by only one person’s earnings. Thus, here lies a problematic and unbalanced action of the governmental response; it is not flexible enough to adjust to reality and consider each family case as separate (Pessoa et al., 1983). The emergency measures are undertaken to fulfill the immediate needs of the affected population during the crisis period and, to a certain extent, help mitigate drought effects. In explaining the character of institutionalization of emergency measures, Pessoa has noted that “referring to government intervention as an ‘emergency’ conveys the idea of urgency that has led to the abuse and corruption known as ‘drought industry’” (Pessoa, 1987:478, cited in Haque and Branco, 1997:17). The emergency work fronts (*Programas de Frentes de Emergência*) undertaken by the government are devoted to minimize drought severity by creating employment for the affected population particularly

through construction of dams and wells. Although the plan is designed to serve both physical and social needs, it has not been very effective.

Several works have pointed to the inefficiency of the “work front” measure with limited benefits to the population (Pessoa, 1987; Branco, 1995a, 1995b). One of the major problems of the ‘work fronts’ has been its trickle-down approach. According to Pessoa (1987), since project formulation, decision making, control, and execution are not shared with the workers, the “work front” programs eventually benefit the large landowners. The “work fronts” provide only short-term relief in times of severe drought crisis; they do not mitigate the effects of the drought nor provide a long-term solution to the problem, a problem embedded in the regional development process. Consequently, the “work fronts” are palliative measures that make the affected population dependent on a meagre salary (half of the minimum wage), inadequate for the survival of the family.

A thorough study of the 1979-80 drought which focussed on the physical and socio-economic aspects of the drought in dealing with the dynamics of the “emergency work fronts” pointed to governmental discrimination against women’s and children’s engagement in “work fronts” (Pessoa et al., 1983). The study indicates that the number of men hired in several states is much higher than that of the women, clearly indicating that the government gives emphasis to the absorption of male workers. The emergency work front program gives priority to the men as heads of households (70.3%) in the age range between 25 and 49 (Pessoa et al., 1983:28). Until 1983, usually only one member of the family was hired in the “work fronts”. Considering the large size of families in rural areas and the meagre salary paid in “work fronts”, it becomes practically impossible to feed a family with the money made.⁹ Large families depend heavily upon the labour of the offspring as they work in the agricultural fields during normal drought years. According to the work of Pessoa et al. (1983), the

⁹ Beyond the fact that their salary is low – half of the minimum wage – it usually comes late; sometimes the workers have to wait several weeks to receive the payment.

consulted population was seriously affected by the small number of family members hired in “work fronts”. In the words of several workers presented by Pessoa et al. (1983):

One of the hardest sacrifices (during the drought) is to work by oneself in the emergency work front to feed eight persons”. “The woman is seldom hired. This is wrong Here, if the women do not qualify then the man should earn more”. “If the woman could qualify, it would be good”. “The worst mistake in the emergency here [in Paraíba] is that a 14 year old boy cannot work (consultants utilized by Pessoa et al., 1983:30).

During the last drought, 1989-93, the government implemented some changes in the “emergency work fronts”. They came to be referred to as “productive work fronts” (*Frentes Produtivas de Trabalho*), in response to lack of success with previous “emergency work fronts” and pressure from the local population as well as grassroots organizations working in the area to support the needs of the local population. In the case of the *sertão do Araripe*, among the organizations involved were the Rural Labourers Union Movement (MSTR), ecumenical grassroots organizations and a local NGO. The pressures led the government to consider the hiring of women in “work fronts” as well as hiring more than one person from each family. Although the salary remained the same, i.e., half of the minimum wage, the labourers had to work only three days a week. Despite the fact that the pay was sometimes late, 78 per cent of the money was directed towards the workers instead of going to the hands of the local politicians as happened previously (CAATINGA, 1994).

The number of persons who apply for the work available through these work fronts is higher each year, reflecting a worsening of the problem year after year. In spite of the changes instituted, these governmental measures have been of a palliative nature, actually increasing the vulnerability of the population. The government has not implemented mitigation measures for long-term solutions based on education, *conscientização* and active participation of the population in decision making.

One of the worst droughts was the one from 1989 to 1993. This crisis affected 12 million people and reached an area of over 12 million km². More than 2 million people applied for work in the emergency productive work fronts (Portella et al., 1994). Despite the fact that

the work fronts have had some effects in maintaining the population in the countryside and thus reducing the rural exodus, they have not been directed towards the development of the region (Ab Saaber, 1985). The population engages in construction of wells, sometimes in private properties, and in other infrastructural work such as the improvement of roads. These tasks are not devoted to minimize the drought problem and the population working on it do not derive any direct benefit. Although the changes in the emergency measures benefited the *sertanejo(a)* on a short-term basis, those improved measures were far from benefiting the development of the region and decreasing the vulnerability of the local population (Barbosa and Branco, 1996).

In sum, the lack of political will to solve the problem, combined with a variety of socio-economic and physical factors, are responsible for the perpetuation of the drought problem in northeastern Brazil. The nature and magnitude of drought-disasters in the northeast are primarily the combined result of an absence and/or irregularity of rain and the character of agricultural production organization, particularly the distribution of landholdings (Andrade, 1985; Coelho, 1985). A highly skewed distribution of land has characterized the region since colonial times and up until the present there has not been an effective solution to the problem by the government.

4.3. Popular Responses to Mitigate the Drought

In face of the ineffective responses of the government to mitigate the drought, the local population has tended to develop mitigation measures to minimize the effects of that disaster. The small landowners and sharecroppers who depend on the cultivation of subsistence crops constitute the most vulnerable and affected sector of the population. Although in times of drought, the medium and large landholders benefit from governmental loans to construct water reservoirs on their own properties, the small landholders usually do not have that option. Thus, the magnitude of the effects of the drought is not the same on the large landholders and on the small landholders (Andrade, 1985; Coelho, 1985). While the

former have more access to measures to mitigate the hazard, the latter are left with fewer options, the most important one being out-migration. The small landholders turn to migration since the opportunities to work for wages are limited due to the low demand of cattle raising for labour power (Amaral and Nogueira, 1993; Branco, 1995b; Brooks, 1972). Before addressing the migration strategy, which has been a measure engaged in by the *sertanejo(a)* for decades, a more recent measure developed by the population of the drought-prone *sertão* – mobilization in groups – will be discussed.

As a consequence of the presence of grassroots organizations in the region and the support the rural population receives from those organizations, as well as the active role played by the Rural Labourers Union, the population, including both men and women, has been able to form action groups in an effort to mitigate the drought collectively. In the case of the men, several small-food producers associations have been formed in several parts of the drought-prone semi-arid region. These organizations basically aim towards the production of crops and, in times of need, provide seeds of several crops to be planted. The provision of seeds is made available through loans and the food producers have the obligation to pay back the seeds when the situation improves. The members of some of these associations have access to small loans from banks.

Women have been able to mobilize in action groups and derive benefit from the process of *conscientização* through the support of grassroots organizations, as well as gain access to employment, particularly important during drought crisis. Although they may not mitigate the drought, these action groups provide ways for the population to mobilize, offering an important potential for popular or community based mitigation measures. Through their participation in action groups women learn about the political and economic dynamics of the drought and not only become aware of their potential to fight the situation, but of their own limitations to do so. Participation of women in action groups give women voice and the opportunity to show their agency.

Grassroots organizations play a very important role in the drought-prone regions. Although these organizations are not found in all of the sub-regions of *sertão*, they are very visible in the *sertão do Araripe* and the *sertão Central* (Portella, 1995); their expansion to other areas is quite likely. The intervention of these organizations has been through the education of the population in regards to the ecological limitations of the semi-arid environment which they occupy, through instruction about the crops that should be cultivated and the animals that should be raised (goat raising became one of the most important activities after the Araripe NGO initiated the work with the population in the *sertão do Araripe* due to the suitability of goats to the ecological conditions of the region), and the *conscientização* of the population in regards to their condition as rural workers and as women. The objective of these grassroots organizations has been to introduce long-term mitigation measures to be undertaken by the affected population. Details of these interventions and of their implications to the local population will be discussed in Chapter VI.

The engagement of the *sertanejo(a)* in rural to urban migration takes place both individually and collectively and can be undertaken either on a temporary or permanent basis. Although migration increases in times of drought crisis, it also occurs in normal drought years due to the problems the population faces to market the agricultural crops and to the “green drought” phenomenon. Both men and women migrate. However, the view of migrant men towards the drought problem and the length of their permanence in the city differs considerably from that of the women who, once they arrive in the city, tend to experience a transformation. Migrant men, on the other hand, have more difficulty in adapting to the city and the work conditions there, and have a great desire to return to their place of origin, particularly those men who are small landowners. Although migration can involve the whole family, it is common for individual family members to migrate, leaving the rest of the family in the countryside. Those who stay behind count for their survival on the remittances sent by the migrant members.

Although it cannot be denied that the drought is the push factor towards migration, studies have pointed to other factors underlying the desire to engage in migration, namely, unemployment, underemployment and dissatisfaction with work conditions (Pessoa et al., 1983; Brooks, 1972; 1973). However, the drought problem magnifies these conditions. As one male consultant stated:

Life in the countryside is rough; we seldom touch cash even in years when the drought is not very severe, but during drought crisis the situation becomes much worse since often there is nothing on the table to eat. The only way out is to abandon our small plots of land and search for work in the cities (Pedro, a 48 years old small landholder).

Women play an especially crucial role in drought mitigation efforts. They become the heads of their households when their husbands migrate and leave them to take care of their offspring in the countryside. These women are known as *viúvas da seca* (widows of the drought), and try to manage the difficulties faced. They are referred to by this term because their husbands sometimes form another family in the place of destination and never return. The tendency of these women to remain in the rural areas does not necessarily mean it is their choice. Many of the women appear to be very curious about city life, but their permanence in the countryside is based on fear and lack of confidence that they will find jobs in the city. As one of my consultants puts it:

The poverty here is great and during the drought, Hail Mary, it gets much worse. I am already used to living alone with my six small children. During the drought my husband goes to the middle of the world in search for some pennies. I myself have never left the countryside, my husband does not want to take me along. He says that he fears not finding a job and staying with us in the middle of nowhere having to beg for food. During the drought I was forced to sell all of the animals we had until the last chicken. Thanks to God my father always helps me (Maria, 24 years old).

Although women may remain in the countryside, women do also migrate either with their husbands or individually. It is very common for young daughters and/or sons to migrate to urban centres for the sake of the survival of their families who stay behind. These young adult migrants then become responsible to feed the families who stay in the countryside by sending

remittances to them. Although this sometimes fragments the family, reliance on the material contribution provided by these young women and men to those left in the countryside seems more important. Women are generally easily absorbed in the urban domestic service sector, in factory work (depending on their educational level) and in irrigated agriculture. Women therefore constitute a valuable resource in times of drought crisis.

Pessoa et al. (1983:29) point out that part of the population affected by the 1979-80 drought prefers not to migrate, but the migration of the *sertanejo(a)* has been noted throughout the years since it often presents a viable option to overcome the drought. It is, therefore, important to understand the dynamics of the rural-urban migration in light of the drought problem, particularly taking into consideration the age and the gender of those involved.

4.4. The Political Economy of Migration

Although there are a series of factors which tend to be responsible for migration, the most studied ones are the penetration of capitalism in rural areas, and the limited economic activities available for rural populations (Durham, 1980; Souza, 1983; Ramalho, 1995). My analysis focuses on the drought hazard and the difficulties concerned with the living conditions in rural areas as a push factor of the population studied. The drought and its effects cannot be viewed in isolation, and its socioeconomic and political nature have to be understood in relation to structural factors within the development context of the northeast and of Brazil as a whole.

Migration has been a measure utilized by most of the rural population in northeastern Brazil to mitigate their poverty stricken condition, a condition considerably aggravated by periodic droughts affecting the region over the course of several centuries (SUDENE, 1981). Although the migration of the northeastern population increases during drought crisis, it does not take place only during those periods. Limited wage labour opportunities and the

difficulties in the commercialization of the agricultural crops are additional problems responsible for pushing the population out of the region.

The relationship between migration and the urbanization process in Brazil is closely related to the development of that country. According to Duarte (1979:7), the northeast has been traditionally supplying labour to other Brazilian regions. This inter-regional labour transfer has been regarded as a factor relieving extreme regional inequality; it reduces the pressure on regional supplies of employment, food and infrastructure.

The high incidence of migration in the population has produced the concept of *retirante*. The *retirante* from northeastern Brazil is found throughout the country. Such a population has engaged in different types of migratory movements for decades, one of the most important of which has been the migration to the Amazon at the end of the 19th century associated with the rubber boom (Weinstein, 1983; Amaral and Nogueira, 1993). Migrants from the northeast (*retirante nordestino*) have contributed greatly to development in many regions of Brazil. Besides their vulnerability as migrants and their flight from poverty, in the majority of cases the migrant is uneducated and unskilled and consequently willing to offer labour power cheaply. The availability of migrant labour power at low cost has benefited tremendously the capitalist sector in the place of destination. Therefore, a close link can be seen between migration and the development process (Branco, 1995b).

The semi-arid interior was struck by two severe droughts in 1951-53 and 1958. The 1950's was marked by a high out-migration, since it was a period of substantial improvement of the country's highway system. These improvements coincided with the post-war industrial boom of the centre-south, particularly São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Another major contributing factor was the initiation of the construction of Brasília, the new capital of the country, in the late 1950's. According to Pastore (1969 cited in Duarte, 1979), 29 per cent of those who took part in the construction of Brasília were from the northeast. This was a period in which inter-regional migration predominated over intra-regional movements; indeed, while out-migration to other regions had represented 48.7 per cent of total migration of

nordestinos, in the 1940's, the proportion had grown to 52.0 per cent in the 1950's (Duarte, 1979). Inter-regional migration was significant for several decades and the *retirantes nordestinos* contributed heavily to the development taking place in other regions.

Although the migration of women has been under-investigated (Moore, 1988), women have played a pivotal role in migration, particularly rural-urban migration. Jelin (1977) has demonstrated the quick absorption of migrant women in the domestic service sector throughout Latin America. In her study of the participation of women in intra-regional migration, Callier (1965) has demonstrated the adaptability of rural women to Recife. Both works succeeded in demystifying the view that women participate passively in migration (Duarte, 1979).

According to Callier, between 1940 and 1950 the percentage of professionally active women increased from 14 to 24 per cent of the total number of women older than 10 years of age. Her objective in the study was to characterize women from rural origins, explain their movement to Recife and determine their assimilation to an urban subculture. She did so to demonstrate that even in the low stratum of society women engage in a type of urbanization. This low stratum consists of those migrants from rural areas who are thought to be the most conservative sector.

Callier's work focussed on women from rural origins, wives or daughters of agriculturalists who work on the land (in their place of origin) or who engage in other marginal income activities such as the processing of manioc flour and the raising of animals. In the Recife research, Callier (1965:40) found that young women from rural origins are in the great majority illiterate and have responsibilities toward their natal families. Among the push factors leading to migration of these women are undervalued agricultural work and the difficulties in finding wage work in the countryside.

The desire to migrate in search of better life conditions reflects the desire for social mobility, which is literally unavailable to those of the lowest stratum of rural society except through migration. This seems to be the case for most rural societies, particularly for women

who belong to the poorest sectors – the ones who engage in subsistence agriculture for their survival. Even though Callier worked with women who migrated either from the *Zona da Mata* or the *Agreste* towards Recife, the situation they faced can be compared to those of women from the *Sertão*, where the opportunities to engage in wage labour are virtually nonexistent, the subordination and invisibility of women are clearly noticed and the drought seems to be responsible for the worsening of such a situation.

Although inter-regional migration involves long distances as well as considerable expenses which can limit the return of migrants, there has been an increase in the number of return migrants who leave the southeast and head towards their place of origin in the northeast (Amaral and Nogueira, 1993). Studies have pointed out, however, that the number of men who engage in return migration is higher than that of the women. According to Amaral and Nogueira (1993:64), 77.6 percent of the interviewed return migrants were men whereas only 22.4 percent were women. According to Sampaio de Souza (1984:77), who focussed on return migration to the northeastern state of Rio Grande do Norte, 88 percent of the interviewed population were men while 12 percent were women. The study concluded that the number of migrant women is less than that of the men and that when women migrate they do not tend to engage in return migration. The reason Sampaio Souza gives is that single migrant women usually marry in their place of destination or engage in traditionally feminine work such as domestic services, nursing, and hair dressing (1984:108-109). Despite showing less return migration among women, the works cited above do not consider the situation of women in their place of origin, which is usually characterized by discrimination and limited availability of wage labour. Under these circumstances, the tendency for women to remain in their place of destination is clearly understandable.

In the last two decades there has been a shift from inter-regional to intra-regional migration. Inter-regional migration still occurs, although to a lesser extent. The shift has occurred due to the economic crisis, which has led to a high unemployment rate in large

industrialized urban centres. The *nordestinos* now tend to migrate to medium-sized cities within the northeast itself. This shift in the migration flow is also related to several factors: (a) the problems related to relocation due to the great distance between the migrant's place of origin, i.e., the backlands of the northeastern region, and the place of destination; most large urban centres are located either in the southeastern region or in coastal areas – the distance from the semi arid region of the Pernambuco state to Recife (the capital of the state of Pernambuco and one of the most industrialized centre in the northeast) ranges from approximately 500 to 800 km; (b) the high expenses involved in moving due to the physical distance between the place of origin and the place of destination; (c) the increasing range of employment opportunities in many medium-sized cities within the region and the easy access to them.

4.5. Rural-Urban Migration within the Northeast and the Development Process

Although the change in the migration flow in which the *nordestinos* engage can be seen as a result of the factors stated previously – the most important being the high unemployment rate in large industrialized urban centres – the most striking factor is that rural-urban migration is now taking place within the semi-arid region, an area characterized by poverty conditions. Such a change, however, also calls attention to the unequal development going on within the semi-arid region itself and the politics characterizing the drought problem.

Through the analysis of rural-urban migration presented here, I do not mean to reinforce the idea that there are “two Brazils”, which reflects the basis of the modernization theory – a rural, poor and backward Brazil, and an urban, wealthy and modern Brazil (Durham, 1980). The view presented here is that by no means are the two Brazils separate; on the contrary, they are intimately related and the development of the modern Brazil depends on the underdevelopment of the rural poor Brazil (Gunder Frank, 1975). This interpretation is supported by the development of the *sertão do São Francisco*, the place of destination of the migrants in my research project and the underdevelopment of the rural drought-prone

areas, as it is the case of the *sertão do Araripe*, the place of origin of some of the consultants in the study.

The rural-urban migration dealt with in the study has an interesting characteristic. Although the place of destination is the city of Petrolina, the majority of the migrants settle in the city but work on irrigated agriculture fields; these migrants therefore remain partially related to their occupations in their place of origin, i.e., agriculture. Although they perform agricultural tasks, however, the social relations of production, particularly those found in capitalist estates, are totally distinct from the ones they were exposed to in the countryside. Whereas in the countryside these migrant population had access and control over the means of production, that is not the case in Petrolina. In their place of destination the workers have to survive by selling their labour power (Branco, 1996). It can be concluded that this rural-urban migration and the migrant's exposure to city life is very distinct from the migration to industrialized urban centres such as São Paulo. The *sertão do São Francisco* is not only geographically closer to the migrants' place of origin, but the work many migrants engage in is related to agriculture. This intra-regional migration therefore does not require the adjustment process migration to southeastern Brazil requires.

The *São Francisco* region, located in the semi-arid portion of the northeast, has been referred to as "New California" and "Valley of Abundance". In the last twenty years, the region has become the major centre of irrigated agriculture in the northeast (Andrade, 1985; Bloch, 1996a, Ferreira Filho, 1996). Despite being located within the semi-arid, this area is not affected by the drought problem because it stands on the margins of the *São Francisco* River, the second largest river in Brazil, which runs permanently (Portella, 1995). The area thus benefits from large-scheme irrigation (Portella, 1995).

The *São Francisco* River runs through the area for 2,700 km and cuts across five of the nine states which comprise the northeastern region. The main characteristic of the river is that it cuts across the region of the *polígono das secas* in 58 percent of its course (Bloch, 1996a). The river basin which is referred to as "the Valley of *São Francisco*" is extended to

an area of 640,000 km², involving 463 municipalities and a population of 14 million people (CODEVASF, 1993; Bloch, 1996a). This region is divided into four areas. For the purpose of the study, however, I will deal with only one of the areas, the one referred to as “*sub-médio São Francisco*”, i.e., lower middle valley, where lies the city of Petrolina, in the state of Pernambuco. The *São Francisco* Valley is divided into four areas in order to facilitate the classification of irrigated agribusinesses. The geographical area of the “*sub-médio São Francisco*” is the central portion of the valley. The sub-region occupies an area of 78,119 km² and stands in the central portion of the *polígono das secas* in the states of Pernambuco and Bahia. The *sub-médio São Francisco* covers five percent of the area of the northeastern territory (Fischer, 1997).

Petrolina, which is located 770 km from Recife, the state capital, is a medium-sized city with a total population of 175,506 inhabitants and occupies an area of 6,115.7 km². The population density is 28.70 inhabitants per km²; 125,359 of this population live in urban areas and only 50,147 occupy the rural areas. Petrolina is the most important urban centre in the region; it is separated from the city of Juazeiro, another urban centre of importance in the state of Bahia, by the river and a bridge (Ferreira Filho, 1996; Fischer, 1997).

The *São Francisco* Valley was populated by the Portuguese since the seventeenth century. At that time, contact was made with the local indigenous population, most of whom were either killed or conquered, and cattle raising was introduced in the region. The raising of cattle in the large landholdings became the most important economic activity from the middle of this century. Beyond cattle raising and the practice of subsistence agriculture, there was small-scale irrigated agriculture on the fertile banks of the river. At that time the economic basis of the *São Francisco* region was the same as that in the rest of the semi-arid region. The situation, however, changed in the middle of this century, when a new model of development was implemented (Carvalho, s.d.).

Until the first half of this century the state intervention in the northeast was directly related to the drought phenomenon, which can be seen through the creation of IOCS,

DNOCS and SUDENE. The emergency assistance measures of those institutions did not aim at any transformation in regards to the agricultural economy; instead, it benefited the large landholders through the construction of wells and roads to improve the local infrastructure and ameliorate the effects of the drought. Due to the failure of these measures, the government has turned its attention to a transformation of the agricultural production and implemented a large-scale irrigation model (Carvalho, 1991).

The Brazilian government has turned its attention towards the development of the *São Francisco* Valley since the 1940's. In an effort to implement the development model underway in the Tennessee Valley in the United States, the government created several institutions to implement the new model based on irrigated agriculture, the construction of dams devoted to the production of electrical energy, as well as improve highways and the local infrastructure. This introduced a major change in the traditional local socio-economic structure which, as in other areas of the semi-arid, was based on subsistence agriculture and cattle raising.

The construction of one of the dams, the *Sobradinho* dam, was initiated in 1973 and completed in 1978. The work was administered by the São Francisco Hydroelectric Company (CHESF). The dam had a capacity of 34 billion cubic metres, flooded an area of 4,214 km², and displaced around 64,000 people (Andrade, 1984).

In order to co-ordinate the implementation of the new development model, the government created the CVSF (Commission of the São Francisco Valley) in 1948. Twenty years later new agricultural techniques and new crops, among them grapes, were introduced. In 1967, CVSF was substituted by SUVALE (Superintendency of the São Francisco Valley). Although the same orientation was maintained, the goal concerning the implementation of an integrated development was not accomplished. In 1974 SUVALE became extinct and the government created CODEVASF (Company for the Development of the São Francisco). The establishment of this institution was marked by a different goal in the development process. While CVSF was interested in including the small food producers located on the margins of

the river in the irrigation scheme, SUVALE prioritized a colonization project for selected public areas and CODEVASF focussed the priority on the private sector (Bloch, 1996a).

CODEVASF has played a very important role in the development of the region since its creation. The efficiency of CODEVASF has attracted large numbers of migrants from other regions who have become major actors in the development process in the valley. The institution is responsible for the planning and the integrated rural development of 640,000 km² of the *São Francisco* basin, but its major goal concerns the strengthening of public irrigation as well as the emphasis on private irrigation (Carvalho, 1991). CODEVASF has also acted upon the improvement of the regional infrastructure.

