Introduction

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The roles of women in Latin American and Caribbean development, their subordination and forms of resistance, are best understood with an interdisciplinary approach, making use of a historical and international political economy framework, rather than the usual country-by-country review. The advantage of this approach is that it looks at the intertwining of economic, social, and political issues within and among the countries of the American hemisphere. In addition, it recognizes the diversity of economic structures that exist in Latin America and the Caribbean, ranging from the predominant capitalist system to socialism; the various types of markets found at the local, national, or global level; and the historical shift in international socioeconomic relations away from direct colonization and toward a development model.

Both scholarly research in women's studies and feminist political work for change have documented the need for a gendered understanding in development studies. This involves more than merely incorporating women into policy making: it requires changing the framework used and the questions traditionally asked about the goals and effects of development. Authors in this book combine these interdisciplinary political economy and gendered approaches to reframe our understanding of women's relationship to development in Latin America and the Caribbean, reflecting new insights and paradigm shifts.

Most U.S. feminist theories prevalent through the mid-1980s were too focused on other issues to integrate fully all women's experiences across class, race, ethnic, and national lines or to capture the significance of the historical, cultural, and social differences that result from the exploitation endemic to the systems and practices of colonialism and slavery that once prevailed in the regions known today as the Third World. At the same time, Latin American and Caribbean feminists were busy searching for new strategies to confront the many immediate problems facing their often impoverished nations, a task that frequently demanded more grassroots action than theorizing.

Nonetheless, since the closing of the United Nations International Decade for Women (1975–85), feminist scholarship in Latin America and the Caribbean has promoted more holistic analyses of women's multiple

oppressive conditions and developed comparative perspectives that establish the crucial connections between women's conditions in these regions and in North America. Simultaneously, feminist researchers from Europe and North America have paid increased attention to the area of women and development.

New Frameworks for Understanding Gender and the Political Economy

Early feminist (and nonfeminist) discussions of women and development generally took a dichotomous approach: women were viewed as either helped or exploited by development, integrated or marginalized, drawn into paid employment or excluded from it, relegated to traditional domestic roles. Recent authors recognize many more complexities in this process and often suggest that development simultaneously has had both positive and negative consequences for women. To reach this new understanding, it has been necessary to secure additional empirical data and to create new concepts and frameworks of analysis.

In the past it was difficult accurately to assess women's role in the development process of individual countries because much of the necessary data was missing, as statistics on labor force participation often omitted work done in the household (primarily by women) or in the informal sector of the economy. As a result, women in international development have advocated better data on home-based work, to be achieved by employing methodologies such as time use, enterprise, or household surveys (United Nations 1988; *INSTRAW News* 1989).

In addition, feminist research since the mid-1980s has emphasized the need to reconceptualize work itself, as Kathryn B. Ward and Jean Larson Pyle (this volume) suggest, to measure it on a continuum from formal paid work, to informal paid labor, to household work. This approach makes clear that development, usually thought of as activity in the productive sphere, is not separate from the reproductive sphere of the home and that the macro- and microlevels of economic analysis can and must be considered simultaneously and interactively.

Redefining work as existing on a continuum implicitly illustrates the usefulness of the household as a unit of analysis for studies of women in the political economy, both in the First World (Bose 1984) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (Acevedo, this volume). Whereas traditional economic studies focus on how individuals maximize their possible income, looking at the household brings to light the power relationships within families or kin networks and how they serve to facilitate and also

segregate men's and women's potential income and occupations along gender lines (Blumberg, this volume; Rothstein, this volume). Research using this household model indicates that women simultaneously are integrated into the economy and experience marginalization, either as low-wage workers in industrial jobs or within the informal economy (Ward and Pyle, this volume). Thus, household income strategies are complexly shaped by the interaction of family and transnational corporate decisions and reflect processes at both micro- and macroeconomic levels.

A gendered perspective on development also broadens the industrial sectors that are considered part of the political economy. Most analysts agree that a new international division of labor has replaced the old one. Where developing nations once were the source of raw materials, they now are the sites of manufacturing and export processing zones whose workforces are often female-dominated, in spite of frequent national efforts to increase male employment (Ríos, this volume). The growth in the employment of Latin American and Caribbean women is due not only to their direct hiring by multinationals, however, but also to the systems of subcontracting and home outwork that generate employment indirectly (Ward and Pyle, this volume; Acevedo, this volume). Thus, industrial work and the family-based economy have grown side by side. Increasingly, women are able even to create their own home-based microenterprises (Blumberg, this volume). Of course, women's labor also takes over the subsistence work that men forsake because of employment, migration, or both. Thus, while many women continue to be employed in their traditional roles as domestics (*muchachas*) or street sellers, new trends in many countries indicate an increase in home-based, income-generating work as well as industrial employment.