Within such an approach, CODEVASF has developed links with the World Bank (BIRD), The Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), and the Nagazoni Fund (Japanese government) in order to finance irrigation projects. Along with that, CODEVASF has given priority to the production of new crops, such as grapes (*Vitis Vinefera L.*) produced for export. Furthermore, for the purpose of the irrigation which has taken place for over a decade, CODEVASF considers two types of areas, one devoted to small producers and the other for large capitalist enterprises. For that purpose, the institution has distinguished the different types of settlements in the region according to their size. Those who own up to 12 hectares are considered *colonos*, i.e., small food producers, who acquired the land through colonization projects; those who own from 12 to 18 hectares are considered small entrepreneurs; properties between 18 and 60 hectares are considered of medium size; and properties over 60 hectares are considered capitalist enterprises (CODEVASF, 1993).

It is important to mention that *colonos*, those small food producers who became part of the colonization project during the 1970's and were able to receive public land, have continuously been selling their plots to others. In the majority of cases they have sold to those who are either medium or large landowners. Although this has been viewed as a "natural selection" process, they sell their plots because they are unable to keep them primarily because they have problems in the commercialization of their agricultural products;

they cannot compete with the lower prices set for the products by the medium and large landowners (Bloch, 1996a).

Being located on the margins of the *São Francisco* river, a privileged location, Petrolina is known as the “crossroads of progress” (*Encruzilhada do Progresso*) as it links the northeast to the rest of the nation. Petrolina became an important urban centre in the 1960's and 1970's and since that time the growth of the population has been high. Such a growth has been attributed to the large number of migrants who come to the city in search for jobs (CODEVASF, 1993). The urban population in Petrolina is 125,359 and the associated rural population accounts for 50,147 (IBGE, 1991), which demonstrates the concentration of the population in the urban sphere, including the immigrants. The urban population, including migrants, however, is mostly engaged in agricultural work in the irrigated estates. This concentration is a consequence of the capitalist model of irrigation development introduced into the region.

According to IBGE (Economic Census of Pernambuco 1950, 1960, 1980), at the end of the 1980 decade, the number of industrial establishments increased from 215 to 979 and the number of employees increased from 774 to 4,874 (CODEVASF, 1993). The number of jobs increased from 2,000 to more than 12,000 between 1960 and 1980, and the number of commercial establishments increased from 1,090 to 6,002 between the same period. In the last decade alone, the population growth was higher than 67 percent (IBGE, 1991; CODEVASF, 1993).

Most of the officially employed labour force in the population is concentrated in agriculture – 12,529. However, the population engaged in income-generating activities, including agriculture, is higher than that since many are not officially employed and their numbers do not appear in any records. This will be further discussed in Chapter V.

The growth of the economy characterized by the direction the development model has taken in the *Sertão do São Francisco*, particularly in the city of Petrolina, demonstrates the interest on the part of the government to emphasize and encourage capitalist development in

the semi-arid region. Capitalist development is taking place instead of an integrated development model which would also focus on the improvement of the quality of life in rural areas affected by the drought. Since viable solutions to the rural drought-prone semi-arid region are not given, the rural population moves massively to Petrolina to look for jobs and, as such, contributes to the concentration of capital taking place by offering labour power at low cost.

The development found in the *São Francisco* Valley clearly illustrates the political dynamics of the drought problem in northeastern Brazil. Located in the heart of the semi-arid region and surrounded by poverty-stricken regions, the entire *São Francisco* Valley actually benefits from such poverty as the masses of the poor flee to the city in search for work. The abundance of labour keeps labour costs down. Petrolina attracts not only migrant men, but migrant women as well. In the cultivation of grapes for export, the most important economic activity in the region, the number of women workers accounts for 60 to 65 percent of the labour utilized (Collins 1995:189; Bloch, 1996a:35).

In order to have a broader picture of the problem, I now turn to the situation of the drought-prone *sertão*, and narrow the discussion to the *sertão do Araripe*, the place of origin of some of the migrants consulted for the study. The drought-prone *sertão* was integrated into the colonization process by the Portuguese in response to the movement of the population from two important urban centres located on the coast, namely, Salvador and Olinda. These centres arose in association with the need for areas to be devoted to cattle raising to feed the population found on the coastal *zona da Mata*. Those new settlers had to deal with the native indigenous population and settle as far inland as the state of Piauí (Andrade, 1986:148). The first area in the *sertão* occupied by the Portuguese was the *sertão do São Francisco* in the sixteenth century (Andrade, 1986; Bloch, 1996a). After that, the population moved toward the north and settled in the *sertão do Araripe* (CONDEPE/FIDEPE/FIAM, 1982) (see Figure 3, page 55).

The specialization of the *sertão* on cattle raising and subsistence agriculture on the side arose as a complement to the plantation system that predominated on the coast, which was devoted to the production of sugar for export (Andrade, 1986:153-154). The population of *sertão* grew during the 19th century when the sugar economy collapsed and many of those who depended on sugar moved inland (Andrade, 1986:156).

The *sertão do Araripe*, located on the northwestern portion of the state of Pernambuco, is an area consisting predominantly of *minifundia* and the practice of subsistence agriculture. It is one of the poorest regions of the state because the majority of the population engages in subsistence agriculture and is extremely affected by the drought. In fact, when the drought strikes, the population loses the crops planted; the only money which circulates is from the retirement pensions of the elderly and the meagre salaries of those who engage in emergency work fronts (Portella et al., 1994). The number of wage labour opportunities in the rural areas is minimal since the medium and large landholdings are devoted to cattle raising, an activity demanding relatively little labour (CONDEPE/FIDEPE/FIAM, 1982).

The rural site of the study, the community of *Santa Luzia*, is located in the municipality of Ouricuri, a city with a population of 73,530 inhabitants (IBGE, 1991). The municipality occupies an area of 4,642.03 km² and the population density is 15.84 inhabitants per km². The urban population is made up of 22,734 inhabitants and the rural population consists of 50,796 inhabitants. Ouricuri presents a contrasting situation from Petrolina; Ouricuri population is concentrated in the rural sphere while the population of Petrolina is focussed in the urban sphere. Another contrasting feature between the two sites is the comparative growth rate for 1980 and 1991. Ouricuri had a total population of 63,948 in 1980 and in 1991 the population was 73,530 inhabitants (15 % increase); in 1980, Petrolina had a total population of 104,300 and in 1991 it rose to 175,506 inhabitants (68 % increase) (IBGE, 1991). Petrolina, therefore, had a much higher growth rate than Ouricuri.

These figures reflect the economic stagnation of the *sertão do Araripe* in response to concentration on agriculture, a poorly adapted activity for the region due to its ecological

conditions, and a high growth rate for Petrolina which, standing on the margins of the *São Francisco* River, benefits from irrigation and is also exposed to capitalist development. Ouricuri is located 210 km away from Petrolina; this short distance means there is a high migration flow to Petrolina and surrounding areas.

The underdevelopment of the *sertão do Araripe* is largely due to the failure by the government to implement a development model adapted to the conditions of the region. In contrast to the *sertão do São Francisco*, where the government has given serious attention to the creation of several institutions in favour of regional development, and has invested heavily in irrigation projects, the *sertão do Araripe*, together with other areas of the drought-prone semi-arid region, receives only emergency attention in times of crisis. The contrast between the two *sertões*, illustrates the government's interest in implementation and consolidation of capitalist development even though such a model may not benefit the whole population or the development of the northeastern region as a whole. The contrast also shows that the centre can be physically close to the periphery (Cardoso and Faletto, 1976) and that the development of the *São Francisco* region takes place at the expense of the underdevelopment of the *sertão do Araripe* and other areas of the drought-prone semi-arid.

CHAPTER V

MIGRANT WOMEN AND THE REALITY IN THEIR PLACE OF DESTINATION: PETROLINA AND THE SERTÃO DO SÃO FRANCISCO

The *sertão do São Francisco* region, in particular the *submédio São Francisco*, that is the lower middle valley, attracts migrants from rural drought-prone areas throughout the semi-arid region. These migrants contribute to the development of the region by supplying the labour force utilized in irrigated agriculture and other activities. This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the transformation migrant women go through in their place of destination as they face life conditions different from those found in the countryside. Women become exposed to distinct processes of knowledge and power through formal and information education, that is *conscientização*, as women are absorbed by the labour market, enter the public domain and engage in the construction of their new “selves”. The analysis will show how the transformation women go through is related to the global economic context as the lives of these women are intertwined with the demands of the global economy. The implications of those changes are analysed in the context of the drought and in the extent to which migrant women remain linked to their families in the drought-prone regions and mitigate the drought through their migration.

The high demand for women’s labour in irrigated agriculture has meant that migrant women tend to engage in agricultural work, but the study also focusses on migrant women who come to Petrolina to work in the domestic service sector. The migrant women in the study vary in terms of the work arrangements they participate in, and in terms of age, marital status, experiences in migration, place of residence, and attitude towards their place of origin.

Women who migrate to Petrolina differ from men in their attitudes toward the conditions in their place of destination. While the migrant women go through a process of change in the city, men do not seem to be affected to the same extent. The women's attitudes towards the conditions of life in their place of origin also differ from those of men.

Before focussing on the distinct categories of migrant women, that is domestic workers and agricultural workers (*avulso* and *fichado*), it is important to present a brief discussion of the regional development process, particularly in regards to the irrigation model applied, since this is what gives rise to migration within the region.

5.1. Irrigation, Development and Opportunities

Irrigated agriculture accounts for the most important economic activity in the *Sertão do São Francisco* region. Agribusinesses play an important role as they absorb the labour power of the migrants (Carvalho, 1991). 3.2 million hectares of land in Brazil is utilized for irrigated agriculture. In the *São Francisco* valley the total irrigated area is 250,000 hectares, and in the area of the *submédio São Francisco*, the lower middle valley – the research site – the irrigated areas account for a total of 90,000 hectares.

The production of fruits, sugar cane, onions and tomatoes is the main activity in the region; this sector of the economy is under expansion. Between 1987 and 1992, the production of fruits increased from 8 thousand to 55 thousand tons and the exportation increased from 600 tons to 28 thousand tons (Bloch, 1996a). Grapes and mangoes are the main products responsible for this increase. The adaptability of these fruits to the region has made the São Francisco Valley become one of the most important producing areas in Brazil. Out of US\$132 million of profit from the export of fruits in the country in 1993, US\$30 million (23%) consisted of the profit from grapes and mangoes in the region (CODEVASF, 1993).

In face of the role played by CODEVASF in large scale production and the high investment in the production of irrigated crops, grape production has become one of the most

important economic activities in the region. The region offers optimum weather conditions for the production of grapes; it benefits from 2,700 hours of sun per year, has a dry climate during most of the year (which is essential to avoid pests and fungi), and has good quality water. Grape production takes place throughout the year enabling two and a half harvests per year. Grapes can be harvested during the off-season of other regions. Enormous profits are realized in April, May and June, and October, November and December. The fruit is exported to Europe and the United States (Bloch, 1996a).

The production of grapes is a labour intensive activity requiring approximately five labourers per hectare. The production of grapes in the lower middle *São Francisco* Valley employs around twenty thousand workers in the four thousand hectares where the fruit is cultivated. Most of the activities are performed by women who do the pruning, picking and packing. Women account for 60 to 65 percent of the total number of workers (Collins, 1995; Bloch, 1996a). Men engage mostly in spraying for pesticides and in the supervision of women's work. Since grape production takes place throughout the year in the *São Francisco* Valley, women can normally find work.

The production and processing of tomatoes is another important economic activity in the valley. In contrast to grapes, however, tomato is not harvested throughout the year and the peak of the harvest season takes place from June to November (Carvalho, 1991). If we include the planting season, the tomato season starts in March as the producer has to wait from 70 to 85 days to harvest the crop. In 1989, with the support from SUDENE (in terms of investment), the production of tomato increased from 900 tons/day to 1,350 tons/day (Carvalho, 1991).

In the region of the lower middle *São Francisco* Valley tomato is produced for export, for the local market, as well as for local processing industries. The tomato pulp is sent to plants in São Paulo (the most industrialized centre located in the southern region of Brazil), such as CICA (*Companhia Industrial de Conservas Alimentícias*), and later exported to

several countries in North and South America and in Europe. Tomato production has made the region the second largest producing area in Brazil (Carvalho, 1991).

Some large-scale capitalist enterprises, that is, agribusinesses, rely on officially employed labourers (*fichado*) in the production of tomatoes. Medium-scale producers prefer to use daily labourers (*avulso*). Such a labour arrangement does not involve job security obligations toward the workers. The tomato harvest is seasonal, from June to November (CODEVASF, 1993), in contrast to grape cultivation, which continues throughout the year. Therefore, when the harvest of tomatoes is over, the labourers usually work with other crops, such as onions and barbados cherry (*Malpigia glabra L.*).

In the production of tomatoes, women's labour is preferred over men's. Women do the planting, clearing and picking of tomatoes and men mostly load the trucks and supervise women's work. According to tomato producers, women are preferred because they are very careful in their performance, whereas the men are not; considered careless, the men are believed to even damage the plants when picking. There is also the view that it is easier to negotiate with women about their wages. Such a rationalization for the utilization of women's work is the basis for women's exploitation. Since the *avulso* women workers are desperate for work, they usually engage in the tasks even when the pay is low.

Despite the preference grape and tomato producers have for women's labour over men's labour, women's tasks are rated inferior to men's. This is the case even though women workers are considered more reliable than men. Women perform the most difficult and the least prestigious work, while men's contribution in wage labour is seen as much higher in prestige, despite the fact that most of the work is performed by women and women are extremely valuable to the industry. The rationalization of gender differences for labour needs is common in this context. The technical division of labour, which is highly arbitrary, acquires the characteristics of a gender division of labour. Much of the literature on women's work in labour-intensive production systems argues that the view is that they possess unique capacities for the tasks they perform (Valdés, 1992 cited in Collins, 1995:187-188).

Where employers require women to monitor and make judgements about the quality of the crop, the work is deemed related to “cosmetics” demanded by the consumer in the external market (Valdes, 1992 in Collins, 1995:187-188). When entrepreneurs were asked why women were preferred, they stated that women were better at selecting quality fruits.

Women play an important role in the production of grapes and tomatoes. However, the type of labour arrangements in which they engage, *fichado*, that is, official agricultural labour, and *avulso*, that is, undocumented agricultural labour, involve different work conditions.

Domestic workers do not seem to have a problem finding work in Petrolina, an urban centre with a high socio-economic development level constantly receiving investors from throughout Brazil and other countries. In urban centres throughout Latin America the domestic services sector usually absorbs the labour force of migrant women soon upon their arrival (Jelin, 1977). This is especially true when the city is exposed to high levels of development, as is Petrolina. Petrolina does not have an organized domestic labourers' union such as the Rural Labourers Union (STR), to which the *fichado* agricultural workers belong. Domestic workers and, to a lesser extent, *avulso* workers (who also lack a union) have difficulties in mobilizing as a political force.

The participation of migrant women in irrigated agriculture and in the domestic services sector is addressed below, but I will first discuss the role of the STR (Rural Labourers Union) in the different agricultural work arrangements affecting migrants and also the role women play in the Union.

5.2. The Rural Labourers Union and Employment in Petrolina

The role of the Rural Labourers Union in the *Sertão do São Francisco* has been largely influenced and shaped by the route the regional development process has taken. Before the mid 1970's, when the presence of wage labour was minor, the Union focussed its attention on the small food producers and small landowners in the region. This period also

coincided with the time Brazil was in the hands of the military government (from 1964 to 1985) and the political actions of unions were limited. During that period, Rural Labourers Unions concentrated more on assisting the population with health programmes (dentists and doctors were available to treat the population) and some of the union members and leaders were appointed by the government to occupy leadership positions (Parisius, 1995). The Rural Labourer's Union represents the workers at the government level and is officially recognized by the government but is not controlled by the government. However, the military government did not support the autonomy of unions.

In the mid 1970's, when the construction of dams was taking place, the Union became involved with the displaced population. The consolidation of this development model was accompanied by the introduction of new crops in the region by CODEVASF which led to the rise in employment opportunities. From that period on the Union has devoted its attention to the wage labourers and their rights as workers, although it still gives attention to small food producers, that is both small landowners and *colonos*, those settlers who have benefited from colonization programmes.

The Union is hierarchically structured and benefits from the participation of its members who vote on decisions which would affect them. Thus, it is democratically structured. The Union also benefits from input by experienced lawyers. The objective of the Union is to protect the rights of wage workers and represent their needs at the municipal, state and national levels. The Union is responsible for negotiating the workers' salaries with the employers. The STR, the Rural Labourers Union, functions at the municipality level, FETAPE (the Federation of Agricultural Workers in Pernambuco) embraces all of the Unions at the state level, and CONTAG (the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers) operates at the national level (Portella, 1995).

The Rural Labourers Union in Petrolina has played an important role in informal education, through *conscientização*, of the agricultural wage labourers (Bloch, 1996b). The directorship is made up of men but women actively participate as *delegado(as)*, an important

position representing the Union at the work level, that is on the capitalist agribusinesses. The *delegado(as)* occupy the position of intermediaries as they deal both with the Union and the employers. The *delegado(as)* are, therefore, the representatives of the workers with respect to their rights, and their role is to advocate in favour of the workers. The *delegado(as)* are expected to report any problems in the work place to the Union so that action can be taken.

It is interesting that the majority of the *delegado(as)* in the Rural Labourers Union in Petrolina who are elected by vote are women; out of a total of 28 *fichado delegado(as)*, 16 are women. The role of women as *delegado(as)* demonstrates that women occupy power positions and have the support of the workers, including the men. The *delegado(as)* are given time off work to participate in meetings and have employment security during the two year period they are Union representatives. Although the majority of the *delegado(as)* are women and their position is certainly prestigious, no woman has ever occupied a position in the directorship of the Labourers Union. This shows that women have access to limited power in the political arena of the Union. The position of *delegado(as)* is rated second in the Union hierarchy since the directorship, in charge of the approval of all measures, comes first. The absence of women from the Unions' directorship clearly reflects the construct of women as subordinate in agriculture, an activity in which men have been playing a major role. This is the case even in a context where women's work is visible.

Not all Rural Labourers Unions are active, but the one in Petrolina is. That Union is very organized and has succeeded in assuring worker rights. In the 1990's, the Union has been negotiating worker salaries with the employers and through such negotiations it has been able to increase the local workers' salary above the minimum wage paid in the whole country. In February 1994 the first collective agreement was signed, which was a significant occasion for the Union and the workers. The agreement was so important that it involved the participation of the Brazilian Minister of Labour (Bloch, 1996b). The agreement was valid for one year and negotiations again took place in February 1995. In 1995 the labourers received a minimum salary with an increase of 10 percent - US\$110.00 per month. Beyond the increase in salary,

the workers also benefited from an improvement in work conditions, such as the utilization of buses instead of trucks to transport the workers to their place of work, and the protection of workers from contact with pesticides (Sindicato de Petrolina, 1995). The Union's power to mobilize the work force makes the employers cautious when negotiating with the Union.

Despite its effort, the Union has not succeeded in the *conscientização* of the *avulso* labourers – those who work on a daily basis and have no official tie with the employer. One of the objectives of the Union is to eradicate the *avulso* type of work arrangement since it does not comply with the struggle for fair working conditions. This, however, seems to be a very ambitious project since this labour arrangement not only attracts the unemployed migrants after they first arrive in the city, but those who have lost faith in the *fichado*, that is, the official type of labour arrangement.

Access to *avulso* labourers is difficult due to the fact that they do not have a permanent place to work, nor a regular work schedule. The Union conducts regular meetings with the *fichado* workers at their place of work, but is unable to do so with the *avulso* labourers. Through the support of Neighbourhood associations, the Union tries to meet *avulso* workers in the neighbourhoods where they live. Four *delegado(as)* have also been appointed among *avulso* workers. Their role is basically to inform the Union about the general working conditions of the *avulso* work arrangement. The *avulso* workers do not have a regular work schedule and sometimes return home from work late at night. Therefore, they are unable to attend the meetings. The role of the appointed *avulso delegado(as)* is limited since access to the workers is difficult.

There is thus a polarization between the Union and the *avulso* workers. The Union believes that the *avulso* work arrangement propagates the exploitation of the workers and contributes to polarization of *avulso* and *fichado* workers. A Union leader stated:

The existence of the type of *avulso* work is a shame for us in the Union; while we try to defend the workers, there are those who do not want to follow us and do not believe in our good intention. By engaging in daily/*avulso* work they spoil our struggle (Mario, member of the directorship of the Rural Labourers Union).

Some *avulso* workers do not appear to be critical of the Rural Labourers Union. To the contrary, when asked what they thought about the Union, the *avulso* consultants rated it high. However, they do not appear to be conscious of the problematic nature of *avulso* work for the overall struggle of the Union and the workers. As one of my consultants stated:

The Union works hard to protect the *fichado* workers, it is good! But to be able to find work as *fichado* is hard; the person has to be lucky. (Ana, a 42 year old *avulso* worker).

Furthermore, although some of those who engage in *avulso* work would like to work *fichado* because of the uncertainty of finding work as *avulso*, many do not find it beneficial to work permanently for an employer. As one of my consultants stated:

It is bad to work *avulso* because every day is a struggle. We never know if we will bring money home, but despite that, we are free. If we do not like the employer we work for, we have to put up with him only for the day, that is it, and we are free (Almira, a 46 years old *avulso* worker).

Through the statements from consultants, it is evident that the Union indeed has serious problems in reaching the *avulso* workers and in making them aware of the benefits that *fichado* workers have over the *avulso* type of work arrangement. Despite the uncertainty in finding work for the day, *avulso* workers do have more flexibility in their work schedule. This aspect seems to attract the unemployed to the *avulso* work arrangement.

Another problem for permanent workers, that is, the *fichado* workers, is that sometimes the workers are laid off within two to three months. This poses a serious problem for the workers and discourages them. As one of my consultants stated:

Why should I worry about getting a job as *fichado*? The last time I found one, I worked for only three months and was laid off. That is not fair because the severance pay I received was nothing. I have to survive engaging in *avulso* work, there is not a way out (Creusa, 48 years old).

This is a problem regarding the *fichado* labour arrangement that the Rural Labourers Union has been unable to resolve. Once a worker is hired as a *fichado*, the Union cannot guarantee work stability. The capitalist entrepreneurs benefit by laying off workers hired on a short term basis because they do not have to pay the benefits they would have to pay a worker who has been hired for a year or longer (Sindicato de Petrolina, 1995).

The problem between the two different types of work arrangements in irrigated agriculture in Petrolina is a difficult one. On one hand, the Rural Labourers Union attempts to educate the workers by *conscientização* about their rights, but on the other hand one can appreciate the difficulties and needs of the *avulso* workers. The Union's efforts to raise consciousness of workers is an important step in the mobilization of the labour force. According to Freire (1980:35), "the more individuals reflect upon their reality and their concrete situation, the more conscious and committed the population is to intervene in that reality in an attempt to change it". The exposure to the process of *conscientização* entails a positive experience for both women and men workers as they reflect upon their situation as migrant workers and become aware of the need to intervene in a reality based on the exploitation of the work force. Those workers can intervene by mobilizing as a labour force through awareness of their rights.

The *conscientização* process is of great importance to women *fichado* workers. Coming from drought-prone areas, some of these women never had access to wage labour and were never exposed to capitalist labour processes. Once exposed to these new life conditions, women grow not only as labourers but as women as they enter the public domain and become exposed to new relations of power and to new knowledge. The entrance into the public domain is very meaningful for these women. Access to wage employment and to *conscientização* lead these women to face changes and undergo a partial transformation.

The new experiences are very important and not only raise women's self-esteem, but make them visible to themselves, to their households and to society more generally. The demonstration of an explicit power is one of the most important changes migrant women undergo in the city. The changes these women go through, however, do not imply that they become totally liberated since they remain exploited both in their households and society. Despite these circumstances, women's self-esteem increases as they renegotiate power relations in the household sphere.