Growth in Latin American and Caribbean women's employment has been integrally linked to trends in North America, especially to the role of Latinas and other women of color in the U.S. political economy (Fernández Kelly and Sassen, this volume; Nash, this volume). U.S. industrial restructuring has meant that corporations design and use multiple strategies in order to maintain flexibility, allowing firms to minimize labor costs and maximize profits. Thus, electronics and garment firms that have sent much of their long-lead-time production to Asia or Latin America are also using immigrant labor from those same regions to work in smaller U.S. firms, where a quick turn-around in production is essential. Here, too, we find heavy reliance on subcontracting systems and industrial homework, and especially the labor of ethnic or migrant women, some of whom create their own small businesses (Fernández Kelly and Sassen, this volume). Interestingly, the simultaneous decline in the ability of men

to be the sole breadwinners within their families and the changing gender roles that recognize women's need for employment have made this trend possible (Safa 1995).

This parallel structure in the gendered division of labor within contemporary First and Third World countries illustrates the significance of the interconnections among class, race, ethnicity, and gender in shaping women's economic roles worldwide. State policy interacts with the first three of these features either to facilitate or to restrict women's employment opportunities. Although the role of the contemporary state is clear when it creates free trade zones, export-driven industrialization policies, or immigration laws that influence the flows of low-paid labor, the highly industrialized nations of Europe and North America, as part of the international division of power within the capitalist system, have shaped gender roles in the Latin American economy since colonial times.

The contemporary condition of Latin American and Caribbean women cannot be totally separated from the legacies of the colonial experience. In many precolonial cultures, women's position and participation in productive work was parallel to men's, rather than subservient. But, Europeans presupposed a universal subordination of women and implemented rules and laws that often deprived indigenous women of property, autonomy, and many former public roles (Etienne and Leacock 1980; Acosta-Belén and Bose, this volume). Such patriarchal policies and their inherent ideologies continued through the centuries, in part because of the neocolonial character of the relations that industrialized nations still maintain with developing countries.

Until the work of Ester Boserup (1970), classic social science literature on development, as well as development policies themselves, assumed that women did not contribute to production, thus ignoring women's labor in the household and in informal economic activities. Boserup's work opened the way for feminist scholars who, beginning in the 1970s, have reframed gender and development issues by placing women at the center of the analysis. On a theoretical level, development is no longer viewed in a dichotomous mode as either economic salvation or unrestrained exploitation of the poor, and the concept of work has been expanded into a continuum that includes the informal economy and industrial homework. In addition, a wide variety of interconnections has been recognized: the economic bond of women in the United States with those in Latin America and the Caribbean, the relationship of gender issues not only to class but also to race and ethnicity (for example, in considering the productive roles of enslaved black women), and the links between changes over time in the economy and those in role expectations for women.

Another major positive effect of the new feminist research on develop-

ment is the move away from a woman-as-victim model, inherent in the marginalization thesis. In the new model, women's empowerment is recognized as simultaneously occurring with shifts in the international division of labor that nonetheless often relegate women to a secondary place. In many ways the status of women is symbolized in the writings of Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Claudia von Werlhof (1988), who envision women as the last colony—a subordinate population whose underpaid work continues to be exploited but that has the potential to create change leading to increased autonomy or independence.

Strategies for Resistance and Empowerment

Women's resistance to their subordinate position is now recognized as occurring in a broad range of dimensions, some of which also empower women to varying extents. Although women's resistance can take place in the traditionally studied large-scale social movements or in union activities, new research has examined other forms of activism as well. Because of frequent extreme conditions of poverty, much of women's organized resistance in Latin America and the Caribbean is based on survival needs, often at the individual or family level as well as in the neighborhood or workplace. Many authors argue that survival itself is an act of resistance.

It is easy to assume that families only constrain women, but contemporary researchers also focus on those family aspects that benefit them. For example, one of the most common ways that households resist the marginalization of low-wage employment generated by the global economy is the use of what Frances Abrahamer Rothstein (this volume) labels multiple income strategies: pooling wages, cash, subsistence produce, and unpaid labor from a combination of work in the formal, informal, and household sectors by a variety of family members. She argues that such strategies are replacing both peasant subsistence and single-breadwinner strategies, at least in rural Mexico, as dependence on the market increases. Decisions concerning household labor allocation must be based as much on shifting work opportunities as on gender roles, and therefore women can obtain access to resources, land, family labor, or schooling through kin networks when it will aid them in generating income. For example, help with the reproductive work of cooking or childcare often allows a mother to attend school or keep a job; a contribution of livestock can start a small chicken or cattle business. Such kin support is especially advantageous to the growing numbers of female-headed households.

Viewing multiple income strategies as an economic form of resistance also substantively illustrates the significance of two theoretical points

made earlier: households and kin, rather than individuals, are an important economic unit of analysis; and work needs to be redefined as occurring on a continuum that includes income sources from the formal, informal, and subsistence economies.

The 1980s' international debt crisis and concomitant structural readjustment in many Latin American countries pushed individuals and kin groups into informal sector labor, where many run or work in microenterprises. Women are not an exception to this trend, but they are concentrated in the lower, subsistence end of the range of such enterprises and are gender-segregated into garment and food products or commerce and service work (Blumberg, this volume). Although their labor in microenterprises is often undercounted and underfunded by development agencies, when women do obtain loans their payback record is as good as or better than that of men and they create more new jobs. Rae Lesser Blumberg argues that this type of employment, even though low paid and often lacking in benefits, is especially important because it generates income under a woman's control, enhancing the well-being of her children and increasing her leverage in family decisions. As women's income, rather than men's, is more closely related to children's nutrition, both survival and empowerment are at stake.

The rising usage of multiple income pooling and informal sector employment, of which microenterprises are an example, illustrates the centrality of domestic survival issues for individuals and families. Moreover, these same issues have become the basis of women's collective organizing in many Latin American and Caribbean nations. Women's struggles are grounded in neighborhood mobilization and often phrased in moral terms, rather than based on a consciousness of class struggle or worker rights (Nash, this volume). Women demand public services such as running water, electricity, health care, or transportation for squatter communities; organize self-help collectives to buy and prepare food or to provide childcare for a neighborhood; or fight for human rights in the names of their "disappeared" relatives victimized by authoritarian regimes.

Scholars disagree about the extent of empowerment brought about through such collective action. Helen Icken Safa (this volume) argues for the advantages, noting that although these movements are undertaken in defense of women's traditional domestic roles, they contribute to greater consciousness of gender subordination and to women's legitimacy in the public sphere as well as the private one. Thus, actions that directly target their demands at the state represent a new and creative political trend, especially in countries where gender restrictions are not only culturally valued but written into many laws. Other researchers note the disadvantages to such peasant or popular movements, which can easily be co-

opted since often they are not connected to a conscious feminist framework or group. These movements may ameliorate an immediate condition without changing the basic structures controlling women's survival.

The state is not an easy social formation for any group to tackle, although under the 1980s Sandinista government women's groups in Nicaragua may have been among the most successful, even if only in the short term. Their achievements were made because the Sandinista leadership took on the issue of sexism in its own theory and practice and because women's activism continued both outside and inside the revolutionary party (Chinchilla, this volume). Thus, Chinchilla and others have argued that early forms of organizing around women's "practical gender interests" must be politicized and transformed into "strategic gender interests" that are articulated with class, race, ethnicity, and other national identity issues to challenge women's subordination. This form of organizing clearly empowers women but it has been hard to maintain, since the international dynamics of the global economy (surfacing in the policies of the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank) often wield more power than the state itself. This power was demonstrated in the U.S.-led campaign to sabotage economically, politically, and militarily the Sandinista government reforms in Nicaragua as well as in the restructuring and debt crisis of the 1980s.

For this reason, women are relatively unlikely to seek change in state processes through the traditional mechanism of political parties, which are still male-dominated and often corrupt, and are more likely to organize around their work-related issues—whether the work is located at home, in a *taller,* or in a *maquiladora.* Even if women are not organized in classic labor unions, resistance takes place daily in the neighborhood organizations using communal kitchens, at computer terminals, or on the shopfloor with work slowdowns, and in the informal sector through the creation of cooperatives and loan groups.

Gender and Development

Latin American and Caribbean women, like other Third World women, have remained in the bottom tier in the international division of labor of the global economy ever since the colonial system initially facilitated and legitimated what is now considered their traditional role. This position is double-edged. Women have less control of resources and lower incomes than men in their countries, but it is their labor—either through direct employment in the *maquiladoras* or indirectly through subcontracting or homework—that has been key to the growth of transnational corporations. This growth began in the 1950s, continued

through the restructuring of the 1970s, and facilitated the newest international economic changes begun in the 1980s.