The existence of both *fichado* and *avulso* wage labour side by side is a product of the consolidation of capitalism. The Rural Labourers Union plays an important role in regards to the protection of *fichado* workers' rights, however, it is unable to stop the exploitation of

avulso labourers. The *avulso* labour arrangement offers considerable benefits to the capitalist sector; employers are not obliged to protect the workers' rights, which keeps labour costs very low. Beyond the low wages paid to *avulso* labourers, the workers have no job security and are faced with poor working conditions. As a result of the continuous flow of men and women fleeing poverty-stricken situations in drought-prone areas, it is unlikely that the Union can stop the exploitation of the newcomers. The role of the Union can only be successful if the government is willing to change the focus of large development programmes, implement efficient measures toward the development of the drought-prone *Sertão*, and introduce an appropriate model for development of the region. These measures would decrease the out-migration flow from the areas affected by the drought.

Most employers are selective when hiring women to work as *fichado*, despite the pressure from the Rural Labourers Union. They usually avoid hiring women who are in their reproductive years and who have not been sterilized, in order to avoid paying for maternity leaves. Sterilization of lower class women has been a practice to which many women have been exposed. This has been the case even of women in their twenties who have more than three or four children. Although women have the right to make decisions about undergoing or not sterilization, many of these women make the option for sterilization without being aware of the implications involved in an irreversible practice. As far as the labour market is concerned, sterilized women seem to be preferred over non-sterilized women workers. Employers also avoid hiring elderly women (those over 45). The justification the capitalist employers use is that these women do not have the energy and commitment to work like middle aged and younger women.

The region of the *sub-médio São Francisco*, the lower middle valley, attracts and employs a large portion of the population from the drought-prone semi-arid area. As a consequence of the instability of women and men workers, of their engagement on either *avulso* and *fichado* workers as well as on the number of women and men who keep coming and going, it is very difficult to calculate the number of migrants employed in *fichado* and *avulso* work.

The employers are obviously clever in defending their own interests. In face of such a situation, we see the strong commitment of the Rural Labourers Union in the struggle to protect the rights of the workers. The following discussion focusses on the migrant workers in Petrolina in *avulso*, *fichado* and the *domestic services*.

5.3. *Avulso* Workers

5.3.1. The Women *Avulso* Workers

The women who comprise this category are undocumented daily workers who engage in the production of tomatoes and in the production of other crops such as onions and barbados cherry in the tomato off-season. These women do not have an official employment tie with their employers and, as daily labourers, work in anything that is available in times of need.

Women *avulso* workers come from drought-prone areas throughout the northeast of Brazil. Six of the consultants in the study were originally from the state of Piauí, two from the state of Rio Grande do Norte and two from Pernambuco. The women *avulso* workers are usually middle aged or elderly, although there are also younger women, most of whom are daughters of *avulso* workers. The level of literacy of these women is low; three of them were literate and could read and write, two could only sign their names and the other five were illiterate. Among the *avulso* workers, the number of women is about 60 to 70 percent higher than the number of men. Out of the ten women consultants, five were married, two were widows and the remaining three were separated. All of these women were married when they came to Petrolina, and it was in the city that they became separated or widowed and took on the position of heads of their households.

The average family size of these women was over five individuals, including the husbands among those still married. In one case, however, an elderly woman (66 years old) lived with her teenage grandson since all of her sons and daughters were married. In three of the cases, the husbands were unemployed and sometimes joined their wives in search for daily work (see Table 1).

Table 1: Women *Avulso* Workers

Pseudonym	State Origin	Age	Marital Status	Literacy Level	Urban Household Size	Number of Income Contributors	Destination of First Migration	Time in Petrolina	First Work Experience	Husband's Employment
Ana	Piauí	42	married	literate	4	2	Petrolina	<2 years	domestic	unemployed
Almira	Rio Grande do Norte	46	married	can sign name	5	2	Petrolina	<2 years	domestic	unemployed
Creusa	Piauí	48	separated	illiterate	6	1	SE Brazil	>2 years	domestic	
Severina	Piauí	66	widowed	illiterate	2	1	SE Brazil	>2 years	domestic	
Maria	Piauí	54	married	illiterate	6	2	Petrolina	<2 years	<i>avulso</i>	garage shop
Raimunda	Pernambuco	45	separated	literate	8	2	SE Brazil	>2 years	domestic	
Carmelita	Piauí	49	separated	illiterate	8	1	SE Brazil	>2 years	domestic	
Teresa	Rio Grande do Norte	36	married	literate	4	2	Petrolina	<2 years	<i>avulso</i>	unemployed
Madalena	Pernambuco	36	married	can sign name	9	1	Petrolina	<2 years	domestic	sporadic market trader
Rosalva	Piauí	57	widowed	illiterate	3	1	SE Brazil	>2 years	<i>avulso</i>	

The experience in migration is important to understand these *avulso* migrant women in my study. 50 percent of these women came to Petrolina over two years earlier; the remaining 50 percent settled in the city more recently. The five women who settled in Petrolina for a period of two years or more were mostly elderly and had migrated to southeastern Brazil before migrating to Petrolina. These women had also engaged in the *fichado* type of labour arrangement and/or in domestic work during this time. These women, however, decided to engage in *avulso* work permanently and have no intention of being hired as *fichado* workers.

These *avulso* women workers have given up on the *fichado* type of labour arrangement and are aware that employers have no interest in hiring them. According to them, working *fichado* is not particularly beneficial since the workers are obliged to a tight schedule. Beyond that, although they recognize that the *fichado* workers have some working benefits, they have no job security and can be laid off at any time. These women who were critical of the *fichado* labour arrangement, however, were engaged in a network and benefited from short-term work contracts as *avulso* workers. Therefore, their working conditions were not as uncertain as those of the newly settled migrant *avulso* workers who sometimes spend several days without work.

The five women who have settled in the city for less than two years migrated to Petrolina straight from their rural villages. Petrolina has been attracting many migrants in recent years. Once in Petrolina, three of these women first engaged in domestic work and the other two in *avulso* work. They have never engaged in the *fichado* type of labour arrangement. Those recent migrants who initially engaged in domestic work did so because their relatives in Petrolina found them jobs. After their arrival in the city, the majority of the consultants (seven of ten) first were employed in the domestic service sector and only later took jobs in irrigated agricultural work. The domestic service sector often absorbs the newly arrived migrant women's labour.

The women's quick absorption in the domestic service sector, while benefiting the whole family, in some cases caused problems within the family since the husbands were upset and jealous for being unemployed for a longer period than their wives. It was the low pay in

domestic services and the opportunities available to work in irrigated agriculture that made those women abandon the domestic service sector. The three women who first engaged in *avulso* work did so because that was the only labour arrangement they had access to. The quick absorption of women by the labour market reiterates the point made by many, including Bruhl (1988), that migrant women have an easier time finding work in the city than men do. Despite the benefits of women's employment to the women themselves and to the whole family, the consultants reported to me that such a situation can cause a breakdown in a marriage. In woman-headed households (often women separated from their husbands) where women are the sole breadwinners, the older offspring stay at home to care for younger siblings.

The *avulso* type of work arrangement appears to be a fall back for the unemployed and also contributes to the development of the region through lowered costs to capitalist employers who have no obligations to the daily labourers. The *avulso* type of labour arrangement is a type of underemployment in which the workers are exploited. Although being politically inactive, women who consider themselves "permanently" engaged in this type of work arrangement, especially elderly women, mobilize on a solidarity basis and are able to benefit from "short-term contracts". Despite the "undocumented" nature of the "contracts", the situation for women who work in teams is better than that of those who do not, usually newly arrived migrants.

Although the women *avulso* workers face uncertainty in this type of labour, there is a strong solidarity among fellow women. The solidarity among these women may build on kinship ties, but it is the work conditions they face that focusses their solidarity. In times of need, these women mobilize to help one another. I witnessed a case of a woman stepping aside to give the opportunity to another woman who had no work for a week. I noticed that sometimes the basis for such solidarity was the place of origin of those involved. Women who had come from the same village or even the same state have a tendency to be closer to each other and to mobilize together around their common condition.

There is an *avulso* worker leader in *Santo Antônio* well known by many employers for her responsibility and good performance as a worker. She is contacted to form a work team

when the entrepreneurs need labourers. Dona Maria, as she is called, is a 54 year old hard working woman responsible for finding *avulso* labourers usually for short term contracts. I was able to accompany Dona Maria in search of workers. Sometimes this was done at night since employers contacted her at the last minute.

It was also interesting to notice the preference of Dona Maria for women workers. According to her own words, women were much more responsible than men and easier to deal with. Some men would become upset with Dona Maria when they were not performing the tasks well and she called it to their attention in the fields. However, despite her preference for women workers, she would not totally refuse to hire men, and they were grateful for that. Although Dona Maria preferred to hire men to perform the tasks considered more appropriate for men, such as loading tomatoes on trucks, in times of great need she would hire them to perform what men considered women's tasks. Dona Maria is well accepted among the other women workers. She does not earn more money than the other workers, which is unusual for leaders of working teams.

The life conditions for *avulso* workers were precarious and their families were poorly fed. This was particularly the case when the *avulso* women workers were the sole breadwinners, true not only for women who were heads of their households, but also for the wives of unemployed and underemployed men. The husbands engaged in activities in the informal sector, such as bartering in local markets or working in garage shops. These men did not earn enough to feed their families by themselves, thus the women had to have an income. In fact, when there was *avulso* work available through contracts, the women *avulso* workers earned more than their husbands. In four of the consultants' households, including three where the husband was unemployed, there were other members who had employment, daughters engaged in domestic work and sons engaged in industrial work. In these cases most of the responsibilities fell to the women, and their offspring only helped in critical periods. In the case of women-headed households, however, the contribution of the offspring was clearly higher.

During the time of the fieldwork all of the *avulso* women consultants were employed, but the uncertainty of their employment meant they were in fact underemployed. Despite their

complaints about this work arrangement, they all recognized that it was something they could rely on. Sometimes the unemployed husbands (three out of five married couples) also engaged in *avulso* labour. These men, however, were very bitter about their situation and, on some occasions, were abusive towards their wives. The three separated women heads of their households reported that the unemployment of husbands can be detrimental to a marriage. Unemployed men usually decide to return to their place of origin during the rainy season; if their wives refuse to accompany them, they end up separating.

The tasks performed by *avulso* workers are difficult. They have to work in high temperatures for long hours and are exposed to dangerous pesticides. In picking tomatoes, for example, *avulso* women do not wear gloves and thus are directly exposed to the strong pesticides. Some women have become ill and have been forced to quit working. Furthermore, their earning is relatively low. They earn 20 US cents to fill a 20 kg box of tomatoes. Since workers are paid on the basis of their output, the higher their production the higher the pay. Sometimes an experienced *avulso* worker can earn more than a *fichado* worker makes in a day. However, *avulso* workers usually earn around US\$4.00 to US\$5.00 per day and are not paid higher for extra hours. When they work steadily for a month, this adds up to US\$80.00, which is certainly less than the salary of the *fichada* women workers.

The economic situation of the *avulso* workers' households is very difficult to calculate on a monthly basis. This is a result of the uncertainty of their work schedules and sometimes of their husbands' work, particularly among those who work in the informal sector. If one considers that the *avulso* worker's salary is US\$80.00 per month, this amount barely fulfills the needs of their households. Having to cover their living expenses in the city, these migrant women are unable to send remittances to their families back home, especially when they have to pay rent. Many of those who live in Santo Antônio participated in the invasion of the area in 1986 and succeeded in acquiring their houses through pressure on the government.¹⁰

¹⁰ The rise of the peripheral neighbourhood of Santo Antônio resulted from an invasion of public land initiated in February 1986. A number of homeless families formed by migrants from drought-prone areas mobilized and occupied public land in the outskirts of Petrolina. These families received rights over the invaded area in July 1987. A month later the Neighbourhood Association was formed. The Association's leaders, along with the families

However, only three of my women consultants owned their homes and therefore did not have to pay for rent. The costs associated with house ownership are low since the services available in Santo Antônio are limited. The seven other women had to pay rent that varied from US\$15.00 to US\$30.00 a month. They also have to pay for electricity and water, which is approximately US\$20.00. Food and other expenses take up the remainder of their salaries. The parents of young children and teenagers did not have to pay for school since it is provided by the municipal government.

The elderly *avulso* workers do not have the support of organizations such as the Rural Labourers Union or grassroots organizations in regard to their retirement rights. Two of my consultants were over 55, the age a woman worker can retire and receive a state pension according to Brazilian law. These women, however, were not retired and the reason they gave me was that it was complicated and expensive to gather the necessary documentation, such as a birth certificate, from their place of origin. When I asked employers why they employed elderly women and did not protect their rights, the employers stated that these women were already retired and were accumulating an income along with their retirement pensions. According to my consultants and many other elderly *avulso* workers to whom I had access, that was not the case.

When women are the sole breadwinners of their families, they offer their labour for low wages from which the capitalist sector derives benefit. Even though women are exploited both in the household and in their employment, it is undeniable that they experience some benefit from their limited (under)employment; receiving an income and being able to feed their families increases their self-esteem.

Women *avulso* workers live under very poor conditions in the city. Still, these women consider life in the city better than that in their place of origin and they are unwilling to return to the rural areas. According to them, they face an unbearable discrimination in rural areas. They recognize that they were not totally powerless there, but they cannot express their power outside the domestic domain.

participating in the invasion, succeeded in pressuring the government to acquire construction material to build their houses as well as provide services such as electricity and running water.

Avulso women workers also derive benefit from involvement in a solidarity network with their fellow women, even though the Rural Labourers Union does not temper their exploitation by their employers. Women's autonomy is reflected in their relationship with the men, whose dominant position is threatened when they no longer have control of their households. These are circumstances when women are not hesitant to separate from their husbands. The separated women consultants also stated that they would be regarded badly for having abandoned their husbands if they were to return to their place of origin. All of these factors contribute to women's preference for life in the city.

5.3.2. The Men *Avulso* Workers

Although more women than men work in *the avulso* type of work, men are clearly visible in this work category. The men, however, are much more dissatisfied with this type of work arrangement than the women and do not engage in this type of work on a permanent basis, but usually only when they are unemployed. Newly arrived migrant men who have limited work offers often have to continue as *avulso* workers longer than they desire. The two men consultants I interviewed in this work category were both desperate to find other types of work showing a great dissatisfaction with their situation. Both were married and their wives were also *avulso* workers. One of the men, Raimundo, had been unemployed for six months and the other, Mario, for four months.

Mario stated that he becomes totally discouraged after returning home without finding any work for three days in a row. He keeps trying to find employment in construction since that was what he was doing before. Discouraged, unemployed men spend several days without trying to find *avulso* work. During that period, the wife *avulso* worker has the sole responsibility of feeding the family. Despite the difficulty of such a situation for women, it contributes to a rise in their self-esteem since this would be unlikely to take place in the countryside. The other consultant Raimundo, stated:

It is not easy for a man to keep walking to *Asa Branca* (the place where daily labourers are picked up) in search for a job for the day, and to return home without a penny. That is not the case with women, for them anything is good, even when the employer offers low pay, they go. For men, it is different, we

are not satisfied with little money. The situation here in Petrolina is hard for men. I wish I could return back to the place I come from... but when I think about the drought, I am afraid (Raimundo, 47 years old).

From Raimundo's statement we see that men consider their work to be more valuable than that of women and are thus dissatisfied with the conditions they face. Men's idea reflects the culturally constructed view of women as inferior and thus satisfied with little.

Men's labour is considered more prestigious than women's, hence, men's participation in the *avulso* type of work is less than women's. This clearly shows the disadvantageous situation for women in the gender division of labour as they occupy non-prestigious positions and live with underemployment.

5.3.3. Neighbourhood Mobilization Limitations among *Avulso* Workers

All of the *avulso* consultants live in *Santo Antônio* - a neighbourhood located in the outskirts of Petrolina. There is no strong presence of NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) or religious grassroots organizations in Santo Antônio or in other poor neighbourhoods in Petrolina. According to leaders of neighbourhood associations, this is explained by the passive role of the Catholic church in these communities and the important role of the local municipal government in Petrolina. The Catholic church in Petrolina is known to be conservative and uninvolved in popular movements among the poor, in contrast with the role of the church in other urban settlements and even in rural areas.

In *Santo Antônio* the attention of the local government can also be seen as the result of pressure from the *Associação dos Moradores* (Neighbourhood Association), which is very active and has been responsible for the many improvements found in the neighbourhood, such as access to running water and electricity, day care centres, a medical station and other services. Migrant women form the leadership in the Association. However, few of my agricultural worker consultants were members. They were not interested in political mobilization at the neighbourhood level. Although I understood that their work schedule did not allow them time and energy to participate in meetings, when I asked them why they did not participate in the Association, they stated that they did not believe in mobilization, even

though they were beneficiaries of the improvements which have been taking place. As one of my *avulso* consultants stated:

I do not believe in the *Associação*, I have no time for that. For me, the Association is for those women who have time to go to the city every day to ask favours from the politicians. This is not for me. If I do not work hard, my family starves (Raimunda, 45 year old *avulso* worker).

According to the leader of the Association, a migrant herself, such a response is due to the lack of knowledge of the struggle of the Association and of the benefits it brings for the whole population. It is difficult for her to reach the agricultural workers because of their work schedules. The *avulso* workers are not always available to attend meetings although sometimes they can spend several days without work. The Rural Labourers Union have the same difficulty trying to reach the *avulso* workers. It is my sense that the *avulso* workers lack interest in collective activities because they place such a high priority on providing food for their families.

I was able to observe the dynamics of the Neighbourhood Association, particularly in Santo Antônio, since I was not only close to the directorship, but received full support from them. I could see the social stratification in the association. The president and vice-president were care-takers of the local day care centres and not only had more time available than the agricultural workers, but were financially better off because their husbands were also employed. That was also the case for most of the other members who were highly politicized. The few *avulso* and *fichado* workers who were members of the Association took advantage of the day care centres, but were rarely present at the meetings and were politically disengaged.

5.4. *Fichado* Workers

5.4.1. Women *Fichado* Workers

The situation of *fichado* women workers is very distinct from that of *avulso*. The *fichado* workers are officially employed, have their rights respected, have a stable income and also have support of the Rural Labourers Union. The ten consultants I utilized were all employed in grape production in the same enterprise, the *Fazenda Campo Verde*, where part

of the data collection was undertaken. Of the ten consultants, three lived in *Santo Antônio* and the remaining seven lived in different neighbourhoods all located on the outskirts of the city of Petrolina.

These migrant workers came from various locations in the drought-prone semi-arid areas. Three migrated from the state of Paraíba, two from Ceará, three from Rio Grande do Norte and the remaining two from Pernambuco. The literacy level of these women also varied. Four of them were able to read and write, four were able to sign their names and two were illiterate. Five of my consultants were married and the other five were separated. However, they were all married when they migrated to the city. The age of these women ranged from their late twenties to mid forties and their family size ranged from four to eight individuals, including the husband if there was one. All of them had migrated to the city more than three years earlier. Five of them had first began working in the domestic service sector upon their arrival in Petrolina and the remaining five first engaged in the *avulso* type of work arrangement (see Table 2).

As in the case of tomato production, grape production relies heavily on women's labour; women constitute 60 to 65 percent of the work force (Collins, 1995; Bloch, 1996a). The men who worked in the vineyards did the spraying for pesticides and the supervision of women's work. Six of the women had worked in the *Fazenda Campo Verde* between two to four years; the remaining four had been working there for only six months. Thus, I considered the latter semi-permanent labourers. Never having migrated anywhere else, all of the *fichado* women worker consultants had their first migration experience in Petrolina. Two of these women's husbands were also employed as *fichado* workers in the same enterprise; one was engaged in construction work, another worked as a mechanic, and the other one was unemployed.

As was the case of women *avulso* workers, all of the women *fichado* workers stated that after their arrival in the city they were able to find jobs more quickly than their husbands, causing tension within the family. *Fichado* women workers' husbands, as well as the men *fichado* workers, did not adjust to city life as easily as the women did. The women felt the city offered more employment and other opportunities than the rural areas.

Table 2: Women *Fichado* Workers

Pseudonym	State Origin	Age	Marital Status	Literacy Level	Urban Household Size	Number of Income Contributors	Destination of First Migration	Time in Petrolina	First Work Experience	Husband's Employment
Rita	Paraíba	29	separated	literate	6	2	Petrolina	>3 years	domestic	
Amélia	Rio Grande do Norte	36	married	can sign name	6	2	Petrolina	>3 years	domestic	construction
Maria	Paraíba	37	separated	can sign name	4	1	Petrolina	>3 years	<i>avulso</i>	
Alice	Pernambuco	36	separated	literate	5	1	Petrolina	>3 years	domestic	
Luzia	Ceará	30	married	literate	7	2	Petrolina	>3 years	domestic	<i>fichado</i> worker
Cidinha	Pernambuco	39	married	can sign name	8	2	Petrolina	>3 years	<i>avulso</i>	mechanic
Rosilda	Rio Grande do Norte	27	married	illiterate	8	1	Petrolina	>3 years	domestic	unemployed
Maria José	Rio Grande do Norte	44	separated	can sign name	4	1	Petrolina	>3 years	<i>avulso</i>	
Joaquina	Ceará	45	married	illiterate	8	2	Petrolina	>3 years	<i>avulso</i>	<i>fichado</i> worker
Teresa	Paraíba	40	separated	literate	6	3	Petrolina	>3 years	<i>avulso</i>	

The working conditions those *fichado* women workers were exposed to were very different from those of the *avulso* workers. With “rights” as documented workers, *fichado* women were much more respected than the *avulso* workers. The *Fazenda Campo Verde*, an establishment of 80 hectares devoted to the production of grapes and mangoes for export, utilized loan funds from SUDENE. The *Fazenda Campo Verde*, therefore, had to follow requirements imposed by the funding agency as well as by the Rural Labourers Union regarding treatment of employees. In contrast to the *avulso* workers, the *fichado* workers were transported to work by bus and there was a health care centre on site in case the workers were hurt in the work place.

The production of grapes involves the use of strong pesticides. Those responsible for spraying must wear protective clothing, including a mask during application. Some workers do not comply with the rules since, according to them, the protective clothing is too hot for the local weather conditions. Women prune, pick and pack grapes and are not expected to work during the period when the spraying is done in order to avoid contamination from pesticides.

Although *fichado* women workers had complaints about their jobs, including their obligation to work overtime when there was the need, they strongly prefer the *fichado* type of work over the *avulso* type of work arrangement. They have become sensitized to the importance of being officially employed. One of my consultants stated:

Working *fichado* is not the best because we feel we have to respect the work schedule, but it is better than working *avulso*. *Avulso* is the worst type of arrangement because you never know if you will find work. Also the “bosses” do not respect the Union and they pay whatever they want. In our case, we have the Union on our side, but in their case, they have nobody” (Rita, 29 years old).

The Rural Labourers Union has been very successful in providing informal education, and in make the *conscientização* of the *fichado* workers possible. In contrast to the *avulso* workers, I detected a commitment to mobilization among the *fichado* women workers. Besides the role played by the *delegada*, who represents the Union at the work place and advocates for the protection of workers rights, I noticed that all of the women workers were outspoken in

regards to their rights when I had the opportunity to observe several meetings involving the employer and the workers.

The role of the Rural Labourers Union, a dimension absent in the case of the *avulso* workers, is important for its focus on the *conscientização* of the *fichado* workers. The *delegada* is herself a worker. Her exposure to the conditions of her fellow workers is instrumental in achieving worker solidarity. By Union requirement, monthly meetings are held with all workers in their work place. This is acknowledged by the employers.

Women who come from poverty stricken regions with no access to wage labour have never been exposed to political mobilization. The informal education they acquire from the Union teaches them important lessons, primarily in regards to their conditions of work. *Fichado* type of work enables women to have access to an income, but it also exposes them to a process of political *conscientização* regarding their work conditions.

A parallel between the *avulso* and the *fichado* workers can be seen in the role of an intermediary in both types of work arrangements. In the case of the *avulso* workers, Dona Maria plays a very important role in coordinating women to work in teams. Among the *fichado* workers, however, the role played by the *delegada* is quite different since she represents the Union; her importance as a leader is very obvious to the workers.

Tereza, the *delegada* for *Fazenda Campo Verde*, is a very active woman who has done a superb job in conciliating the negotiations of the workers' rights between the Union and the employers. She is separated and is the head of her household and a good leader among her fellow workers. The financial situation of the *delegada* (who does not earn a salary for the position she occupies in the Union) and her fellow *fichado* workers is much better than that of the *avulso* workers. Their steady work gives them higher earnings than the *avulso* workers, which means they are better able to manage household expenses.

The number of women heads of households in the *fichado* work category is the same as that among the *avulso* workers. In both types of labour arrangements 50 percent of the women were the heads of their households. The five women *fichado* workers were all separated; among women *avulso* workers three were separated and the other two were widows.

As among *avulso* workers, I also found a solidarity among the *fichado* workers. *Avulso* workers' solidarity and mobilization is based on insecure working conditions, whereas the basis for the solidarity of *fichado* workers reflects a *conscientização* about their rights as workers. Women tended to mobilize in response to an injustice towards one of them, which brought pressure on the employer to be fair to them all. I witnessed a case when the worker was not paid for the day because she was sick and arrived late at work. The worker brought a statement form the doctor to prove she was at doctor's office before coming to work. The fellow workers mobilized and collectively went to talk to the employer about this situation. As a result of their response to this situation, the employer ended up paying for the worker's day. *Fichado* workers have a legal basis for their mobilization and in the majority of the cases have succeeded in achieving their goal.

The mobilization of *fichado* women in the work place is an important way to show women's agency in regards to their rights. Through their political mobilization, *fichado* women workers not only show their power but also their *conscientização* through the Rural Labourers Union education program.

The financial situation of the *fichado* women workers and their households is better than that of the *avulso* workers. *Fichado* workers have access to a stable income, US\$110.00 per month, and are paid extra for working overtime. The situation of their husbands is also better and more stable. In two of the cases the men do *fichado* work and earn almost double the salary of their wives. One of these men supervises the women's work and the other is responsible for the spraying of the vineyards. The husbands who work in construction and in auto repair also earn a higher salary than their wives. When the husband was unemployed, the situation in the household was tense because the man felt inferior to his wife, who was then the provider. According to this man, he felt very awkward seeking wage labour through the *avulso* arrangement while his wife worked as a *fichado* worker.

The number of separated women who head households among the ten *fichado* consultants, that is five, was higher than among the ten *avulso* consultants, that is three. This could be interpreted as a reflection of the autonomy *fichado* women consultants acquire in the city as a result of their experience through regular employment and their empowerment.

However, the data I have is limited and should not lead to generalization. The five cases of separation between the *fichado* workers and their partners took place in Petrolina after the women had some security in their employment. One of the consultants, however, stated that she has tried to separate from her husband, but he keeps coming back. Beyond their salaries, women who head households also have help from their offspring who contribute to expenses. In these households the sons and/or daughters engaged in the work force were more cooperative and usually provided part of their income to cover household expenses.

Women *fichado* workers have access to more benefits and better life conditions than *avulso* workers in many respects. However, in contrast to some of the *avulso* workers who owned their houses in Santo Antônio, none of the *fichado* workers owned their homes; they therefore had to pay for rent. The rent ranged from US\$20.00 to US\$30.00. These women also had to pay for food, water and electricity as well as to cover other needs for their families. The semi-permanent workers did not have the job security that the women who had been working for two to four years had. Semi-permanent workers try to perform tasks well to remain working in the same enterprise. But this is not always the case as some of them are laid off after working for a short time period.

As in the case of *avulso* workers, *fichado* workers have access to new life conditions in the city and to a new regime of power and knowledge. Women's access to wage labour not only provides them with wages, but provides them a type of knowledge they were never exposed to before. This can be seen through *fichado* worker mobilization based on *conscientização* processes and through *avulso* worker mobilization emphasizing solidarity. Their exposure to these new circumstances lead women to a re-negotiation of power within the household and to women's empowerment. Women certainly benefit from these new life conditions; however, the transformation they face is limited by the exploitation present in their new wage labour employment. Both *avulso* and *fichado* women workers play a very important role in the regional development process. They benefit their capitalist employers as well as the world capitalist system by making their labour available at low costs while their own benefits are limited. Women are dependent on the work in the production of crops for

export to fulfill their family needs and, as a result of that, are closely related to the global capitalist system.

The work situation of the *avulso* women workers differs from that of the *fichado* women workers in many ways. However, the men in both types of labour arrangements show dissatisfaction towards their work conditions and life in Petrolina, thus their situation is worthy of investigation. By focussing on the men, the changes women go through become clearer.

5.4.2. Men *Fichado* Workers

I selected two men *fichado* worker consultants for the study, although I contacted and engaged in informal conversations with several others. The men in the study were both married; one was 42 and the other 39 years old. José, the 42 year old, had come to Petrolina with his family and had been there for over 15 months. Antônio, the other consultant, had come to Petrolina eight months prior to my contact with him and had left his family in the countryside. Although their situations were quite different, both of them were unhappy and were willing to return to their place of origin. In both cases the men left the countryside because they could not fulfill their survival needs during the dry season. According to them, although they had *fichado* work in the city, the situation there was not much easier. José, the consultant who was accompanied by his family (nine persons in all) mentioned that the meagre salary was not enough to feed the whole family, and his wife was not working.

Antônio claimed he had difficulty sending remittances home to his wife and five children. In the city he had to pay for room and board, and after he paid for his expenses he ended up having very little money. Although the situation of each consultant was different, they both had the same desire - to return home, take care of their land and not have to migrate again. Both men were uninterested in the Union and only paid for the membership fee because, as *fichado* workers, they were required to do so.

The lack of interest of the men *fichado* workers to remain in the city would not be expected when one considers that their tasks are rated as more prestigious than those performed by women. However, their poor adjustment to the work conditions and to city life

is understandable when one considers the situation in their place of origin; in that patriarchal society men occupy a dominant position and do not suffer from any type of discrimination. Patriarchy is challenged in the city as women have opportunities to assert themselves. Although women have always been powerful and subjugated at the same time, city life has a way of making women's power explicit. Women experience a rise in their self-esteem by having access to an income; in some cases they become the sole breadwinners. There is then a renegotiation of power in the domestic domain. This is responsible for changes to women's as well as men's roles in the domestic domain.

The situation of women is very distinct from that of men in the *fichado* type of labour arrangement. Women are more interested in maintaining their jobs than are the men. The men perform their tasks poorly and are interested in being laid off in favour of receiving severance according to the law. According to the men workers, they would use the severance pay to invest in their place of origin. This is the case particularly when men leave some land back home. They can receive these benefits from their employer only after one year of employment. Since many men lack the patience to remain in the job for that period of time, they usually receive a meagre amount. The migrant men do not seem to adapt as well as the migrant women to the working conditions they find in the city. This has not only to do with the opportunities available to women, but to the situation of both men and women in their place of origin. A detailed discussion of this will be provided after the discussion of the other category of women – domestic workers.

5.4.3. Neighbourhood Mobilization Limitations among *Fichado* Women Workers

Despite the many differences between the *avulso* and the *fichado* workers, they share some of the same attitudes in regard to their participation in the Neighbourhood Association in the neighbourhood where they live. As was the case with the *avulso* workers, *fichado* workers do not participate actively in the Association. The reason they give is that they usually come home tired and have no energy to participate in meetings. However, they view the neighbourhood very positively and, in contrast to the *avulso* workers, believe in the

importance of the association. This is probably because they have some added understanding of the political importance of the Neighbourhood Association. One of my consultants stated:

I fully support the struggle of the Neighbourhood Association although I am not a member and do not participate in meetings. I do not have time for that, but if I did, I would be a member. It is important to work with the support from others. You see, from the support we give to the Rural Labourers Union we have acquired many benefits (Amelia, a 36 year old *fichado* labourer).

Of the ten consultants only three were members of the Neighbourhood Association, although they rarely had time to attend the meetings. The membership of the three women was based on the benefit of having their children attend the day care centres.

5.5. Domestic Workers

The migrant women who comprise this category differ considerably from the women who engage in irrigated agricultural work. They differ not only in regards to the work they engage in, but in age, marital status, literacy level, decision-making in regards to their migration and relationship to their place of origin. The ten consultants from the study who engaged in domestic work were single, young, adolescent women who migrated to the city alone. Their ages range from 14 to 27 years (see Table 3).

These women are more educated than the women in the other categories. They have elementary education and are all able to read and write. These young women are representative of young women in Santa Luzia in general. Their literacy level demonstrates that younger generations in rural areas are benefiting more from education than older generations when we compare the literacy level of these young women and other migrants in the study. All came from Santa Luzia and live in the houses where they work. Their room and board are free so they do not have to use their salaries to pay living expenses. Although living in their place of work is beneficial in the sense that they do not have to cover their living expenses, it also contributes to their exploitation. These domestic workers are always on call and do not have much spare time. They are hired to cook, clean, wash clothes and care for children (see Table 3).

Table 3: Domestic Workers

Pseudonym	Place of Origin	Age	Marital Status	Literacy Level	Occupation	Monthly Salary	Length of Employment
Fatima	Santa Luzia	17	single	literate	cleaning and washing clothes	US\$90.00	1.5 years
Lucia	Santa Luzia	18	single	literate	cooking and cleaning	US\$80.00	8 months
Sonia	Santa Luzia	22	single	literate	cooking	US\$100.00	2.5 years
Teresa	Santa Luzia	19	single	literate	babysitting	US\$100.00	2 years
Emilia	Santa Luzia	27	single	literate	cooking	US\$100.00	3 years
Isaura	Santa Luzia	17	single	literate	cleaning	US\$70.00	8 months
Carmem	Santa Luzia	16	single	literate	babysitting	US\$60.00	8 months
Lola	Santa Luzia	14	single	literate	babysitting	US\$60.00	6 months
Bia	Santa Luzia	22	single	literate	cleaning	US\$50.00	4 months
Luisa	Santa Luzia	24	single	literate	cooking	US\$100.00	1 year

There is no Domestic Labourers Union in Petrolina to act on their behalf, so domestic workers have no legal protection. I was able, however, to identify a strong solidarity as well as kinship ties among these young migrants. These young women all came from the same rural community, Santa Luzia, thus they not only knew one another but in some cases were kin-related. There were several cases where more than one domestic worker was from the same household.

The migrant women employed in irrigated agricultural work all came to the city accompanied by their immediate family members (although some became separated later on). The domestic workers in my study usually came unaccompanied. In the city they have the support of their kin who are already working in Petrolina, and support from Dona Fernanda, a middle-class woman who serves as an intermediary between the families who stay behind and the domestic workers. Dona Fernanda also helps these young women find jobs in the city.

Another difference between the domestic workers and the agricultural workers is in the decision-making process involved in migration. The irrigated agricultural workers are accompanied by their families and the decision involves the husband and the wife (even though the men heads of household are the ones who typically make the final decisions). This is not the case with the young single women. The decision to migrate is usually made by their parents, although these young women usually agree to migrate. In times of need, particularly during the drought, the parents view their daughters as a valuable resource and make the decision for them to migrate. Once their daughters find work in the city they are able to help the family financially. One of the consultants stated:

I was happy when my father told me that he wanted me to migrate so that he could stay with my mother and the smaller kids in the countryside. I found a job as a domestic worker right after I arrived in Petrolina and my life changed a great deal. I make a little less than the minimum wage. I keep a little of the money for myself and send most of it to my family. I feel good about making money and being able to help my family in the countryside as I sense that my family acknowledges my help and respects me (Fatima, a 17 year old domestic worker consultant).

The decision to have daughters migrate is a difficult one, although in many circumstances that is the only way out of misery. The parents worry about having their

daughters in the city because of the danger of city life. The absence of their daughters causes a fragmentation in the rural household since these young women would normally help their mothers with the domestic chores as well as in subsistence agriculture; there is also the fear that their daughters will become seduced in the city. One of my consultants whose four daughters are in Petrolina stated:

It is very difficult to see our daughters go away. We just let them go because of the great need we have here in the countryside. Daughters are precious... and we fear for them in the city since over there there are bad people who can take advantage of them (Seu Raimundo, 54 years old).

The worries of letting the daughters go to Petrolina are, however, reduced by the presence of Dona Fernanda. She can advocate on their behalf and find a place for them to work. Furthermore, Dona Fernanda is a well-liked widow who has been helping women to find jobs as domestic workers for years. One of the consultants stated:

My husband and I worry too much about our daughter in Petrolina. She is young and childish. Although we needed to send her away, we only did it because we knew Dona Fernanda is there and she is a good woman (Dona Betina, 39 years old).

Although the decision to migrate is always made by their parents, these young women are usually happy to come to the city. One of the most attractive aspects of city life is that these women are usually able to go to school and can improve their education. Another attraction of migrating to the city is their exposure to an income, with which these women can contribute to the survival of their families in the countryside. Such a contribution provides them with a sense of self-esteem. In their place of origin these young women never “touched money”; once they are in the city and find work they are able to earn an income and to provide their families with substantial help. One of my consultants stated:

I like Petrolina; life is better here in the city. Back home there was nothing to do to earn money. Here it is different; I earn a salary as a babysitter and can even help my parents and my siblings. This would never happen if I was back home. I had my hands tied up and did not even know what making money meant (Tereza, a 19 year old domestic worker).

The engagement of young migrant women in domestic services and their access to services such as education raises the status of these young women, who had no access to income-generating activities in the countryside. Although they came to the city individually, these young women formed a strong network in Petrolina of friends and kin from their place of origin. These migrant women, however, do not mobilize on a political basis and the help they send home is also individual. Although the absence of a Domestic Labourers Union in Petrolina accounts for that as well as for their exploitation, the nature of domestic services can also be seen as a factor because the women work in isolation and have no opportunity to mobilize. Family ties among domestic workers are stronger than among the other migrant women studied. The lack of an orientation from a Union is very detrimental to these young domestic workers, who have no experience in negotiating their salaries; and some of them are highly exploited.

The salary of domestic workers varies from half of the minimum wage, US\$50.00 to the minimum wage, US\$100.00. Such a variation has to do with the amount of time they have been engaged in domestic service and the skills they have. Although these women are accustomed to domestic work in their own homes, the nature of the domestic service they carry out in the city is more sophisticated. The newly arrived, inexperienced workers are the ones who receive the lowest salaries and are the most exploited; they perform all types of tasks, such as washing clothes, cooking, cleaning, babysitting (see Table 3). The employers justify the meagre salary by pointing out that these women need a period of training. The longer these women spend in the job, the higher the wage and the better the working conditions.

The permanence of these domestic workers in the city and their employment varies; while some of them adjust to the work conditions easily, others keep coming to the city and returning to their place of origin. However, in periods of severe drought they tend to adjust quicker to the job conditions since they know they have to stay in the city to provide for their families in the countryside.

The remittances these young women send to their families varies according to their salary and how often they send remittances. In several cases, there was more than one

domestic worker from the same household. This not only puts less pressure on them to send their whole salary, but the impact of the contribution from these domestic workers is greater and clearly visible. In cases when there is only one domestic worker in the city per household, the pressure is greater for her to send her whole salary.

As it has been mentioned previously, the collection of data took place in a normal drought year, but even then domestic workers are expected to send remittances home and they did so during the research period. These women are closely connected to their families and their rural village. They used to come to Dona Fernanda's house on Monday afternoons to anxiously find out the news from their village and to receive letters from home. On Fridays they also came to send remittances and/or letters. Remittances are usually sent on a monthly basis, but during hardships the domestic workers ask for an advance in their salaries and are able to send money on a more frequent basis.

I noticed that the remittances sent were used only to fulfill the survival needs of the rural families and that was also the intention of the young migrants who sent them. In one case, however, four sisters bought new furniture for their family. In this case, the remittances had a limited impact on the rural household and did not introduce new measures to the rural household that would decrease the population's vulnerability.

Despite the strong tie with their families back home, the longer these domestic workers stay in the city the weaker their tie with the rural sphere and their families become. In the city they have access to formal education and to many job opportunities. Those who stay in Petrolina permanently have a chance to graduate from secondary school. They can then find work in stores, improving their conditions of life, and thereby increasing their status. Domestic workers who marry in the city are unable to continue helping their families and stop sending remittances. Once they migrate to Petrolina, none of these young women want to return home, even those who have a strong family bond and keep going back and forth. According to these young women, there is not much they can do to change life in Santa Luzia other than sending remittances to those left behind.

The situation of migrant domestic workers is different from that of irrigated agricultural workers, both *avulso* and *fichado*. The distinction is not only based on their

exposure to a different type of labour arrangement and different conditions of life in the city, but to their links to their rural households and their place of origin. Of the three categories of migrant women under investigation, the domestic workers are the ones who have the strongest ties with their rural origins. They are also able to send remittances in order to assist family survival in the countryside. The contribution of these young migrant workers is acknowledged by their families and as a result of that these women experience a rise in status.

While migrant irrigated agricultural workers, especially those who engage in the *fichado* type of labour arrangement, are exposed to *conscientização* and are able to mobilize politically, and the *avulso* workers mobilize on a solidarity basis, this is not the case for domestic workers. The work these women engage in does not allow them to mobilize; they are isolated and only associate with their fellow women during a limited period of time at the school in the evenings. The changes these women face in the city are therefore much more limited than those of the other migrant women.

Despite the limitations in their place of destination, domestic workers acquire knowledge and power to which they never had access before. While in the countryside the majority of them did not have adult status. Once they are in the city and have access to ways to help their families, these migrant women not only gain adult status but also a high status in their place of origin. This may contribute to the link with their place of origin since the acknowledgement of their importance comes from there.

These domestic workers enter the public sphere because they work for others and earn a cash income. Therefore, they are not confined to the domestic domain as are rural women who engage in non-remunerated domestic activities. In the study, the domestic services sector which provides an income to the workers is considered as important as any other activity taking place outside the confinement of the domestic boundaries and in the realm of the public domain. As with the other migrant women in the study, domestic workers are also related to the globalization of the local economy. These young women are quickly absorbed in the domestic service sector because Petrolina is exposed to a high rate of socio-economic development, attracting investors from other regions of Brazil and even other countries. The

availability of domestic work is closely connected to the local development process and its place in the global economy.

5.6. Young Migrant Men

I also collected data from young single men who migrated in search of jobs. The situation for those young men is considerably different from that of young domestic workers. While the young women found jobs in the city right after their arrival, the young men did not stay in the city but settled in the agricultural estates where they found jobs. The money they earned was hardly enough to cover their living expenses, hence the remittances sent home were less frequent than those sent by the young women. In contrast to young migrant women, the period of time of the young men away from home was much shorter than that for young women and they kept going back and forth. These young men were not exposed to city life and had no access to education as the young women did. Therefore, their place of destination was not as attractive. One of my consultants stated:

I come to engage in wage labour in agriculture in the last instance because the pay is not all that good and the expenses I have with the food to eat are very high. The only reason why I keep coming is because at home (rural drought-prone areas) the situation is worse. Although I can never take good money back home, the little I take is helpful, but not as helpful as what my sister, a domestic worker, sends (Orlando, 19 years old).

5.7. Migrant Women and the Drought

The conditions of life as well as women's attitudes toward work differed considerably from that of the men consulted. In order to understand these differences and women's adaptation to city life, it is necessary to look at the relationship between the consultants and the drought problem which affects the rural areas where they come from and is the push factor towards their migration.

The migrant women all view their migration to Petrolina as a measure to minimize the impact of, that is mitigate, the drought. Despite their different responses to the drought, the view of these women towards the problems affecting their place of origin was quite homogeneous. Women from the three categories studied all present a negative view of the

drought and a pessimistic attitude regarding life in their place of origin. Women consulted in the three categories of work stated:

The drought is horrible, it brings famine and desperation. It is sad to see everyone leaving in search of work in other places, but there is nothing to do about it. Nobody (the government) cares to solve the problem so we have to leave to see if outside is better (Maria, a 37 year old *fichado* worker);

Life is never too good in the countryside, but when drought strikes, my God, it is unbearable (Lucia, an 18 year old domestic worker);

The drought is the worst thing a person can imagine, we have no food and sometimes have to drink dirty water from the wells. Life is not easy here for me, but I prefer anything than to go back to the rural area (Carmelita, a 49 year old *avulso* worker).

Migrant women are usually not willing to return to the countryside despite the hardship of the lives they encounter in Petrolina. Beside the periodic droughts which affect the rural areas, opportunities for women, such as wage labour jobs are limited. As women are absorbed in distinct work conditions in the city, they tend to respond differently to the drought and to the situation of the family members left in the countryside. Having migrated with the purpose of helping their families to survive in the rural areas, young migrant domestic workers are closely connected to the countryside and send remittances to their families to help them overcome crisis situations.

The close link between the single young domestic workers and their rural families is also a result of the fact that they migrate to the city unaccompanied. That is not the case with women who engage in agricultural wage labour and migrate accompanied by their close family members, that is their husbands and offspring. Women agricultural workers are unable to send remittances as they have to fulfill their household needs in the city. The only way agricultural migrant women workers have found to help their family members overcome the drought is to encourage them to migrate to the city and provide them with the support needed. One of the consultants stated:

I am glad I no longer have to endure the hardships of the drought. There was a time when I had to walk ten kilometres to fetch water, otherwise we would all die of thirst. No, that was not a life. I do not want to return to the

countryside; I will only feel happy when I see all my relatives working here in Petrolina (Alice, a 36 year old migrant *fichado* worker).

Migration is certainly one of the measures found by women to mitigate the drought. Whether this measure mitigates the drought or not is a question which remains to be answered. The goal of mitigation is to reduce the vulnerability of the affected population (Wilches-Chaux, 1993). Mitigation measures can be seen as actions taken to minimize the destructive and disruptive effects of hazards and thus lessen the magnitude of a disaster (Maskrey, 1989). *Conscientização* that gets at the root of the problems affecting the lives of disaster victims, and the awareness that those affected have a potential to develop measures to address the drought hazard can be the basis for the development of mitigation measures (Maskrey, 1989; Branco, 1995).

Popular or community based mitigation measures take place only when the affected population, in this case women, is aware of the socio-economic and political implications of the disaster, that is, the drought, and also of their own potential to deal with the problem (Maskrey, 1989). Such a consciousness leads the population to attempt to change reality instead of attributing their life conditions to fate. Through migration, women attempt to change the life conditions they are exposed to in face of the drought. Thus, community-based or popular mitigation measures are related to the population's consciousness about their own problems.

The consciousness of the population toward their own potential does not mean that they can mitigate the drought solely by their own actions. Disaster mitigation is a complex process and, although the population may be conscious of their own potential, they also acknowledge their limitations. Government support can be important for the development of effective popular mitigation measures. Maskrey (1989) points that community based mitigation measures are not undertaken to substitute for governmental actions although they rise as a result of the ineffective measures implemented by governments.

In the context of the study, the support the affected population receives from grassroots organizations and the Rural Labourers Union is important for the women under investigation. Such support is not only important for women's attempts to mitigate the

drought hazard, but also to pressure the government to introduce changes in policy making and development planning so that the vulnerability of the population can decrease and the disaster can be mitigated (Maskrey, 1989). A serious problem, however, is that many governments, including the one in Brazil, are not willing to implement the necessary measures to mitigate the drought, such as changes in the land tenure system which would lead to long-term development.

In the analysis of whether or not migration is a drought mitigation measure, it is necessary to understand that while migration is viewed as an attempt to mitigate the drought, it is also a survival mechanism. Through migration, women contribute not only with monetary help for those who stay behind, but help other family members to migrate. Migration is important particularly for women; it gives them the opportunity to be exposed to new life conditions. For the women in the study, migration is not only a survival mechanism but an attempt to mitigate the drought as well as a way through which women become visible and have access to an array of different life conditions.

The question of whether the rural-urban migration of women is a mitigation measure is a complex one. Migration can be a flight from poverty and a consequence of the drought. Even though individuals migrate to minimize the impact of the drought, they are aware of the limitations of their actions. In the case of young single women who engage in domestic work, the remittances they send home are utilized to fulfill the basic needs of their family members. Since that is the case, remittances can be considered an emergency response to a specific need, so they can well be seen as part of a survival strategy for the rural household instead of being a measure which introduces changes and helps the population to overcome not only the present crisis but future drought crises. True mitigation measures would entail changes in economic activities which would decrease the vulnerability of the population who rely on agriculture in a semi-arid environment where conditions are not favourable to this economic activity and/or the transfer of appropriate technology along with crops adapted to regional climatic conditions.