From the 1950s through the 1970s, U.S. corporations began "outsourcing" or "offshoring" their production, especially to countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and East Asia, seeking lower labor costs. National corporations thus became transnationals, with much of their workforce outside the United States. On the receiving end of these changes, export processing zones, *maquilas*, and increased industrial homework characterized what became a pattern of export-led industrialization for most Latin American and Caribbean nations. This development strategy tended to draw on women directly as employees or indirectly in subcontracted work, escalating an existing trend for women to leave agriculture and enter manufacturing or the informal economy. Ultimately, the economic power of the multinational corporations transcended the political power (or willingness) of nation-states to control them, and a new international division of labor was created between countries of the First and Third Worlds, beginning what has been dubbed "the global assembly line." Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Asia and parts of Africa, were proletarianized by this global corporate restructuring, a process that was exacerbated by a tremendous increase in the Latin American international debt.

During the 1980s, corporate strategies began to shift again. Increasingly, their emphasis has been on internationalizing the service sector rather than manufacturing, as well as on creating global markets in finance. The global assembly line is transforming into what has been described as "regional clustering," brought on by corporate attempts to lower production costs through the use of advanced computer technology, rather than by moving production work from country to country (Nanda 1994). New methods of automation are more flexible, making use of equipment such as robotic arms or programmable lathes that are replaced less often, can be used in many production processes, and usually need only computer program modification to create a new product. The only requirement is that the computerized machines for the various industrial processes be in close proximity, clustered in a given region. The impact of this new configuration on women in Latin America and the Caribbean is beginning to be noted.

As global cities such as Los Angeles enlarge their importance, so too does the labor of Latina and other immigrant women who are hired in the electronics and garment industries there. One outcome is that women's migration patterns to the United States are beginning to separate from those of their households as they enter such regional clusters seeking employment. In this sense, the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is unavoidably tied to the work roles of women. An

additional effect of these strategic corporate shifts is that the labor cost of unskilled workers in Latin American countries has become less important to corporations than that of skilled workers, such as those who can use computers in production or data entry.

These corporate strategy shifts represent a response not only to production methods and costs but also to the internal politics of the Latin American countries in which transnationals operate. In the past, development models focused on growth, often to the detriment of both the ecological environment and the needs of the population. As a consequence, many nations, especially in Central America and the Caribbean, have called for new models of sustainable development in which the use of natural and social resources would be deliberately planned to meet basic social needs in ways that are directed and evaluated by people in local communities (Lélé 1991). The rising popularity of models of sustainable development has made the shift toward services and away from ecologically damaging industries more politically attractive as well as cost-effective.

These conceptual changes in economic growth and development models, and their outcomes for women, are epitomized in Puerto Rico, which has the dubious distinction of being in the vanguard of international corporate changes (Ríos, this volume). The island, which has been a colonial possession of the United States since 1898, was heavily industrialized in the 1950s under Operation Bootstrap, a labor-intensive development program based on U.S. investment in manufacturing industries in return for low-wage labor and corporate tax exemptions. Puerto Rico was turned into the export platform for U.S. manufacturing, with early investment in labor-intensive industries later followed by capital-intensive industries, such as petrochemicals. In accord with the foreign investment and export-led development model, the industrialization of Puerto Rico created a modern infrastructure with a concomitant improvement in per capita income, literacy and educational rates, and life expectancy, as well as new occupational opportunities and increased consumption of U.S. goods. As in other countries, in spite of Puerto Rico's efforts to bring in male-dominated employment, corporate strategies ultimately drew largely on women's labor. Furthermore, the subordination of the Puerto Rican economy to U.S. corporate interests produced massive population displacements resulting in the migration of more than one-third of the total population to the continental United States and a perennial unemployment rate of over 15 percent.

In the 1970s the island lost most of its competitive advantages as it became more integrated into the U.S. economy, and wages, energy, and commercial transportation costs increased. To alleviate this ongoing economic crisis, by the 1980s the U.S. and Puerto Rican governments

were attempting to restructure Puerto Rico's economy into a unique tax haven and financial center for transnational capital, facilitating the transference of profits from operations in other parts of the world to island subsidiaries. This high-finance strategy is intended to transform Puerto Rico into an international center for investment trade and services, leading to the expansion of its commercial banking sector and the promotion of service industries, which will draw women into their heavily computerized operations.

The Puerto Rican case is a good illustration of how, collectively, Latin American and Caribbean women are the site at which economic forms continue to materialize (Sassen 1994); at the same time, these women remain in the second tier both in their native countries and in the U.S. economy. Thus, the analyses in this book of how women are an integral part of the development process and the ways in which they are seeking empowerment, or at least how they are individually and collectively resisting a subordinate status, are cornerstones of a full understanding of the interplay of forces and relationships that constitute the global economic order.

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