The relation of migrant women to their families in their place of origin varies with the length of time women have been in the city, their marital status and their life circumstances

in the city. In the case of agricultural workers engaged both in the *fichado* and *avulso* type of labour arrangement, their relation to the family members who stay behind is not as strong as that of young migrants who engage in domestic services. Migrant agricultural workers are exposed to conditions of life that do not allow them a great variety of actions. These women are unable to send remittances, but they encourage their family members to migrate. For these migrant women, migration is an immediate response to minimize the effects of drought. Migration is a temporary measure that provides only short-term benefit, but it often can lead to long-term as those involved may stay in the city on a permanent basis. Domestic workers are not only in a position to send remittances home, but their closer link to their place of origin is because their immediate family members have usually remained in the rural areas.

Despite their different circumstances and the recognition of their own potential, all of the women consulted view the drought as a problem beyond their control. Although the help they provide their families may be important in times of need, it is never enough to mitigate the drought problem. These women are not only aware of their potential to help, but of the limitations they face. According to them, the drought can only be solved through a joint effort involving the population and the government. One of my consultants stated:

The drought brings misery and the only thing I can do for my family is to send my meagre salary to them. During those periods I cannot buy anything for myself and I am left with no money. Do you know why? Because the government takes no action to avoid the drought (Sonia, a 22 year old domestic worker).

The agricultural workers, who are older and have more life experience, are even more pessimistic towards a viable solution to drought. They believe that in the absence of effective governmental mitigation measures, migration is the only way the *sertanejo(a)* has to minimize the effect of the drought problem. A consultant stated:

The drought is a serious problem, I am tired of it and feel I cannot help very much. The only thing I can do is to help my relatives to come here (Teresa, a 36 year old *avulso* worker).

The limitation of women's actions is clearly visible when we consider the importance of integrating mitigation with long-term development planning. Although limited, migration is

an important response given by women in the disaster context of the analysis. In order to look into the effectiveness of migration, it is important to question whether or not migration decreases the vulnerability of women and of those who stay in the countryside and receive migrant women's support.

Despite the differences in regards to the actions of migrant agricultural workers and of domestic workers towards the family members who stay in the countryside and the limitations of these actions, all of these women recognize that once they are settled in the city they can better help those who stay behind. The help provided by them raises their status in the rural village as well as their self-esteem. These women also recognize the importance of their migration to themselves and others and believe that the migration process gives them visibility. Their entrance into the job market leads to acknowledgement of their contribution by their family members back home as well as the whole community.

Life for women in the countryside is very bad; we are nobody. In Petrolina it is different, we are like everybody else. After I moved here I became more respected in my village. My relatives all ask my opinion for anything they are doing. You know why that is happening? Because now I have work and money and thus I am like everybody else (Luzia, a 30 year old *fichado* worker).

Through the words of Luzia the visibility of rural women through migration is closely related to the new life conditions in the city, including women's access to wage labour and to an income. For women from poverty-stricken regions such as the northeastern drought-prone semi-arid, where the opportunities are very limited, the changes they go through as a result of their migration are meaningful. These women experience an increase in their self-esteem and not only acquire a new knowledge, but enter into new power relations. They enter the public domain, once the territory of men and this is an important step for them who, in the rural areas, were confined to the domestic domain. The transformation process women go through in their attempt to engage in a new construction of their selves in their place of destination is a complex one. The analysis of the new situation women face in Petrolina will enlighten the discussion on whether or not migration decreases the vulnerability of women, and adds a new dimension in mitigation measures.

5.8. Change among Migrant Women in Petrolina

One of the most important changes migrant women face in Petrolina is access to employment opportunities. All of the migrant women consulted for this study engage in some type of wage labour, but their access to employment and conditions of life in the city are quite varied. Through their employment in irrigated agriculture, migrant women are absorbed by capitalist labour processes and experience situations distinct from those experienced by women employed in the domestic service sector.

Migrant women employed in irrigated agriculture sell their labour power and by doing so become exposed to capitalist relations of production. Under capitalist relations of production the capitalists own the means of production and the labourers own only their labour power (Nichols, 1980). Through the exposure to these relations, women face new work conditions and experience new conditions of life such as *conscientização* through the Rural Labourers Union. Women workers' exposure to *conscientização*, however, varies according to whether they are exposed to the *fichado* or the *avulso* type of work arrangement.

The absorption of workers by capitalist labour processes takes place as the means of production as well as labour power are purchased in the market by the capitalists. Work is performed under the supervision, direction and control of the capitalists, and the products produced are the property of the capitalists and not the property of the producers (Braverman, 1974; Nichols, 1980). In order to better understand the changes women go through in face of their exposure to capitalist labour processes, it is important to discuss the difference between labour and labour power. It is labour power not labour that workers sell to capitalists for a money wage. The producer who cannot sell the product of labour must sell the labour power in exchange for a sum of money, the wage. The selling of the workers' labour power to the capitalists requires a separation of the labourers from means of production so that the workers cannot produce and sell the product of their labour and are forced to live by selling their labour power (Nichols, 1980).

For women without employment opportunities in rural areas and tied to the production of subsistence crops, the conditions they are exposed to in Petrolina are new in

many respects. The absorption of women's labour power by capitalist labour processes not only gives women access to a wage, but to many other conditions. These changes are not uniform for all of the migrant women in the study and vary according to the work conditions they face. *Fichado* women workers become unionized and acquire a consciousness of their rights as women workers. *Avulso* workers are not unionized and thus do not benefit from *conscientização* process provided through the Rural Labourers Union. *Avulso* workers, nevertheless also sell their labour power to capitalists and are absorbed by capitalist labour processes.

Access to these new life conditions lead women to enter in a new regime of knowledge and new power relations. These relate to women's visibility and women's agency. Despite the distinct ways in which migrant women experience changes in the city, all of the women go through a process of transformation and engage in a new construction of their selves. Women's acquisition of new knowledge entails changes not only in the women but other members of the society, as it calls for a renegotiation of power between the dominant, in this context the men, and the subjugated, that is, the women. From a situation characterized by subordination, where women were confined to the domestic domain and were not allowed to demonstrate their power explicitly, women enter into a situation when they not only work for wages, but learn about the dynamics of the capitalist relations to which they are exposed through the Rural Labourers Union. This new knowledge becomes embedded in the social structure and is shared by all members of the society. These new life conditions lead women to become conscious of their potential and aware of their power. Women, therefore, have their potential recognized. They achieve a new self-recognition and experience a rise in their self-esteem.

The situation women face in their place of destination is a way of empowering themselves, but the benefits are limited since these women face a new regime of exploitation as they depend on their wages to survive. This is particularly the case for *avulso* women workers who, being underemployed and facing insecure working conditions, sell their labour power at low costs and receive no employment benefits. This is worsened because these women are not unionized. Under capitalist labour processes exploitation occurs when one sector of the

population, that is the women workers, produces a surplus whose use is controlled by another sector, the capitalists (Braverman, 1974). It is capital's control of the workers' labour process which allows the exploitation of the working class to take place in the process of production, and any formal model which does not recognize that social characteristic of capitalism will of necessity fail to capture its essential relation of production (Braverman, 1974; Nichols, 1980).

Young domestic workers also experience changes in the city. Access to employment by these domestic workers is not only important for them, but also for their family members who remain in the rural drought-prone areas. These migrants came to the city with the purpose of providing financial help to their family members who stay in the countryside. Young migrant domestic workers are not exposed to capitalist labour processes but, like migrant irrigated agricultural workers, face exploitation. One of the causes for these women's exploitation is that they are not unionized; there is no Domestic Workers Union in Petrolina. Consequently, these women are not exposed to *conscientização* and are not conscious of their rights as women workers. These young women, however, benefit from formal education and, as such, have access to new employment opportunities.

Through wage labour, migrant women acquire a knowledge which leads to the demonstration of their agency both in the city and in the countryside. This new situation not only increases women's self-esteem, but empowers them as their contribution is acknowledged by their family members in the countryside as well as by the members of their households in the city. Migration renders these women visible as they are able to exercise their power explicitly. Although the new situation benefits women in many respects, the transformation these women go through is limited and women are not totally liberated as they continue to face exploitation. In the case of migrant workers absorbed by capitalist labour processes, exploitation is seen when the women workers produce a surplus whose use is controlled by their capitalist employers (Roemer, 1988). In the case of the domestic workers, their exploitation is present through the appropriation of their labour in exchange for a low wage. Such an employment condition benefits the employers because labour power is reproduced under low costs.

Regardless of their occupation and the increase in their self-esteem, women are exploited and their lives are closely connected to the globalization of the local economy. The absorption of migrant women in capitalist development may not be seen as the best alternative for them, but it exposes women to a series of changes in regards to life conditions. Women acquire a consciousness about their rights as women workers and this gives them voice. This is seen in the case of irrigated agricultural workers, particularly those who work under the *fichado* type of labour arrangement. One of the consultants stated:

Life here in the city is very different from that in the countryside. In the city a woman does not work only if she does not want to, because there are always jobs available in irrigated agriculture. I have learned a lot by engaging in wage labour. Through the union meetings, I learned that we workers are not slaves, we have rights as workers. Before I did not even know what a law was; now I know what it is and know that laws exist to protect us workers (Cidinha, a 39 year old migrant *fichado* labourer).

From the voice of Cidinha, it is evident that the exposure of migrant women to capitalist labour processes and to the Labourers Union, entails a learning process and *fichado* workers become aware of issues previously ignored by them. According to Freire (1980:26):

The process of *conscientização* is based on the idea of “human praxis”, that is, it is necessary to understand reality and to reach a critical stand about it. In such a case, the process of *conscientização* cannot exist outside of praxis, i.e., outside the action-reflection act. The process of *conscientização* is, thus, a dialectical process. It consists of the way of being or of transformation of the world in which human beings live.

Once exposed to *conscientização* the women not only become transformed, but engage in a transformation of reality. Participation in migration in itself is an attempt to transform reality as women flee from drought and poverty and hope to change their life conditions. All of the migrant women in the study attempt to transform reality. But some of them are more aware of what the transformation entails than others. Since the transformation of reality is closely related to praxis and to *conscientização*, women who do not benefit from this process, e.g., domestic workers, may not be aware of the implications involved in the transformation process. Migration itself has been a response of the rural population throughout the years to

minimize the effects of the drought. Women respond differently as a result of their exposure to distinct types of work in Petrolina as well as of their specific responses to the drought situation in their place of origin.

Young domestic workers, considered by their parents as a valuable resource in times of crisis, migrate with the specific purpose of fulfilling their family needs particularly in drought crisis. These women migrate individually and maintain a close link with their place of origin. Although in the city these young women do not benefit from the process of *conscientização*, they gain self-esteem as a result of their important contribution to their families and a consequent rise in status in the countryside. As a result, these young women are able to express their power explicitly and take advantage of the new situation.

Irrigated agricultural workers also benefit from the new knowledge and power they acquire as a result of their migration and the new life conditions they face. Unable to send remittances, these women encourage and support the migration of their family members to the city. Aware of their limitations to mitigate the drought problem effectively, these women recognize the socio-economic and political implications of the drought and are very pessimistic about solutions to the drought problem. These women experience a rise in their status both in the rural and urban sphere.

Coming from areas where wage labour was virtually non-existent for women, the exposure of these women to capitalist labour processes is viewed as an important vehicle for their transformation. In the case of *fichado* women workers, they not only acquire a salary, but become politicized in regards to their rights as women workers in a capitalized economy. By being exposed to these new dynamics, these women become aware of the problems affecting them and their families in the countryside and attempt to change that reality by encouraging their family members to migrate to the city.

Women *avulso* workers are also exposed to capitalist labour processes, but quite differently. Hired as daily labourers, these women are underemployed and do not benefit from *conscientização* through the Union. In fact, the undocumented nature of *avulso* labour

opposes the struggle of the Union, which hopes to eradicate this labour arrangement. This type of employment is a product of the capitalism implemented in the region based on the exploitation of the workers and profit to the capitalist sector. The presence and importance of this type of labour arrangement is a result of the large number of unemployed who come to Petrolina mainly to flee from poverty and drought conditions in their place of origin and who are willing to sell their labour power for a low price. The role of the Union is limited in regards to these workers. As long as the rural drought-prone areas continue to be poverty-stricken, the *avulso* type of arrangement is likely to attract unemployed women and men.

Despite the great differences among the migrant women under study, they all go through a process of change as they migrate and experience distinct life conditions from the ones they were exposed to previously. The situation of these different women reflects their attempt to mitigate effects of drought. Regardless of their differences, the migration of these women is a result of their need to change reality, that is the threats posed by the drought. This regional threat is recognized both in the urban and rural sphere.

Considering the changes migrant women go through in Petrolina, women's vulnerability decreases as they become visible actors through the migration process, demonstrate their power explicitly, enter the public domain, and grow as women and as workers. However, the same life conditions which are responsible for the demonstration of women's capacities are responsible for the rise of another regime of vulnerabilities inherent in the new conditions women face.

In the city women are exploited at the household as well as by the capitalist sector. The connection of these women to the globalization of the local economy is seen as they depend on their wages to survive. Women cannot fight the exploitation inherent in structural conditions of the world capitalist system. The transformation these women experience is therefore limited; they are unable to escape the exploitation of the capitalist economy. Therefore, in order to understand the role of migrant women in the mitigation of the drought,

it is not only important to account for their agency at the local level, but to account for the structural conditions affecting their responses.

The analysis of the conditions of work as well as of attitudes toward work and city life of migrant women and men provides insight into life in their place of origin and the different situation of women and men in rural society. Accustomed to control over the household and to control/access over the means of production, men are not satisfied with the employment conditions they face in Petrolina and are always willing to return to their place of origin. That is not the case with migrant women.

Despite the limitations of migration to mitigate the drought hazard, and despite the continued vulnerability faced by women and by their family members in the rural areas, migration is an avenue for change in the women's lives. Through migration women become visible and have the opportunity to demonstrate their potential in their attempt to mitigate the impact of the drought. Women cannot be considered passive beings in face of crisis situation. In Petrolina, women's agency is visible and challenges the discriminatory view of women's incapacity to deal with disaster situations, which is a product of the cultural construction of women in the strong patriarchal society of rural northeastern Brazil.

CHAPTER VI

LIVING WITH THE DROUGHT: WOMEN AND RURAL ACTION GROUP MOBILIZATION IN THE SERTÃO DO ARARIPE

The government in the drought-prone areas of northeastern Brazil has not implemented an adequate model of development aimed at the mitigation of drought hazard as an integral part of a regional development process. Consequently, the population of the region continues to suffer the impact of the drought. The more vulnerable the population, the more severe the impact of the drought. The drought has been seen as a hydrological problem (Andrade, 1985; Coelho, 1985), and high investments have been made in the construction of dams and wells but these measures have not benefited all sectors of the population. The following discussion of the drought-prone underdeveloped semi-arid and the conditions of life of its population provides a better understanding of the political nature of the drought. It explains how this area remains underdeveloped so that the irrigated semi-arid area can achieve a high level of socio-economic development.

One of the most vulnerable sectors of the population – the small food producers – have not benefited from governmental mitigation measures beyond “emergency work fronts” that offer a meagre salary during drought crisis (periods when the drought takes extreme proportions). These emergency measures implemented by the government are only palliative in nature and create a dependency among the local population who expects to benefit. Furthermore, the subsistence agriculture carried out by small-scale producers does not attract

the government's attention. It is considered unimportant, given the governmental interest in large-scheme development projects such as the one taking place in the São Francisco Valley.

Women and children are the most vulnerable sector of the rural population affected by the drought. Until 1983, women were not allowed to work in "emergency work fronts" (Pessoa et al., 1983). Rural women are also generally subordinate and have limited or no control over resources such as land. In a patriarchal society such as rural northeastern Brazil, there is no place for women outside the domestic domain. Opportunities for wage labour are limited, and priority is given to hiring men. Women's vulnerability does not mean they are without power, however. In the household women exercise their power, but confined within the household, women are "invisible" actors in the context of the larger society. The vulnerability of women is culturally constructed. Although subjugated, women's contribution to the household and society can be seen through women's agency. Women not only engage in domestic chores devoted to the reproduction of the household unit, but participate along with the men in important decisions. Women's agency is more visible in severe drought periods when they either become household heads or migrate for wage work.

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the role and responses of rural women towards the drought problem through mobilization in action groups. Attention is drawn to the conditions faced by two categories of women: return migrants and women who never engaged in migration and who have lived permanently with drought hazard. Consideration is given to mobilization in women's action groups, the transformation these women go through as a result of their mobilization, and how that influences their behaviour and promotes changes in regards to their permanence in the countryside and to drought mitigation.

6.1. Limited Opportunities in the *Sertão do Araripe*

The drought-prone area selected for the study is a rural village located in the *Sertão do Araripe* in the municipality of the city of Ouricuri, a small city with a population of 52,319

inhabitants (IBGE, 1991). *Santa Luzia*¹¹ is not only the place of origin of the return migrants and rural non-migrant women of the study, but also of the migrant domestic worker consultants who live in Petrolina.

The *Sertão do Araripe* is located on the northwestern extremity of the state of Pernambuco. Cattle raising is a very important economic activity, however, agriculture, particularly subsistence agriculture, is of great importance since the region is characterized by minifundia. According to INCRA (The National Institute for Colonization and Land Reform), the minimum landholding which would guarantee the survival of a family in the area is 70 hectares. The 1985 census has indicated that the average landholding is around 31 hectares. Forty-five percent of the establishments consist of less than 10 hectares and occupy an area of about seven percent of the total area. Thirty-five percent of the population engaged in agriculture occupy and work these landholding. These proportions are inverted when we focus on establishments of over 100 hectares. Properties over 100 hectares correspond to less than six percent of the total number of rural establishments, occupy 37 percent of the total area and employ 8.3 percent of the labour force. Intermediate landholdings, which range in size from 10 to 100 hectares, correspond to nearly 50 percent of the total number of establishments, occupy 56 percent of the total area and utilize 57 percent of the labour (IBGE, 1985). According to these figures, the unequal distribution of land is evident and the concentration of a great portion of the land lies in the hands of a few.

The comparison between the occupation of land in 1975 and the occupation of land in 1985 demonstrates the decrease in size of the smallest holdings. There was a general growth in the number of establishments (from 6,721 to 9,483) as well as of the total area (from 211,803 hectares to 292,626 hectares), but such a growth did not take place uniformly and the average size of the establishments smaller than 10 hectares decreased from 5.66 hectares to 4.67 hectares in 1985. The distribution of the 9,483 establishments is

¹¹ The village of *Santa Luzia* became a city in 1996; however, during the collection of the data in 1995, the village belonged to the municipality of Ouricuri.

approximately 64 percent landowners, 35 percent squatters¹² and one percent sharecroppers (IBGE, 1975, 1985).

Cattle are raised on a small number of large estates, an activity which requires a low demand for labour. Wage labour opportunities are therefore limited. The municipality of Ouricuri is characterized by small landholding and subsistence agriculture. As a consequence of limited wage labour opportunities, the most viable option is the practice of subsistence agriculture and the marketing of surplus as well as commercial crops.

6.2. The Rural Village of Santa Luzia

Santa Luzia has a population of 10,848 individuals; 932 of those inhabitants are found in the village and the remaining 9,916 reside on small landholding surrounding the village (IBGE, 1991). Santa Luzia is characteristic of rural villages located in the *Sertão* and of other villages in the state of Pernambuco. There is a Catholic church, a Protestant church, an elementary school, a secondary school, a police station, a telephone station, a health centre, a few shops, bars and bakeries. Sunday is the local market day when the population not only sell and barter, but also come to the village to socialize.

The village is characterized by a strong solidarity network among those who live there and many are kin-related. However, there are a few factions in the village, which usually happens in small communities (Schryer, 1975; Branco Lima, 1985). In Santa Luzia, community factionalism is not only related to class differentiation but to the political inclinations of those involved. The village's economic elite, comprised of local shop owners, is politically conservative and belongs to conservative political parties. The small-scale food producers, in contrast, have more limited access to and control over resources and tend to be members of leftist labour parties such as PT – *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Labourers Party)

¹² Squatters refer to landless food producers who utilize the land of others to cultivate agricultural crops and have no ties with the landowners. In some situations there can be tension between the squatters and the landowners.

– and of ecumenical grassroots organizations. They also belong to local organizations such as the women’s action group and the small-food producers’ association. While some members of the conservative elite view these local organizations as subversive, others view them of little importance and posing no threat.

Santa Luzia is politically very active. There is representation of the STR (Rural Labourers Union), and members of PT, beyond the small-food producers’ association and the women’s action group. The strong presence of ecumenical grassroots organizations led by the Catholic church and of the Araripe NGO has contributed to the political *conscientização* of the population. Although that is the case, the four politicians elected from the village belong to conservative political parties and also belong to the local elite. Santa Luzia fits well into the national political context and reflects the situation which predominates throughout the country. The national political scene in Brazil has been characterized by the presence of conservative politicians despite the strength of leftist parties such as PT.

The village’s economy consists basically of subsistence agriculture and the majority of its inhabitants are small landholders. Even those who own a business and who are employed by the municipality, such as healthcare agents and teachers, engage in subsistence agriculture. There is virtually no wage labour available in agriculture in the region since the majority of the establishments are small holdings (between one and 100 hectares) and are cultivated by their owners and their family members. The population survives basically on what it produces and there is limited circulation of cash in the village.

The situation of the small food producers in Santa Luzia is representative of small food producers of the *Sertão do Araripe* and other areas throughout the *Sertão*. The production of staple foods, such as corn, beans and manioc root, is present in all households. The harvest is stored for consumption during the dry season. Households also produce commercial crops such as cotton (*G. Religiosum L.*) and castor beans (*Ricenus communis L.*).

The gender division of labour is rigid. Women engage primarily in domestic tasks and in the cultivation of subsistence crops for household consumption, but participate in all of the

activities performed in the *roça* (field) during the periods their husbands and sons are away. The men are usually responsible for the cultivation of the products of greater importance, such as corn, beans and manioc. Men are responsible for the cultivation of commercial crops such as cotton and castor beans, the raising of cattle and goats, and the collection of honey.

Women not only engage in the domestic tasks of cooking, cleaning and caring for the small children, but are also responsible for fetching water and wood, for raising of chickens and pigs (mostly for household consumption), for the cultivation of medicinal plants and of crops of less economic importance, such as pumpkin (*Curcubita Pepo L.*) and sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea Batatas Lam.*), which are used as a complement to the family's diet. The children start working at seven years of age. The tasks women perform are considered less prestigious than those performed by the men, which contributes to the relative "invisibility" of women's tasks and leads to their subordination. A woman consultant stated:

My life is tough, I have to wake up very early to fetch water and wood. I spend the whole day very busy, cooking, caring for the small kids and I even help my husband in the *roça* (field), and what do I earn in return? Nothing, because I never touch cash. When he is around, my husband is the one in charge. Life is tough for all of us women (Francisca, a 26 year old non-group member).

The subordination of rural women can be appreciated when it is understood to be embedded in the socio-cultural context of the society, a patriarchal society where men's actions are rated superior to those of women and women's contribution is invisible. This relates to the presence of men in the public sphere and to the confinement of women in the domestic sphere. Although subordinated, women are not without a source of power, but they are not expected to make their power explicit.

During the harvest season, when the family is unable to perform all of the activities, help is sought among family members and godparents. The difficulties imposed by the absence of water and the limitations of the ecosystem are high; they limit the production of agricultural crops. The cultivation of crops takes much of the time of the food producers. Right after the first rains, the producers plow the land in preparation for planting. The planting season is

initiated with the planting of beans, which usually takes place in December and January. Corn is usually planted between January and March. When the interval of rain is too long, the producer plants two or three times in the same area. The harvests normally take place between May and June for beans, and July and August for corn. In the second semester of the year, the period of the non-rainy season, castor beans and cotton are harvested and marketed. During this period, the small food producers also clean wells and small lakes, and repair fences in preparation for the following year.

Beans are harvested and stored for household consumption and the surplus is sold. Corn is used for household consumption and to feed pigs and chickens in drought periods. Corn is also sold, but in smaller quantities than beans. Cotton and castor beans are grown strictly for sale. The commercialization of these crops is done locally between the producers and the owners of local shops. Beyond selling these crops at a low price (the shop owners act as intermediaries), the negotiations often do not involve money, but the exchange for food products obtained from the local shops. Depending on the price and on the quantity of the products being sold, the local shop owners provide food for the rural household during a certain period of time in exchange for the products bartered. The reliance of food producers on middlemen is characteristic of many small-scale food producing societies and works to the detriment of the producers. Middlemen are usually able to make high profits through the negotiations they have with the food producers.

The situation of the small food producers is difficult; they are totally dependent on the local shop owners. During “normal drought years”, i.e., periods when the absence of rain takes place only during the dry/summer season, and the yield is high, the prices of the products fall and the producers end up losing in the negotiations. During the fieldwork period the yield of castor beans was high. A sixty kilogram bag of castor beans yielded to the producer only US\$13.00. In the case of corn, producers were paid US\$7.00 for a sixty kilogram bag. This price was so low that the money was enough only to buy one kilogram of lean beef. The same bag of corn, however, could be sold in large cities such as Recife, the

state capital, for amounts as high as US\$25.00. The small food producers end up facing exploitation and dependency on the local shop owners since they are unable to pay for the transportation of their crops to be sold in markets outside the local village. Consequently, many food producers refuse to sell their products keeping them for household consumption and also storing them for the following planting season. The situation of the rural producers does not improve much in non-drought years; however, it becomes much worse during severe drought, when they are unable to produce food for household consumption.

Raising animals is also difficult in drought periods. The absence of water becomes problematic since, in contrast with the cultivation of agricultural crops, the raising of animals demands attention throughout the year. Goats are more popular among the small landholders than cattle. Goat- raising not only entails fewer costs but goats are also more adapted to the semi-arid environment than cattle. Goats, therefore, represent one of the main sources of animal protein (milk and meat) for the poor population as well as for sale; the meat and skins are easily sold in the *sertão*.

The population faces environmental and systemic limitations, hence the village is poor and there is a limited circulation of cash. A great part of the cash which circulates in the village comes from the retirement pension of the retired elderly,¹³ which consists of US\$100.00 per month (equal to the minimum wage). Those employed by the municipality, such as teachers and healthcare agents, also receive salaries, however, they are paid less than

¹³ The number of retired individuals is high in the community. The rural retirement pension has benefited tremendously the elderly population. The women agricultural workers retire at 55 years of age and the men at 60 years of age. It is easier for the elderly men to retire under the category of agricultural worker than for women. The problem women have in the patriarchal society they belong to is that their contribution is visible only within the domestic domain; women do not view themselves as agricultural workers despite playing a major role in the production of subsistence crops. Thus, they are usually not unionized (Forum de Mulheres, 1997). Through the local women's action group, however, the STR (Rural Labourers Union) is playing an important role in the *conscientização* of women towards their right to retire. Furthermore, in the case of return migrants, most of them return to the village after retiring in their place of destination.

the minimum wage. The local teachers earn US\$64.40 a month and the health agents earn US\$36.00 a month. It is interesting that both the teachers and the health agents¹⁴ were all women.

Households also benefit from the remittances of migrant members, particularly daughters who engage in domestic work in Petrolina. The amount of remittances vary according to the salary of domestic workers and the need of their family members. Remittances vary between US\$40.00 and US\$100.00 per month. During severe drought, the remittances sent are utilized to pay for food acquired from the local shops. In those instances, the beneficiaries do not even see the money as it goes directly from those who remit to the hands of the shop owners.

Life in the village is much less expensive than in the city. Rural dwellers do not have to pay for rent or for electricity (there is electricity only in the village, not in the small landholdings where the majority of the population lives). In normal drought years, the costs for food are not high since rural dwellers produce most of what is consumed. These food producers have to meet the caloric needs of their family members to assure the reproduction of the household unit. They must also bear replacement costs, which have to be acquired through the sale of products or from remittances, to maintain work tools as well as buy clothing for household members (Wolf, 1966:5-6).

Another expense which has to be met is what Wolf refers to as the "ceremonial fund" (Wolf, 1966:7-9), which includes social obligations such as weddings and other religious ceremonies. The patron saint in Santa Luzia is *Nossa Senhora dos Remédios* (Our Lady of Healing). The celebration of the patron saint takes place on the seventh of September every year and during this occasion many festivities are held. This is a time when outsiders come to the village to participate in the festivities and the local population faces costs to prepare

¹⁴ Health agents are hired by the municipality to instruct the population how to have proper hygiene habits, of the importance of vaccinating the children and other health related matters. Their work involves visits with the population in peoples' own homes.

for them as well as the need to spend money during the celebration. Beyond these costs, the small landholders who have title to land have to pay land taxes. This varies according to the size of the holding. The payment of these taxes is important – it is one of the requirements for the elderly to retire as agriculturalists.

The situation of the population becomes difficult when drought strikes. In “severe drought periods”, the small food producers are unable even to acquire the food to fulfill the basic needs of their families. During those periods, the government gives attention to the population and, in order to fulfill their basic needs, provides work through “emergency work fronts” (which later became “productive work fronts”), organized to provide the rural poor a meagre income. The employed population engaged in “work fronts” work for three days a week and receive half of the minimum wage, i.e., US\$50.00 a month. This income is inadequate for the basic needs of rural families, which are usually large.

Until 1983, only one member of a family qualified to engage in “work fronts”; and women were excluded from them. The exclusion of women was based on the idea that they were not fit for the kinds of work required in the construction of dams and wells. From 1983 onward, women began to qualify; depending on the number of persons in a family, two individuals can be employed in work fronts. Women engaged in work fronts usually perform the same tasks as those performed by the men. The number of women hired in work fronts during the last severe drought, which took place from 1989 to 1993 was high particularly in areas where men out migrated in large numbers (Portella et al., 1994).

The “productive work fronts” are, in many ways, distinct from the “emergency work fronts”, although the former still have an emergency character. The changes undertaken in work fronts, such as the inclusion of women and other family members, were a result of pressure on the government from the STR (Rural Labourers Union), NGO’s, religious grassroots organizations (the differences among these organizations have been addressed in Chapter III) and local politicians. With the support of these organizations, the village population also mobilized and pressured the local politicians to act on the behalf of the

population. While most of the funds to pay for the labourers did not reach them during the “emergency work fronts” period and ended up being used for other purposes by the municipal government, 78 percent of the funds in the “productive work fronts” reaches the labourers. This is a clear improvement; however, the pay is always late and this programme continues to be linked to a dependency in the population (Portella et al., 1994).

Women’s invisibility is reflected in the neglect by the government to include women in disaster relief efforts such as the “emergency work fronts” before the last decade. The neglect of hiring women was based in the idea that women were not fit for the tasks. In times of severe drought, however, women have not only demonstrated their potential, but are a resource to the family, as they either stay in the countryside and take on the headship of their households so that their husbands can migrate, or they migrate for work themselves.

Migration is a measure utilized by the population to overcome the drought and the problems which characterize life in the countryside. The male heads of the household engage in migration in search of jobs, leaving behind their wives and children. The migration of young daughters and sons is also common. The decision to place young daughters and sons in the migration stream is made by the parents. The young daughters often migrate to Petrolina and engage in domestic work, while the young sons migrate to the rural estates on the margins of the São Francisco River to work in irrigated agriculture.

Considering the patriarchal nature of the society and the strong *machismo* ideology which reflects the superiority of men toward women (Nash and Safa, 1980; Grisi Bustos, 1980; Wiest, 1983), the attitudes of the fathers towards the migration of young daughters seems to be contradictory. Once these young women leave their rural households for work in the city, they are no longer subjected to the control of their fathers. In deciding about the migration of daughters, the parents are aware of the importance of the material contribution they are able to provide once they settle in the city and engage in the domestic service sector. Even under those circumstances, it is very difficult for the parents to see their daughters leave. One of my consultants stated:

It is very difficult to send our daughters to the city because we know that they will face a dangerous environment there, and once they migrate they become different. I have four daughters engaged in domestic work in Petrolina. Although I do not regret having let them go because they have been helping us very much, particularly during the drought, once they leave home, they do not want to return. They change very much in the city. It is like losing our daughters. The worst is that I and my wife cannot do anything about it. We can neither provide them with what they have in the city nor survive without their help in times of drought (Seu Luis, a small landholder).

From such a statement we can conclude that families face a difficult situation in regards to the migration of their young daughters. On one hand, there is the demand for cash to fulfill the rural household needs and, on the other, there is the worry by the parents about their daughters in the city and the certainty that they will not return. Migrant domestic workers usually stay in the city as life for them there offers an array of opportunities and services absent in the countryside. Furthermore, once they are able to help their families back home, the status of these young women in their place of origin rises and this builds their self-esteem. There are benefits of having their status raised to the empowerment of these women. But once they have jobs in the city, these young domestic workers are exploited by both their employers and by their rural families. This is the case even though the rural families may not intend it. The parents face a dilemma about the decision of having their young daughters migrate. Many of these young women, however, are not aware of the circumstances which led them to migrate. They lack extensive life experience and are happy to be away from the hardship of life in the countryside.

The migration of young women to work in domestic services in Petrolina, with the purpose of helping their family members in rural areas, calls attention to the close relationship between the rural and urban sphere as they both relate to the drought. The drought is not the only problem affecting the lives of women and of the whole population. Among the problems experienced by women are poverty, limited access to resources (including land), unemployment and patriarchy. Women acknowledge the existence of these problems, but they

relate these problems to the drought and they frequently mention that the drought increases the potential of all these other problems.

In spite of the drought and all of the problems affecting the lives of women, women have been powerful in responding to these problems and in attempting to mitigate the impact of the drought. The women in the study, as well as in the community of Santa Luzia in general, have benefited from the presence of grassroots organizations, the Rural Labourers Union, and the Araripe NGO. These organizations have played a major role in the process of *conscientização* of the population calling particular attention to the root of the problems affecting their lives, such as the political and economic dynamics of the drought and the inequality in access to resources. These organizations have also been successful in assisting the population to adapt to the limitations of the local ecosystem by educating and transferring appropriate technology to the local people.

6.3. The Role of the Local NGO

The Araripe NGO created in 1986 is a non-profit organization with a political and professional inclination. The NGO develops activities in the technical agricultural field in defence of the environment in several areas, the most important of which are education from an agro-ecological viewpoint, and the diffusion of environmental knowledge, as well as alternative technology. The Araripe NGO was created to focus attention on the small food producers and to contribute to the development of the region (CAATINGA, s.d.; CAATINGA, 1988).

The NGO was formed by an interdisciplinary group, including a biologist, a sociologist, an education specialist, a veterinarian, agricultural technicians, and others. This organization receives funding from several international government and non-government organizations. Its main objectives are:

(i) to contribute to the building of an alternative development model which is socially just, ecologically sustainable and which includes the participation of the local population;

(ii) to contribute to the elaboration of public policies adequate to the economic, social and environmental conditions of the semi-arid, and to work together with other NGOs and social movements for the implementation of such policies;

(iii) to contribute to the unification of the workers' struggle through actions which should combine general actions of a national and international scope with those in the countryside and wider region.

The work of the Araripe NGO, which directly benefited 1,400 families in 1995, by transferring appropriate technology and educating the population about the limitations of the environment, does not aim at substituting for other forms of public action. However, since the government is not concerned with the well being of thousands of small food producers who remain in the area in spite of the drought problem, organizations such as this work directly with the marginalised population and make important contributions. The Araripe NGO plays two roles. On one hand, it seeks appropriate technology for the region and, on the other, it attempts to diffuse the technology in the most feasible and efficient way. These are the objectives of the work of rural extension.

The NGO has played an important role in the area of education and has benefited directly a great portion of the population. A school was constructed as a result of the demands of the local population. The NGO offered the site and the interested population provided products cultivated by them, and bingoes were held to acquire the money necessary for the construction of the school. With the money acquired, construction material was bought and the school was built by the local population. The construction was initiated in 1988, but the school only started to function in 1991 due to the lack of money to initiate the activities. The school was a participatory project which involved the local population and, as a result, received support from UNICEF (CAATINGA, s.d.; Bloch, 1997).

During the period of the construction of the school, the Araripe NGO contacted the local population to know what a school meant for them and what should be taught at school. Based on the needs of the population, it was decided that, apart from the subjects taught in

traditional schools, such as mathematics, sciences and Portuguese, this school would also teach subjects related to the regional agricultural cycle, the production of appropriate crops for the ecosystem and the limitations of the semi-arid environment. According to such an approach, the students would be able to learn how to better interact with the environment for a more appropriate use of the ecosystem. Paulo Freire's methodology on participatory education based on the *conscientização* of the students was the methodology adopted (CAATINGA, s.d.).

The Araripe NGO became aware that the school should be available for children, youngsters and adults. Presently there are 150 students enrolled. The adults had classes in the evening and the school suspended classes during the planting and harvesting seasons. During these times, the population, including children, engage in agriculture on a full-time basis and are unable to reconcile school with the work in the fields. The poor diet of most children in their homes was taken into account. It was decided that the students should be provided with meals because the learning process cannot be satisfactory when those involved are hungry. The families of the children were contacted and, if they had enough food, they were asked to contribute some food. Each student's mother was asked to work one day a month in the preparation of the children's food at school. This way the mothers would participate in the education of their offspring by being exposed to how the school functioned. These occasions also provided an opportunity for the women to be away from the domestic activities at their homes.

Through such participation, we see that everyone (students, parents, teachers, and the NGO members) benefit from the learning process and also have some contribution to make. The school also utilizes the local population in the teaching process, for example, a small-scale food producer teaches the students about how to better utilize the environment. Teaching the population how to better deal with the limitations of the environment is one of the objectives of the school. Under such circumstances, education is intrinsically related to the mitigation of the impact of the drought and to development.

Although migration still takes place, especially in times of severe drought crisis, the school has succeeded in demonstrating to the local population that the development of the non-irrigated semi-arid is possible. But in order for development to take place, it is necessary that the population acquire knowledge about how to cope with the semi-arid environment and how to use the proper technology. Although the school has benefited many *sertanejas(os)* considerably, it cannot attend all of the population of the *Sertão do Araripe*, including the one from Santa Luzia, as a result of the distances involved in commuting to school.

The NGO also has a rotating credit system and a seed bank available for the small food producers. Although a seed bank was created by the Catholic church prior to the one developed by the NGO, the church-based one did not work well and some smallholders did not return what they had borrowed (Bloch, 1997). A seed bank is of great importance to the local population because during severe drought the planted fields are destroyed and some small food producers are left without seeds and end up having to buy seeds from intermediaries (those who sell their crops) who charge a high price.

The Araripe NGO seed bank was implemented in 1987. It not only has seeds of traditional crops such as beans and corn, but of a variety of other crops such as gergelin (*Sesamum indicum L.*), sorgho (*Sorghum halepense Pers*), peanuts, guandu (*Cajanus indicus Spreng*), and manioc. Such variety is important; it means the population is not limited to the cultivation of a few crops and the risk of losing it all. This variety of cultigens also enables small food producers to plant not only staple crops, but crops for the market. The borrowing system of the seed bank operates on the basis of exchange. For each kilogram of seeds borrowed, the borrower has to pay one and a half kilograms after the harvest. This system has been working well and has benefited the local small food producers.

The alternative credit system has two characteristics: it does not involve money and is based on a rotating fund. An example of that can be seen when the NGO buys fifty hoes and distributes them among food producers in need. After a period established in the contract

between the beneficiary/borrower and the NGO, the borrower has to return the number of hoes borrowed and the returned hoes are lent to other food producers in need.

The Araripe NGO has played a very important role in the area, particularly in the municipality of Ouricuri. Its action has also been seen by the population in the support and consultancy to workers' organizations and to social movements such as local farmers' cooperatives, Rural Labourers Unions and women's action groups. Along with the participation of the Araripe NGO, other grassroots organizations such as ecumenical organizations, particularly those led by the Catholic church, contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of rural dwellers. These organizations work together and support each other in the education and *conscientização* of the local population. In order to understand their role in regards to mobilization of women, I turn to a women's action group located in the community of Santa Luzia.

6.4. The Women's Action Group and its History

The women's action group of Santa Luzia was created in 1987 when the STR (Rural Labourers Union) was already represented in the community. In a meeting of rural women labourers from different regions within the state of Pernambuco promoted by FETAPE (The Federation of Agricultural Workers in Pernambuco) and CONTAG (The National Confederation of Agricultural Workers), the need for greater participation of women in Rural Labourers Unions throughout the state was discussed. The Union's interest in the participation of women in the rural Labourers struggle was because most of the union members were men. According to the union, the low participation of women was a result of their exclusion from the union's struggle and meant that these women were not aware of their rights as rural labourers. The idea was then to reach rural women labourers in different situations, including wage labour and subsistence agriculture. Through the process of *conscientização* of women workers' rights, these women labourers would not only benefit

individually, but become members of the union and participate in the political struggle of rural labourers.

The few women who represented their communities in this meeting were given the responsibility to reach other women and to form women's action groups in their place of residence. The underlying basis for the formation of these women's action groups was initially not directed towards specific needs of women, but towards the involvement of women in the political agenda of the Rural Labourers Union.

Margarida, the woman representing Santa Luzia at that meeting, is a politically engaged woman who has not only been a member of the Rural Labourers Union and of an ecumenical grassroots organization very active in the *Sertão do Araripe*, but also of PT (the Labourers political party). This woman has great leadership potential. Margarida has been the leader of the group many times as a result of her articulation with different organizations and the information she is always exposed to about rural labourer's rights and women's struggle. She has made a significant contribution to the group since its beginning. The selection of action group leaders is done by individual vote, but prior to that all of the members select potential candidates.

Upon her return from the STR (Rural Labourers Union) meeting, Margarida communicated with women from the village about the need to form the group, and the idea was initially accepted. However, not many women demonstrated interest in joining the group in its initial phase. Many women did not understand the purpose of the group and were reluctant about the fact that, if the focus was on engaging in the Rural Labourers Union struggle, why should the group be a women's group. The hesitance of women was supported by the suspicion of their husbands and initially the group counted on the participation of only five women. The first step was for these rural women to become members of the STR (Rural Labourers Union) and, as part of their own struggle, initiate their active participation in the struggle of the rural workers.

As women were incorporated in the union's struggle, the group objectives became clearer. The basic idea was the need for a higher participation of rural women in society, their engagement in the struggle for better conditions of life, and a greater *conscientização* about the utilization of their labour and of problems, such as the drought, affecting their lives. These objectives remained closely connected with the political agenda of the Rural Labourers Union.

After the first phase of consolidation of the group, the number of members rose to fourteen women. Presently the action group has forty participating women. Since its initial phase in 1987, the small action group started to meet once a month on Sundays since that is market day in the village. Sunday was an appropriate day for the women to come from the rural areas surrounding the village. Each woman contributed food and after the meeting they had a collective meal. As all of the action group members were Catholic, after eating, they gathered in church to pray. The meetings included discussions on workers' rights, on the role and importance of the union to advocate for the labourers, and on the rights of women agricultural workers to retire. The discussions also called attention to different work conditions of those from different regions within the state of Pernambuco, including the landless wage labourers who work in the sugar cane fields in the humid coastal area, the migrant labourers in the irrigated agriculture of the *São Francisco* Valley, and the small landholders of the *Agrreste*, the transitional zone between the coast and the semi-arid *Sertão*. Through these discussions, women became aware not only of the political implications of the drought which affects their lives directly, but of the implications and exploitation of wage labour outside the village. Women, therefore, achieved a *conscientização* and an understanding of reality to which they were never exposed before. This led to exposure to a distinct regime of knowledge and power acquired by women as they become critical of reality and attempt to change it by mobilizing and searching for drought mitigation measures.

After a few months the women's action group gained the support of ecumenical grassroots organizations and later on the Araripe NGO. In relation to the population of the village, the women's action group is small. However, more important than the number of

women involved is their potential to mobilize by meeting on a collective basis to discuss local and structural problems affecting their lives and the changes the women go through by joining the group. Each member is asked to pay a monthly fee of US\$.50. However, as a consequence of the shortage of money, few members comply with that.

During the last severe drought which affected the region from 1989 to 1993, attention was turned to income-generating projects to complement the family income of the women members of the group. Although the material needs of women were taken into consideration and the group began to concentrate on the specific needs of women, the political agenda of the Rural Labourers Union remained the overall objective. By that time the group was recognized by all village members and its political agenda was considered to be in the public realm. It is interesting to note that the income-generating activities in which women engaged were traditionally women's activities, but since they were performed collectively within the domain of the women's action group, they were acknowledged as activities undertaken in the public domain.

Drawing upon the importance of corn production and the availability of corn husk, the group members had the idea of producing crafts made with corn husks (rugs, purses, hats and mats). Each woman was expected to contribute corn husk and the work was usually done collectively. This constituted an important occasion for the socialization of the women. After sale of the products, each woman received 70 percent of what she produced and the remaining 30 percent was devoted to the maintenance of the group. The commercialization of the products was difficult since none of the organizations supporting the group took the responsibility to sell the products. The products were sold by the action group leader in markets in several villages and in the city of Ouricuri. This activity was of great importance to many women at the beginning of the last drought from 1989 to 1993, and served as a complement to the family income. However, due to the long period of that drought – four years – the women were unable to continue such activity because they did not have corn husk available.

Unable to produce corn husk crafts, the group members attempted other activities. Through the assistance of the Araripe NGO, the women had access to funds from an international grassroots organization for the purchase of sewing machines and material to produce clothes, embroidery, and handicrafts such as crochet work. These products were also sold by the leader of the action group in Ouricuri. Despite the support from funding agencies, the members of the group complain that the income generated has been insufficient for a stable income high enough to cover the survival expenses of the women and their families, particularly in periods of long drought.

Beyond these activities, the women from the action group have taken advantage of collective gardens devoted to the production of subsistence crops and medicinal herbs utilized in the elaboration of home-made medicines. Furthermore, the action group also has a communitarian seed bank, through which women are able to borrow seeds and resume agricultural production after periods of drought crisis.

During the last drought, the women received the support of the local NGO and were able to mobilize and be incorporated into the “Food for Work” Programme of PMA (Programa Mundial de Alimentos / World Food Programme) created by FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization). Under this programme, food was provided in exchange for work in the community, such as cleaning of roads. This benefit was realized only by the women involved in the action group, not all of the women in the village. There was some resentment by women non-group members toward this situation as the latter felt discriminated against. According to several non-group members, “they all have the same needs, so they all should qualify to receive help”. This situation, however, shows the importance of mobilization to acquire benefits in crisis periods.

The women’s action group has not only brought material benefits to its members but a *conscientização* about their stand as women workers and their rights. Such *conscientização* is acquired by women as they learn about the conditions of life of women workers in other regions and about their rights as subsistence agricultural workers. Women’s participation in

this learning process places their own life experiences in a broader perspective. Furthermore, by participating in the group, women have the opportunity to share their problems with their fellow women and to receive support in times of need. This is not only seen in the political discussions, but in women's collective income-generating activities. These women usually attempted to work together either in the church facilities, in the case of those who live in the village, or in a house of one of the group members, in the case of those who live in rural areas.

Until recently, the action group did not have a space of its own; it utilized the facilities of the Catholic church and/or of the Rural Labourers Union to hold the monthly meetings. The women of the action group were able to convince the Catholic church of the importance of having their own space, and in 1995, were given a site from the Catholic church and received funds from an international grassroots organization for the construction of their own space. The construction has been done with the cooperation of the men from the village. The men who were initially suspicious of the group became supportive in light of the accomplishments of the women members, particularly during the last drought (1989-1993).

As has been pointed out in Chapter III, non-migrant women who were not members of the action group were not systematically included in the population studied, however, data were also collected from those women on an informal basis. Those women faced the situation of non-migrant action group members prior to their entrance in the group. Women non-group members were characterized by fatalistic attitudes about the drought and had pessimistic attitudes about a solution to the problem. They had low self-esteem and were unaware of their potential to mitigate drought. According to these women, the solution to the drought lies with the government. This view reflects the dependency women and the population of the drought-prone *sertão* have developed over the years through short-term emergency measures implemented by the government in crises periods. As one of the women stated:

The drought is always a problem to us because we depend on the crops we plant to survive. There is not much we can do in drought periods. I usually stay here because my children are small. My husband migrates, but during the

last drought he stayed here and we both worked in the work front (Lucia, a 30 year old non-migrant woman).

These women have varying views of the action group. All of the non-members of the action group, however, agree that women change when they join the group. While some of the non-group members demonstrate interest in the group and would like to join it, others view the group as being elitist in the sense that it benefits only the few members; they express some jealousy towards action group members. A non-group member stated:

I think that women who join the group change a lot. They become very conceited once they become members of the action group. It is as if they know everything. They begin to talk about things that the rest of us do not know. But they sure benefit from being group members (Francisca, a 26 year old non-group member).

It is undeniable that the decision of women to join the action group can be a difficult one. As women decide to participate, they go through changes. The changes involve breaking out from the domestic and entering into the public sphere. In most cases, the men initially disapprove of the entrance of women into the group and women have to re-negotiate their decision in the domestic domain. Re-negotiations have to be done as well between women and the other village members. Women action group members are considered distinct from the other women in the village. Women experience changes as they become part of the group and grow as women, as workers, as wives and as mothers. The changing nature of women's action group members is reflected in the words of one of the members:

Before I was home, hiding. I was ashamed of everything, never opened my mouth when there were many people together. I did not know anything. Now I learned how to talk, I am not ashamed, neither do I fear to open my mouth. Now it is hard for me to stay quiet. Now I feel I belong to the struggle (Rosa, a 27 year old group member).

The group has certainly been an important vehicle for the women involved as it entails a transformation for women who had previously been secluded within the domestic domain and isolated from other women. Through the action group women attempt to mitigate the drought, and engage in a reconstruction of their selves by being exposed to a domain

unknown to them previously. They have the opportunity to demonstrate their agency explicitly. The entrance of women into the action group in a rural patriarchal society challenges patriarchy itself. The transformation of women comes along with changes in the attitudes of men who became supportive of the group once they saw the practical results of it during the last drought (1989-1993).

The great majority of the members of the action group are women ranging from their twenties to their sixties. Most of these women are married and have children. They are either return migrants or women who have never left the countryside and have been dealing with the drought in the absence of their husbands and/or sons/daughters (young adults who migrate in search of work in other places). The action group benefits from the participation of women with different life experiences and of different status in the community. The heterogeneous nature of these women has contributed in many ways to the success of the group. Women in different situations are able to share their experiences with one another. In spite of their differences, all of these women share the suffering and hardships brought by drought, as some of the consultants stated:

The poverty here is great and during the drought, Hail Mary, it gets much worse. I am already used to living alone with my six small children. During the drought, my husband goes to the middle of the world in search for some pennies. I myself never left the countryside; my husband does not want to take me along. He says that he fears not finding a job and staying with us in the middle of nowhere having to beg for food. During the drought I was forced to sell all of the animals we had until the last chicken. Thanks to God my father always helps me. (Maria, 24 years of age)

The drought is ugly, it brings hunger and sadness for us. For days the pan has nothing to cook. Besides that we see our families split. We had to send two of our daughters to engage in domestic work in Petrolina and a son to São Paulo so that we would not starve. The worst is that we stay here wondering how they are doing there. I stayed with my old man (husband) and the small children. I tell you, we did not starve to death because they sent money. (Rita, 40 years old)

I have only one daughter. In the drought my husband goes away and I stay with her. During the drought my parents helped me and I was able to get

some money to buy food from the corn husk crafts I made in the women's group, but this was only at the beginning; after that, the situation got worse. (Rosa, 27 years old)

I think that I will die here. I have left in search of work but I suffered very much. I decided to return. I have already gone three times. The worst is when the drought strikes. We become crazy to leave and outside we only find suffering. (Lia, 28 years old)

Through the statements of the consultants, the suffering is intimately related to the departure of family members, who view themselves with no other choice but to migrate to other places in search of work to guarantee their own survival and that of those who stay in the countryside. The drought is a threat and causes not only misery and hunger, but the pain of disintegration of the family structure, which is not only temporary, but often permanent. Through the voice of these women we can perceive that although they recognize that migration is often inevitable, they are conscious that migrants will not always find a reality in which they are able to improve the quality of their lives in the place of destination. Through the process of *conscientização*, and based on the different life experiences of the women involved, the group has succeeded in demonstrating that migration may not be the best alternative, as life outside the village may be even more difficult. The consciousness of these women, developed through the involvement of the distinct grassroots organizations, has also served to demonstrate that the drought and the difficult conditions these women face in rural areas is a result of the uneven development taking place within the semi-arid region itself, as well as in the nation.

The drought can also be seen as a threat to the existence of the group. It is undeniable that the absence of rain for a long period was responsible for women discontinuing the production of crafts because of the unavailability of corn husks. However, the women persisted and sought other means to engage in productive activities. From a threat, the drought became the articulating phenomenon of the group since it is exactly the pain and misery which articulate the women in the action group. For the women involved, the group represents much more than a locus of income-generating activities, since the material profit

they earn is insignificant, especially when compared to the gain acquired through their *conscientização* about the importance of their mobilization for fighting the drought. In order to better understand the group and the women who participate in it, attention is now devoted to the women members of the group: return migrants and women who never migrated.

6.5. Return Migrants

6.5.1. Return Migrant Women

The ten return migrant women who comprise the consultants for the study are mostly elderly retired married women or widows; only two of them were in their twenties. The majority of these women had basic formal education: five were able to read and write; three could sign their names; and two were illiterate (see Table 4). These women differed from those who never migrated in terms of life experience and status in the household and in the village. However, the participation of women from both categories in the group is based on the same goal – to find solutions for the problems brought by the drought and to improve the conditions of life in the rural sphere.

All of these return migrants came from families who owned land and were originally small food producers, but four of the consultants' families sold their land when they decided to settle back in their place of origin, and constructed houses to live in the village. They did so because these women and their husbands benefited from their retirement pension (which varied between US\$100.00/month to US\$300.00); therefore, they had enough to cover their living expenses. These retirees also thought agricultural work no longer suited them and, in case they decided to cultivate crops, they would have to hire workers since they were too elderly to perform the work well. Their sons and daughters usually remained in São Paulo. Nevertheless, not all of the return migrants sold their plots of land. In the case of the widowed return migrants, although some of their sons remained in São Paulo, others had returned prior to their mothers. Therefore, land was not sold, as the sons worked on it.

Table 4: Return Migrant Women

Pseudonym	Migration Location	Age	Marital Status	Literacy Level	Occupation in Migration Location	Number of Pension Income Contributors	Rural Household Size
Lia	São Paulo	28	married	literate	domestic	not retired (non-pension)	7
Edna	São Paulo	27	married	can sign name	domestic	not retired (non-pension)	9
Ana	São Paulo	60	widowed	literate	sewing and embroidery	1	3
Arinda	São Paulo	62	married	illiterate	domestic	2	2
Luzinete	São Paulo	59	married	literate	factory worker	2	2
Francisca	São Paulo	58	widowed	literate	factory worker	1	6
Lucia	São Paulo	58	married	illiterate	domestic	2	2
Maria	São Paulo	57	married	can sign name	sewing	2	4
Raimunda	São Paulo	58	widowed	can sign name	domestic	2	7
Isabel	São Paulo	60	married	literate	domestic	2	2

These return migrant action group members are certainly financially better off than most other women action group members. The retired women receive a pension and do not need to continue to depend on agriculture for their survival. However, these return migrant group members do not belong to the economic elite in the community, which is formed primarily by shop owners. Despite the distinction between the elderly retired women and the women group members who never migrated, the various group members are not necessarily all financially better off than other women in the village.

All of the return migrant consultants came from São Paulo, where they had migrated and lived for over a decade. According to the women consultants, they had either migrated with their husbands and small children during drought crisis or joined their husbands after the husbands had found work in São Paulo. When they initially migrated, they did not have in mind to stay in their place of destination permanently, but only to settle there on a temporary basis until the drought was over. In fact, all of these families returned to their place of origin several times. But since the conditions in the *sertão* did not allow them to remain, after a certain period they migrated back to São Paulo. This took place over and over again. The situation is characteristic of many migrants from the northeast as the *sertanejas(os)* are known to have a strong bond with their place of origin (Amaral and Nogueira, 1993). Such a movement usually takes place until they grow older and are able to retire and return to their homeland for good.

Return migrant couples each have a steady income, i.e., the retirement pension, and do not depend on agriculture for their survival. The pension is enough to cover their expenses and also to help their close kin. The pension is not much, but it becomes of particular importance when drought strikes. It is used to fulfill the needs of married daughters, married sons, and other family members.

All of the consultants in this category returned from São Paulo rather than from Petrolina. This is clearly understandable since the attraction of migrants to Petrolina has been limited to the last two decades. Prior to that, São Paulo attracted most of the labour force of

the *sertaneja(o)*. Furthermore, Petrolina is located within the semi-arid region and migration there does not involve the high costs involved in migration to São Paulo. Being close to their place of origin, the migrants who settle in Petrolina can make more frequent trips to their place of origin. The problems affecting the rural areas lead some of the migrants to keep moving back and forth. This is particularly the case for migrant men.

The migration movement of *sertanejas(os)* to São Paulo provides them with new experience, particularly women who were exposed to discrimination in the countryside and were essentially “invisible” in the household and larger society. In their place of destination, São Paulo, the most industrialized urban centre in Brazil, these women become exposed to a very different way of life, and to an array of opportunities absent in their place of origin. One of the most important new opportunities is their access to an income through domestic work, factory work or even in autonomous activities such as embroidery and sewing.

The migrant women consulted in Petrolina do not desire to return to their place of origin for fear of discrimination and lack of opportunities in the countryside. That is not the case with elderly return migrants from São Paulo. Being older and experienced in city life, as well as being economically autonomous in a place where access to a cash income is rare, these women do not face the discrimination they faced before. Nor do they experience a lowering of their status upon their return to the place of origin. Thus, the invisibility to which they were once victims is no longer a problem.

The autonomy of return migrant women is also present in the household as they participate more fully in decision-making. The power the elderly women hold, however, does not constitute a source of conflict in the household. Despite their autonomy, these women are conscious of their limitations as women in the rural context where patriarchy is so strong. These elderly return migrant women are more visible than those who never migrated and the experience these women gained in their place of destination contributes to their increased visibility in society in their place of origin. These women, therefore, initiated a process of

transformation based on a new construction of their selves in their place of destination, a process which continues to take place through their participation in the action group.

The situation of the younger return migrants is very distinct from that of the elderly. These young women return without any benefits. While their youth may give them more opportunity, they do not have the status the elderly return migrants have. Under these circumstances, the limited work opportunities for them increases their discrimination and subordination. As a result, many younger return migrants are likely to engage in the migration process again, even considering the negative experiences they might have had before. The entrance of the two younger return migrants into the action group, however, is a way of empowering them and an avenue for them to remain in the countryside. According to my consultants in this situation, they did not express any desire to return to São Paulo again.

It is unquestionable that the elderly return migrant women are financially better off and have a higher status than other women and their kin. The solidarity of elderly return migrants with their family members who remained in the village did not change despite the long time they stayed away and the life experience they gained. Consequently, the elderly return migrants interact well with the other women members of the action group; they enjoy transmitting their own experience to other women and the non-migrant women learn much from that. All of these elderly women were exposed to political mobilization in São Paulo, which adds to their contribution to the action group. As a result of the experiences return migrants gained in their place of destination, they are aware of the importance of collective action to improvement in people's lives.

It was in São Paulo that these return migrants were first exposed to grassroots movements and learned of the importance of mobilization. Nevertheless, the group in Santa Luzia was not formed under the leadership of return migrants. Yet, through their experience as return migrants and the desire to improve the conditions of life in the countryside, these women participate actively in the action group. The diversity of group members is important to the action group and to women's struggle. It enriches the group through the exchange of

information and experiences among the members, particularly in regards to the dynamics of the migration process. Some of my consultants commented on the experience they had as migrants in their place of destination:

It was very hard to live over there (São Paulo) at the beginning. I felt like a fish out of water. After some time it was getting better. I met some of the neighbours and they took me to a meeting at the (Catholic) church and I began to participate in the movement (Arlinda, 62 years old).

In the beginning, when I started to participate in the church meetings, my husband was very mad. One time he stopped me from going and the next day I went to talk with the priest. The priest talked to my husband and he accepted and began to support me (Ana, 60 years old).

What I learned in the neighbourhood association and in the church meetings was very good. When I was there (São Paulo) I wondered how good it would be if there were a group here to discuss our problems and to engage in income-generating activities. I returned from São Paulo and more or less two years after that the women's group was formed, and then I thought that one of my dreams had come true (Luzinete, 59 years old).

The experiences of elderly return migrants in mobilizing in their place of destination reflects the problems they faced as women, to become involved in political struggle due to the resistance of their husbands. This situation is present to a greater extent in the mobilization of rural women. Among the problems women are exposed to is the suspicion of their husbands toward the changes that might take place in their wives' behaviour after they mobilize. The return migrants' voices also express the optimistic attitudes they have in regards to women's mobilization in their place of origin.

Some of the return migrant consultants had been settled in São Paulo and lived next to their sons and daughters, who were all married and lived in São Paulo permanently. Even in those cases, the desire to return to the poverty stricken *Sertão* was based on their preference for life in their place of origin, despite the drought, and to their desire to live close to their kin found in the countryside. In the case of return migrants who have some of their sons/daughters settled in the village, the desire to return home is even higher. After being exposed to a totally different life style, the elderly return migrant women have the desire to

share their experiences in city life and thus contribute to promoting changes in their place of origin. The participation in a rural women's action group provides these women with such an opportunity.

The number of return migrants in the group is smaller than that of non-migrant women. There are thirteen return migrants and twenty-seven non-migrant action group members. The return migrants are more enthusiastic about the group and are totally absorbed in the struggle for better life conditions. Return migrants have the desire to implement changes in the place of origin and are more optimistic about it than women who never left the countryside. This is the case even though the political agenda of the action group has been closely linked with the agenda of the Rural Labourers Union. The later involvement of the local NGO and other grassroots organizations with the group has also incorporated these organizations' political inclinations, which overlap those of the union in many respects.

The differences between the attitudes of return migrant and non-migrant women action group members reflects the different life conditions these women are exposed to. Return migrants are not worried about providing food for their families on a daily basis as non-migrant women are. The former benefit from the retirement pension while the latter have to deal with the limitations of life in the countryside, including limitations imposed by the ecosystem and limited wage labour opportunities. Furthermore, having to cope with the drought on a permanent basis, non-migrant women have a more realistic view of the difficulties related to that disaster and of the difficulties related to its solution.

The situation of return migrants differs from that of women who never left the countryside in many respects, including experiences in popular movements. However, the former identify with the problems and life conditions of the latter particularly in regards to drought. Prior to their migration to São Paulo, the return migrant women went through the same situation faced by non-migrant women. The struggle for better life conditions and for the development of drought mitigation measures is shared by all members of the action group

and has become the underlying basis for the group's articulation. This is the case despite the heterogeneity in the conditions of life of the women involved.

6.5.2. Return Migrant Men

As far as the men consulted in this category, i.e., return migrants, they were both elderly and enjoyed talking about their life experiences, particularly in regards to their lives in São Paulo. According to their view, São Paulo is a paradise for those able to make money. They migrated during the industrialization boom which took place in São Paulo in the 1950's, although one of the migrants stayed unemployed for some time when he first arrived in São Paulo. Despite their pride in having lived and worked outside their village, they all enjoy their place of origin and are happy to be back. One of the consultants puts it this way:

São Paulo is good for making money, especially when you are young, but there is no place better than here. In São Paulo life is too busy. It is different here; we have peace and we do not have to be running around (Seu José, 64 years old).

The two men consultants both shared the same view about the importance of returning to their place of origin after retirement. Although they do not regret having lived in São Paulo, they blame their migration on the inefficient measures of the government in dealing with the drought problem. Both men returned to their place of origin several times to take care of their land, but were unable to stay because of the drought. It was only after they were able to retire that they could fulfill their desire to return to their place of origin for good. One of the consultants whose sons and daughter stayed in São Paulo regrets his inability to engage in agriculture. He sold his plot of land to others. As he stated:

It is good to be home and to have my retirement pension. I only regret the fact that I was unable to hold my land, to engage in agriculture and raise a few animals. That is what I learned to do with my father and grandfather. I am too old for that now and have no one to help me; they all (sons and daughters) stayed in São Paulo; that is a pity (Seu Pedro, 60 years old).

While elderly retired women found other activities to do in their place of origin and their participation in the action group helps them in this regard, the retired return migrant men do not have other activities to perform in a village devoted to agricultural production. This is responsible for their uneasiness since they are men who have been used to working during their whole lives.

6.6. Non-Migrants

6.6.1. Non-Migrant Women

The ten women in this category differ considerably from the return migrants, although women in both categories mobilize in the action group under the same objectives. Return migrants are mostly elderly retired women, either married or widows, who have not only experienced life outside the village but are also financially better off. Furthermore, the elderly return migrant women have more spare time as their children are all grown and many remained in São Paulo. The non-migrant rural women are younger (their age ranging from the twenties to the late forties), are married and have no access to a cash income on a regular basis (refer to Figure 5, page 65). Seven of them live in the countryside and the other three live in the village, whereas all of the elderly return migrants live in the village. The level of literacy of these women was also lower. Three of them are able to read and write; four can sign their name; and three are illiterate (see Table 5).¹⁵

The non-migrant women have experienced severe hardship in life. These women have proven to be strong and capable of handling difficult situations in times of drought crisis, particularly when their husbands migrate and they stay in the countryside, assuming the headship of their households and having to care for their children. As a consequence of the

¹⁵ The number of income contributors per household in the rural context would lead to a biased assessment of the actual contribution of particular household members because agricultural production in the semi-arid environment of Santa Luzia is unreliable and the participation of women in non-remunerated activities can distort their actual contribution. They also have limited access to a cash income.

Table 5: Non-Migrant Women

Pseudonym	Place of Residence	Age	Marital Status	Literacy Level	Rural Household Size
Rosa	Santa Luzia	27	married	literate	3
Maria	Santa Luzia	24	married	can sign name	8
Rita	Santa Luzia	40	married	can sign name	7
Lourdes	Santa Luzia	40	"widow of the drought" (separated)	can sign name	6
Creusa	Santa Luzia	39	married	literate	8
Noemia	Santa Luzia	32	"widow of the drought" (separated)	illiterate	7
Luisa	Santa Luzia	43	married	illiterate	6
Francisca	Santa Luzia	36	"widow of the drought" (separated)	illiterate	7
Margarida	Santa Luzia	32	married	literate	6
Amélia	Santa Luzia	33	married	can sign name	5

absence of their husbands during drought crisis, these women are usually referred to as *viúvas da seca* (widows of the drought).

Feminists have been critical of the use of the term “widows of the drought” to refer to these rural women (Portella et al., 1994). The argument is that the expression automatically associates women with their husbands and does not take into account the potential of these women independently from men. For me, the term “widows of the drought” is accurately suggestive since it reflects the reality of rural women as subordinate to men and therefore captures the cultural construction of women in the drought-prone society of northeastern Brazil.

These women have limited access to resources and are confined to the domestic sphere. However, in times of crisis and in the absence of their husbands, they perform all types of agricultural work and have been employed in “productive work fronts” since 1983. These women perform these tasks very well. The younger women stay with their children in the countryside whereas the older ones also see their daughters and sons migrate. Among the women studied, three of them had been abandoned by their husbands. The migration of husbands takes place with the purpose of helping their families who stay behind, but it does not necessarily happen that way. The husbands, especially the ones who migrate to São Paulo, do not always find a job. Furthermore, sometimes the living expenses they have to deal with in their place of destination are so high that they are unable to send remittances back home on a regular basis.

The men who migrate in drought crises to work in the irrigated fields of the São Francisco Valley have to deal with the high competition for work and low pay as a result of the high availability of labour power from the drought-prone areas. During these drought periods, only *avulso* work is available. As a result, the men are unable to send remittances and the women have to provide for the family needs.

The contribution of non-migrant women and their efforts to overcome the drought problem as the heads of their households is clearly seen. Nonetheless, upon the return of their

husbands, these women continue to occupy a subordinate position. The reason is that women's assumption of the headship of their households in the absence of their husbands is expected, and is not fully appreciated. This is the case because society expects women to show their strength in the absence of their husbands. Therefore, the recognition of women's potential is not explicitly expressed as it would be expected in other societal settings. The men and the population in general are, however, aware of women's potential and strength.

The strength and power of these non-migrant women is important not only to their families but to the society in general. If women were unable to handle the difficult conditions of life during drought periods, the situation would be much worse. One of the consequences would be for these women and their offspring to beg for food on the streets of nearby cities. This is common, but it has not happened with women from Santa Luzia. In Santa Luzia women are not only proud and aware of their strength, but receive the support of ecumenical grassroots organizations, the Rural Labourers Union and the local NGO, particularly during drought. The benefits of that to women is especially seen when they mobilize in the action group.

The participation of non-migrant women in the action group is an achievement for them. Their mobilization helps them to recognize their potential, share their difficulties with other women, and learn about their role as women and as rural workers. The mobilization of these women in an action group is a way for them to assert themselves and to engage in a construction of their new selves.

The decision to stay in the countryside and take on the headship of their families involves both the women and their husbands. These women are not forced to stay in the countryside; they usually realize the need of doing so. Being confined to their village, these women always wonder how life is outside the village and have a great curiosity about São Paulo. Two of the consultants stated:

I was born here and have lived all my life here. I have only gone to Ouricuri and Petrolina for medical reasons. I like Petrolina, it is beautiful especially for the river. I would like to accompany my husband, but he never took me to

São Paulo. He prefers to go by himself because he says he never knows what is looking for him there. I would like to go there but I am afraid. The women who have lived there tell me that it is a very big city. (Luisa, 43 years old)

I do not like it here during the drought, it is hard, very hard. It is also very lonely. I stay with the kids in the countryside and my husband goes away. I become very isolated, but it has changed since I joined the women's group. I enjoy the meetings and the work we do with corn husk. I like to talk to other women; we all go through a lot in life and have the same problems. It is good to feel that I am not alone. (Creusa, 39 years old)

The participation of these women in the women's action group can be seen as a vehicle of transformation for them. The number of women participating in the action group is low considering the village population. While the group involves a relatively small portion of the village, what is important is that it exists and acts as a vehicle of change for the women involved in it.

By participating in the women's action group, non-migrant women benefit greatly. These women have the opportunity to interact with return migrants, to be exposed to the discussions held, and to benefit from income-generating activities. For most of the women in the study, prior to their participation in the action group, they had not been aware of the limitations life in the countryside poses to them and also had not been exposed to discussions about the political issues related to their lives as women and as rural workers. Once they mobilize in the action group, it becomes clear that mobilization itself is an avenue for them to develop measures to mitigate the drought.

For these women, the participation in the action group gives them an opportunity to abandon their confinement to the domestic sphere and to enter the public sphere. The return migrants have already been exposed to this experience in their place of destination. The action group provides the non-migrant women with the opportunity to be exposed to the public domain and to the process of *conscientização* of their problems including the limitations posed by the drought.

6.6.2. Non-Migrant Men

As for the men who engage in migration and leave their wives in the countryside, the two consultants I had both stated that they migrate because circumstances force them to do so. They also mentioned that in most cases, particularly in recent years, their migration to São Paulo and Petrolina has not been worthwhile. They have great difficulty in finding a job which enables them to cover their living expenses in the city as well as to send remittances to their families back home. For them, the best option would be to stay in the countryside, and they blame inefficient governmental actions for their inability to do so.

In the case of their fellow migrant men who abandon their families, the return migrant men state that this is usually the case when the migrant men find a good job in their place of destination. They both disapproved of such behaviour. When asked why they do not take their families along with them, they stated that it is because it involves too great a risk since when they migrate they never know whether or not they will find a job.

In the case of the two men consultants who never left the countryside and have been exposed to the drought on a permanent basis, both men were elderly and stated that they never migrated because they heard of bad experiences and were afraid they would never return back home. Both men owned large plots of land; - one held a plot consisting of 84 hectares and the other of 95 hectares. They have been working in agriculture and in the raising of animals all their lives. Furthermore, the families of these men were both large. While one had eight offspring, including men and women, the other had thirteen. Although these men never engaged in migration, that has not been the case for their sons who had migrated at some point in their lives to São Paulo and Petrolina. Life during the drought crisis has never been easy, especially considering the large size of families. It is clear, however, that the financial situation of these men and their families is much better than that of those who own less land.

The analysis of the conditions of life in the countryside and of the participation of women in action groups provides not only an understanding of the situation of those in the

countryside, but an insight into the situation of migrant women in Petrolina and the reasons why they resist returning back home for good. *Conscientização* of discrimination and hardship rural women face in Santa Luzia, which is representative of most rural villages throughout the semi-arid, is acquired by women who belong to the action group. The participation of women in the group is an important step in the transformation of the women members and a stimulus for them to begin a construction of their new selves. Through mobilization, women attempt to change reality. Nevertheless, in regards to the improvement of their quality of life, there is still much to be accomplished. Major improvement is unlikely to happen unless the government changes its stand towards the drought-prone semi-arid.

The population of the drought-prone semi-arid area needs to be educated about how to better deal with the limitations of the ecosystem. Despite the great efforts of popular movements and of the NGO, that work in the region, the government needs to support NGOs and the local population in the development of the non-irrigated semi-arid and improvement of life in that region. Once this takes place, the population will benefit considerably. For the time being, the actions of rural women mobilized in a small group in order to improve their lives and to work towards mitigation of the drought hazard demonstrates that they are benefiting from the transformation they go through in the action group and also shows that these women have great potential, not only on an individual basis but on a collective basis.

6.7. The Women's Action Group and Change in Women's Lives

In a society characterized by a strong patriarchy and in which women are not expected to show their power explicitly, the formation and existence of the women's action group shows the power the women members have. The support from grassroots organizations, the Rural Labourers Union and the local NGO has been of great importance to the existence of the group, particularly in times of severe drought crisis, but the entrance and participation of women in the group has required a re-negotiation of power relations at the household level. By being able to re-negotiate their relations in the domestic realm, women enter into the

group and thereby have opportunity to demonstrate explicitly the power they have. Women's participation in the group challenges patriarchy as the group offers an avenue to the transformation of women as a result of the re-negotiation of power relations they go through with their close male kin.

Women's decision to participate in the action group usually does not come easily. In most cases, there is resistance by the women's husbands and sons to their interest in the group. The problems faced by women demonstrate that the challenge of patriarchy in the rural society of northeastern Brazil is a difficult and complex process. By challenging patriarchy, women challenge the way society has been operating and this is associated with the introduction of a new pattern of behaviour expected not only from women but from men as well. Women's participation in the action group, thus, exposes them to new knowledge and constitutes new social relationships.

Once the re-negotiation of power is resolved at the household level, women also have to re-negotiate their relations with other society members including women non-group members. This is the case because once women enter the group, they face a process of change and transformation and become different actors in society. Participation of women in the action group not only renders them visible, but allows women to enter the public domain. The discovery of women's rights makes women realize the importance of the public domain and to be aware that it is possible for them to enter it. As a result, women mobilize in public life where they begin to exercise a political will and to intervene in their own fate (Souza-Lobo, 1991).

The political agenda of the action group is broad. It encompasses the struggle of the Rural Labourers Union as well as the needs of women workers. The women's action group fits well in the category of organizations referred to by Maskrey (1989) as community-based, which can play a major role in disaster mitigation. The mitigation of the drought problem is a major concern of the action group. Drought is a problem which overlaps with, as well as

increases, the other problems affecting rural women such as poverty, limited access to resources and patriarchy.

The entrance of women in the action group can be seen as a way of searching for drought mitigation measures, especially when we consider the exposure of the women members to the process of *conscientização*. According to Freire, this process is based on the idea of what he calls “human praxis”, that is, it is necessary to understand reality and to reach a critical stand on it. The process of *conscientização* cannot exist outside of praxis, i.e., outside the action-reflection act. The process of *conscientização* is, thus, a dialectical process (Freire, 1980). In the case analysed, once women are exposed to the process of *conscientização*, they not only attempt to transform reality in their efforts to mitigate the drought, but experience a process of transformation.

Women’s mobilization in the action group is a major step towards the transformation of reality. Although the reality of the rural areas is quite different from that of Petrolina, it is through “the action group” that NGOs, the Rural Labourers Union and religious grassroots organizations reach the women and provide them with a process of *conscientização*. Through *conscientização*, women become aware of the reasons behind the underdevelopment of their place of origin and of the problems characteristic of capitalist development, including the exploitation of the workers. Action group mobilization decreases the vulnerability of women. Beyond the learning process to which they are exposed through *conscientização*, women experience changes which enable them to have explicit power and to enter the public domain.

Although remaining in rural areas, these women are also related to the capitalist world system. The permanence of these women in the drought-prone rural semi-arid area takes place so that other family members can migrate to fulfill the labour demand of the capitalist sector. The costs of the reproduction of the labour force also decrease as women remain in the countryside and bear the reproduction costs of the domestic unit (Mies, 1986). Furthermore, the permanence of these women in rural areas can be seen to result from the lack of opportunities for them outside that sphere. The poverty women face is closely related to the

globalization of the local economy as drought and underdevelopment of the region are products of the internal colonialism characteristic of the semi-arid and of its relations to global economy. Through engagement in action groups, women are also linked to the world capitalist system as they receive funds from international grassroots organizations which have been used to generate activities for women particularly during severe drought crisis.

The participation of women in the action group is a form of resistance to the conditions of life characterized by the subordination and discrimination these women were subjected to in the patriarchal rural society particularly prior to but as well as during their participation in the action group. The engagement of women in the group, thus, shows that women are strong enough to engage in critical changes and, by doing so, not only attempt to demonstrate their potential as women and as workers, but to implement important changes in their society. The political mobilization of the population is certainly an important step towards the mitigation of the drought. However, it is a limited measure in regards to the implementation of a development model focussed on the solution of the drought, a problem which has been going on for a long time and which benefits the regional political and economic elite. The women group members are aware of their limitations toward the solution to the drought problem despite their efforts to mitigate that hazard. One of the consultants stated:

The group has brought a lot to us because, prior to engaging in the group, we women were all isolated from the world. We did not know about anything and when the drought came we had no shoulders to cry on since our husbands usually left in search for work. I like it here, but there has to be a solution to the drought problem. Although we in the group have been doing our best, we need support from the authorities, the only good thing the drought brought us was this women's group (Lourdes, a 40 year old action group member).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Drought is not a problem related only to the rural areas, but to the urban sphere, to the region and to the nation as a whole. The drought is not a physical and environmental problem solely but a human-made one and is embedded in the development process of the region. This is clearly shown through the high levels of socio-economic development achieved by portions of the semi-arid region while other areas are subjected to poverty and underdevelopment. As a result of political and economic interests, the government has not focussed attention on the implementation of effective mitigation measures which would bring a solution to the drought and promote long-term regional development.

In the absence of effective governmental action, women, who comprise one of the most vulnerable sectors of the population afflicted by the drought, have attempted to mitigate the hazard. However, women's actions and potential to mitigate the drought have been underestimated. The present study refutes the idea that women are passive beings and shows that women play a very important role in dealing with the drought. Women have attempted to mitigate the drought hazard by either engaging in migration or mobilizing in rural action groups.

Beyond the lack of attention to the development of the drought-prone semi-arid area, and the attention given to short-term emergency measures during severe crises, the government has failed to include the needs of women in development planning and in policy-making. The drought has been investigated by many scholars in the social sciences and

technical fields, but until the present time there has not been any study which focusses systematically and specifically on the role of women and on gender relations. Neglect of the role played by women is a result of the ideology of the patriarchal society of the region which renders women inferior to men and reflects the idea that women are passive beings. The neglect to focus on women is certainly a product of the social construction of women and of the role they play.

In northeastern Brazil, particularly in rural areas, women are essentially confined in the domestic sphere and usually do not engage in remunerated activities. This has led to the “invisibility” of women (Ramalho, 1995; Fischer and Melo, 1996). This study has attempted to demonstrate that, although subjugated, women play an important role in the reproduction of the domestic unit and have proven to be powerful in the domestic sphere in the rural semi-arid areas. However, according to societal norms, women are not expected to show explicitly the power they have.

The neglect to focus on women has led to a limited understanding of the impact of the drought as well as of the population’s responses to that hazard. A complete assessment of the drought problem, therefore, requires attention to women and their role in face of the drought situation. Once women are incorporated into investigations of the drought, the important role women play is acknowledged. The incorporation of women in disaster research and in policy-making becomes crucial and an important step for the development of realistic and effective measures toward the implementation of long-term development planning to the region.

The study deals with women facing different situations and exposed to distinct life conditions both in the rural and urban sphere. By focussing on women exposed to capitalist wage labour in irrigated agriculture (*avulso* and *fichado*) and domestic work both in Petrolina, and on return migrants as well as women who never left the countryside and mobilize in rural action group, the analysis demonstrates that these women are exposed to completely different life circumstances. The study thus provides an overall picture of the responses of women to the drought problem. All of the women are related to the drought and

have their lives, in one way or the other, shaped by this hazard. Despite the differences in their conditions of life, these women all attempt to mitigate the drought and have their lives transformed as they search for measures to mitigate the drought. The transformation they go through, nevertheless, is limited. The process of *conscientização* about the underlying causes of the drought, as well as about women's own potential as women and as workers, is an important vehicle to the transformation of women and a very important step for women to develop appropriate measures to mitigate the drought and to assert themselves in society.

In face of government neglect toward the drought-prone areas, the study has demonstrated the important role played by religious grassroots organizations, the Araripe NGO and the Rural Labourers Union. These organizations have not only been focussing on the needs of the local population in general, but on the needs of women themselves. Through these organizations, the rural population has benefited from the process of *conscientização* and from the transferring of appropriate technology which leads to sustainable development.

Migrant women have benefited from *conscientização* through the Rural Labourers Union, which provides them with a learning process about their conditions as workers and also about the dynamics of the drought. This is the case because women learn that their labour power becomes available to capitalists as a result of drought conditions in their place of origin.

Grassroots organizations, the Rural Labourers Union and the local NGO do not aim at substituting for the government, but have been important in pressuring the government to implement a development model which would lead to an improvement in the quality of life of the population and to sustainable rural development. The Rural Labourers Union also calls the attention of the population to the needs and rights of workers exposed to capitalist labour processes so that fair working conditions can be incorporated in the development of the capitalized portion of the semi-arid. Despite the efforts of these organizations the government has been slow in responding to the demands of grassroots organizations.

The involvement of grassroots organizations has been of great importance to the population of the drought-prone semi-arid area, particularly women. However, it has not succeeded in stopping the population from migrating out. Migration has been a mitigation response of the *sertanejos(as)* to the drought for many years. Although rural-urban migration takes place in normal drought years, it increases considerably during severe drought periods. Along with several regions of Brazil, the irrigated semi-arid areas have been taking advantage of the labour supply of the population afflicted by the drought. The migration of women has been high, although it has not attracted the attention of scholars or government officials. Rural-urban migration has rendered women visible because women are usually absorbed by the labour market in their place of destination more quickly than men. This is especially the case in Petrolina where women are not only employed in the domestic services sector but in irrigated agriculture.

Both women and men consider migration to be a mitigation measure. Nevertheless, an assessment of the effectiveness of migration as a mitigation measure has to take into account whether or not the migration movement decreases the vulnerability of the population involved in it. In the case of the women engaged in migration to Petrolina, migration does not necessarily decrease their vulnerability. Even though Petrolina offers a series of advantages for migrant women, including access to employment and to the process of *conscientização* through the Rural Labourers Union, the transformation of women is partial as women face a new dimension of exploitation once they are absorbed by capitalist labour processes. Under these circumstances, women face another realm of vulnerability. Through *conscientização*, however, migrant women become aware of their conditions and limitations as migrants and as workers and also of the political and economic nature of the drought.

Another way to mitigate the drought in rural areas of the *sertão do Araripe* has been the mobilization of rural women and return migrants in action groups. This mobilization has had the support of grassroots organizations, of the local NGO and of the Rural Labourers Union. Through the action group, women benefit from the process of *conscientização* and

learn about their conditions as women workers. Action group mobilization also provides women with the opportunity to socialize with other women, and to engage in income generating activities. The action group has been a valuable avenue for women to understand the roots of the problems affecting their lives such as poverty and drought. Mobilization of women in action groups decreases the vulnerability of women as women become aware of the limitations imposed by the ecosystem, of the political and economic nature of the drought and of the limitations of capitalist labour processes in the absorption of migrant women's labour power. Such mobilization increases women's self-esteem and allows women to demonstrate the power they have explicitly.

The experiences entailed in the migration of women in this study are not the same and do not impact on all of the women equally since the conditions of life and situation in their place of destination are very heterogeneous. These women all migrated with the intention of mitigating the drought by either sending remittances to those remaining in the rural areas or by encouraging the migration of family members in the countryside. While some women are exposed to the process of *conscientização*, others are not. Migrant women who benefit from *conscientização* not only attempt to change reality but experience changes in their stand as women and as workers, which lead to their partial transformation.

The changes and experiences of the migrant and non-migrant women in the study are very distinct. Nevertheless, all of the women respond to the drought situation and attempt to change the limitations imposed by the drought to their lives and the lives of their family members. The changes women go through in their mobilization in rural action groups and rural-urban migration challenge patriarchy in both the city and in the countryside. This leads to important changes not only for the women involved but for men and for society more generally. *Conscientização* is an important avenue for women to challenge patriarchy. The process empowers women and changes their attitudes toward their own potential and capability about the changes they can introduce to improve their own lives.

The conditions of life migrant women face in their place of destination are very distinct from those found in their place of origin. Women go through a learning process as their lives become transformed and they engage in a new self construction in the city and in the countryside. One of the important changes which occurs to women in their place of destination is women's wage labour employment. By taking wage labour jobs women are exposed to a process which allows them to demonstrate their knowledge and power explicitly. As part of that process women re-negotiate power relations at the household level. Exposure of women to new knowledge constitutes new social relationships including gender relations. The acquisition of new knowledge by women is related to new implications in the domain of power such as the case of the demonstration of implicit and explicit power. In Petrolina women's power becomes explicitly exercised.

Although the conditions of labour are not good and a sexual division of labour is invoked through the rationalization of discrimination of women's labour, migrant women do not desire to return to their place of origin. Having access to new life conditions raises the self-esteem of migrant women and is an important accomplishment for them; it enables them to help others and to become "visible" to both themselves and their families whether found in the city or in the countryside.

The entry of these women into the public domain, to which is attached greater importance than the domestic domain, enable women to demonstrate their knowledge and power explicitly. Although women become "visible" and not only gain a higher self-esteem but societal recognition at the level of both the household and society, women still remain exploited in both spheres. Thus, the transformation women go through is limited.

The nature of the limited transformation women go through is present in the dependence of women on the jobs they perform and on the globalization of the local economy. This limited transformation of migrant women is closely related to another realm of exploitation these women face in their place of destination. The reliance on women's labour in irrigated agricultural work and the different work conditions to which women are

exposed reflect the exploitation of these women workers by the capitalist economy which rationalizes the exploitation of women under gender differences. Since in some cases these migrant women are the breadwinners of their families, with unemployed or deserting husbands, the exploitation of women is clearly present within the household sphere. In the case of domestic workers, the exploitation is present when we consider the reasons behind the migration of these young women and the obligation they have to provide for their rural households of origin.

The situation of rural women members of the action group also reflects the exploitation of women and its relation to the global economy. These women take on the headship of their households as a result of the needs of their domestic unit. The permanence of these women in the countryside takes place as a result of the demand of the capitalist sector for labourers. These women take on the responsibilities of providing for their families so that other family members can be absorbed by the capitalist economy. The situation of these women within the rural action group is also related to the capitalist global system as they receive funds from international grassroots organizations to engage in the production of crafts for sale to provide for the survival needs of their rural households. However women rural group members do not experience another realm of exploitation and their mobilization empowers them in all avenues of life. Mobilization of rural women in action groups allows women to enter the public domain of life and to have voice through their demonstration of explicit power.

The differences among the women studied are not only related to the dynamics of life in the rural and urban spheres, but to the dynamics of the migration process related to the place of destination of migrant women. The experiences involved in migration thus reflect women's willingness to engage in return migration or to stay in their place of destination on a permanent basis. All of the return migrants settled in Santa Luzia had migrated to São Paulo, not to Petrolina. On the contrary, migrant women settled in Petrolina express no desire to return to the countryside. The different attitudes these women have towards their place of

origin is closely related to the experiences they have in their place of destination, such as type of work in which they become involved.

Another important factor is whether these women engage in inter-regional or intra-regional migration. Migration to São Paulo involves not only long trips, but higher expenses. It also involves an adjustment process to the conditions of life and work characteristic of a large urban industrial centre. Migration to Petrolina does not require the adjustment process required by migrants engaged in inter-regional migration. Petrolina is not only geographically closer to women's place of origin, which enables women an easier access to their rural villages on a more frequent basis, but also offers many work opportunities to women in irrigated agricultural work. The changes faced by migrant women in Petrolina are thus not as radical as those faced by migrant women settling in São Paulo. This situation may have considerable implications for the willingness of migrant women to stay in Petrolina on a permanent basis.

The majority of return migrants returned from São Paulo in a position when they benefit from a retirement pension. Under these circumstances, these women have a higher status in their rural village of Santa Luzia. Many studies have demonstrated that the *retirantes nordestinos* have a close bond with their place of origin in the drought-prone *Sertão* and are always willing to return when drought crises are over. That does not seem to be the case when the population, particularly women, engages in intra-regional migration. The changes in migration flows taking place in more recent years have certainly been affecting the attitudes of the population, especially women, towards return migration. Studies focussing on return migration have indicated, however, that the number of women returnees is lower than that of men even in inter-regional migration (Amaral and Nogueira, 1993; Sampaio Souza, 1984).

In spite of the heterogeneity which characterizes the lives of the women under study, these women are all related to the drought and their situation in both the urban and rural spheres are shaped by the drought in a global perspective. In face of the neglect of the government to implement effective measures to mitigate that hazard and also to implement

a feasible development model in the region, the population will continue facing hardships and continue to migrate to other areas.

By focussing on women and their relationship to the drought problem, the agency of these women in responding to the hardships of the drought and to the conditions of life imposed by drought are clearly seen. In order to have a reasonable assessment of the drought problem, the focus on women is of major importance. Through this study I hope to have demonstrated the important role women play and hope to have demystified the notion of women as powerless and passive beings. The presentation of the distinct faces of women as well as of the semi-arid region becomes of great importance to the understanding of the drought problem, of the role women play in face of the drought in both the rural and urban spheres, and of the attitudes of women toward their potential to mitigate the drought and engage in the construction of their new selves. The needs of women must therefore be incorporated in regional development planning and in disaster mitigation efforts so that long-term regional development can be achieved. This can only take place if women and men participate actively in development planning projects.

Through the analysis presented I hope to have demonstrated that disaster mitigation should move away from emphasis on emergency measures. Disaster relief efforts should incorporate long-term development planning (Maskrey, 1989; Anderson and Woodrow, 1989). In order for this to be accomplished, governments should not only support, but work closely with NGOs, religious grassroots organizations, neighbourhood associations and labour unions, so that appropriate and effective measures can be implemented. These organizations work closely with populations affected by disasters; people at the grassroots level should be considered a resource. By working along with grassroots organization the local population can be involved in planning and implementation of disaster mitigation.

Empowerment of the population at the grassroots level through *conscientização* should not be considered as a threat to governmental action, but an important condition for development to take place. This may require breaking away from old political and economic

oligarchies and turning towards implementation of a model which incorporates the needs of a majority of people and that is based on people's participation. The emphasis on sophisticated models and technology to deal with drought has proven ineffective. Effective measures can be implemented at lower costs if the affected population participates in the process. Future disaster research should not only give attention to women, but should incorporate them into planning to address their needs.

Studies of disaster should move away from focus on natural and physical aspects, and consider the social, political and economic implications of the phenomenon. Future research should have an interdisciplinary focus that involves experts from the social sciences (*La Red*, 1993), but should include awareness of the importance of *conscientização* as a social process. This will not only change the understanding of the disaster phenomenon, but have considerable implications for policy-making.

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APPENDIX A

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT

CHESF	São Francisco Hydroelectric Company
CICA	Industrial Company for Processed Food
CONTAG	The National Confederation of Agricultural Workers
CODEVASF	Company for the Development of the São Francisco Valley
CVSF	Commission of the São Francisco Valley
DNOCS	The National Department of Works to Overcome Drought
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FETAPE	The Federation of Agricultural Workers in Pernambuco
IDB	Interamerican Development Bank
INCRA	The National Institute for Colonization and Land Reform
IOCS	Department of Works to Overcome Drought
MSTR	Rural Labourers Union Movement
PMA	(Programa Mundial de Alimentos/World Food Program
PT	Labourers Party
STR	Rural Labourers Union
SUDENE	Superintendency of Northeast Development
SUVALE	Superintendency of the São Francisco Valley

APPENDIX B

STANDARDIZED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- I. Consultant's Identification**
 - 01. Consultant's name**
 - 02. Date**
 - 03. Occupation**
 - 04. Place of origin**
 - 05. Place of residence and address in the city**
 - 06. Place where the interview is undertaken**
 - 07. Name of consultant**
 - 08. Educational level**
 - 09. Age**
 - 10. Marital status**

- II. Information about Domestic Group in the Place of Origin and Migration Process**
 - 11. How many people live in your house?**
 - 12. What is your kinship relation with the other members of the domestic unit?**
 - 13. What was your occupation in the place of origin?**
 - 14. Did you earn a salary in the place of origin?**
 - 15. What are the occupations of the other members of your domestic unit?**
 - 16. Do they work in their own land?**
 - 17. What type of work your family members do during the drought?**
 - 18. How long ago did you migrate to the city?**
 - 19. Is this the first time you migrated? If not, when and where did you migrate before?**
 - 20. Why did you migrate?**
 - 21. Are you the only family member that has migrated?**
 - 22. Who made the decision for you to migrate?**
 - 23. Did you migrate before, during or after the drought?**
 - 24. Did you have any help from family members in the city when you first arrived?**
 - 25. Do you feel related to your family in the rural areas?**
 - 26. Do you send remittances for your family members who stayed in the countryside?**
 - 27. How often do you send remittances?**
 - a. Once a month**
 - b. Every three months**
 - c. Other**
 - 28. Do you think the remittances you send help your family overcome the impact of the drought or it is only utilized on subsistence expenses?**

29. In case there is a relationship between you and your family in the rural areas, who do you think benefit most from the relationship?
30. Do you receive acknowledgement from your family about the remittances you send?
31. Do you consider your family in the countryside:
 - a. Not too poor
 - b. Poor
 - c. Very poor
32. For you, what is the drought?
33. During drought periods, what did you do to help your family?
34. Do you think the drought affects women and men equally?
35. How do you think the drought problem can be resolved:
 - a. by the government
 - b. by the affected population
36. What do you think about the role of the government in regards to the drought?
37. Do you want to return to your place of origin?

III. Information about the migrant situation in the city

38. Who do you live with in Petrolina
 - a. parents
 - b. offsprings
 - c. alone
 - d. in the place of work (in the case of domestic workers)
39. Which jobs did you have before?
40. Do you think the city offers more opportunities for women or men?
41. What difference does it make for a woman to have access to an income?
42. Has your life changed after you became a wage labourer?
43. If yes, in what ways?
44. How long have you been in the city?
45. How much do you earn?
46. How often do you see your relatives (if there is any) who live in the city?
47. When you migrated did you have intentions to stay in the city on a permanent or temporary basis?
48. Why did you decide to live in this neighbourhood?
49. Do you own your house or have to pay rent?
50. Comparing with life in the countryside, do you think life in the city is:
 - a. better
 - b. the same
 - c. worse

IV. Community based organization (this section was not applicable to domestic workers)

51. **Is there any grassroots organization active in your neighbourhood:**
 - a. **church-based ones**
 - b. **neighbourhood association**
52. **Are you a member of any of these organizations?**
53. **In your place of origin was there any grassroots organizations and mobilization of the population in:**
 - a. **food producers association**
 - b. **cooperatives**
 - c. **women's groups**
54. **Did you participate in any of them?**
55. **Do you think it is easier to mobilize collectively in the rural areas or in your place of destination?**
56. **Are you a member of the neighbourhood association?**
57. **Do you participate in the meetings?**
58. **Is the neighbourhood association important?**
59. **Are you a member of the Rural Labourers Union?**
60. **Do you think the Rural Labourers Association is important?**
61. **Why?**
62. **What do you think about women's leadership in the neighbourhood association and in the Rural Labourers Union?**