

Development vs Empowerment: The Gendered Legacy of Economic Restructuring in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the nature and implications of the implicitly gendered changes in development paradigms that have accompanied recent restructuring of Latin American economies in order to contribute to the formulation of a more transformative approach toward the development of women. Analysis suggests that the marginalization of women in development planning and the labor market is caused by, and reproduces, women's social subordination and economic dependence. Empowering women economically will lead to empowerment in all aspects of their lives and, to be effective, development must be mindful of the perspectives, understandings, and experiences of women.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout many parts of the world, women occupy an inherently contradictory location within the various interlocking power structures that define their lives. For example, women in the South and parts of the North have long been simultaneously central and peripheral to global as well as local economic relations. Indeed, it has been argued that the exploitation of women's labor and colonial resources was, and continues to be, fundamental to the world capitalist system of development--at once integrating women into an expanding web of economic relations while marginalizing them within it (Acosta-Belén and Bose 1995; Bose and Acosta-Belén 1995; Elson 1991). Similarly women, especially in the South, are central to national development yet are provided few resources with which to discharge their economically productive and socially reproductive responsibilities. Nowhere is this more true than in Latin America where the subordination of women is exacerbated by an entrenched and hegemonic gender ideology which is reproduced at all levels of social organization and reinforced by nearly all institutional systems (see Scott 1986, 1990; Westwood and Radcliffe 1993; Fisher 1993; Braslavsky 1992; Stromquist 1992; Prigoff 1992). It would therefore seem that, despite their significant and vital contributions, Latin American women remain "in the margins of the world economy, at the periphery of gendered power relations and in the underclass of formal power structures" (Westwood and Radcliffe 1993 :21).

Careful analysis reveals that the patriarchal system of social relations characterizing most Latin American societies is itself deeply contradictory and can be met with widespread resistance among the very women it subordinates. Gendered identities embedded within patriarchal social systems at once constrain and empower women, depending on the specific position of individual women along the multiple and intersecting axes of class, gender, race/ethnicity, age and citizenship which specify their lives (Mohanty 1991; Schirmer 1989; Martin 1990; Radcliffe 1993; Hays-Mitchell 1995). In this paper, I contend that low-income women of Latin America are not passive victims of inherently discriminatory and subordinating discourses, policies and practices; rather they are active agents of change who vigorously resist and challenge the power structures [end p. 119] that encumber their lives. Building on a rich heritage of political and social activism,¹ poor urban women in particular are seizing the initiative and taking self-directed action to meet their immediate practical needs as well as address their long-term strategic interests. Throughout the region, they are engaged in struggles to turn their structurally disadvantaged position at the global, national and local scales into a source of strength from which to debate and negotiate a redistribution of power and resources for the 21st century.

In order to understand the ways in which poor women challenge the hegemonic structures of the

international economic system and Latin American society, it is necessary to analyze how they are at once integrated into, and marginalized within, the power structures that affect their lives. To this end, I examine the ways in which implicitly gendered changes in the development paradigms that have accompanied the recent restructuring of Latin American economies have affected the lives of popular sector women. While the profoundly gendered implications of, for example, newly emerging divisions of labor, the structure of labor markets and the nature of opportunities for women and men of the region is receiving increased attention from feminist scholars within Latin America and beyond, the intrinsically gendered nature of the notion of development in general and the value of a feminist perspective to understanding and rectifying this condition have been largely disregarded by the mainstream development community. Therefore, this discussion attempts to consolidate recent significant advances in the study of gender and development in the region in order to provide material to advance a newly emerging perspective for future action. The intended outcome is to contribute to the design of a more sensitive and transformative approach to the development of women in Latin America.²

In order to appreciate the complex and diverse ways in which women have experienced economic development and restructuring in Latin America, it is necessary to look beyond simple measures of employment to both economic and non-economic issues relating to the quality of women's employment.³ To understand the practical and theoretical implications of these concerns for women and their families, I theorize a relationship not only between women's occupational status and women's well-being but also between women's occupational status and gender relations within the household and society at large. In other words, I seek to explore the impact of truly empowering women in the labor market not only on their physical status but on their ability to transform gender roles and contribute to the production of knowledge about themselves.⁴ By exploring the contradictory location and actions of women within the various interlocking power structures that define their lives, I address three interrelated issues. First, I attempt to demonstrate that the marginalization of women in development planning and the labor market simultaneously is caused by, and reproduces, women's social subordination to, and economic dependence on, men. Second, I suggest that empowering women in the marketplace---that is, allowing women access to educational/training opportunities and economic resources as well as control over their own labor and the wealth generated by their labor--should translate into a more general empowerment of women. And third, I endeavor to articulate a new approach to understanding women's employment in underdeveloped societies. The arguments presented here stress the need for an alternative, gender-informed and empowering paradigm of development.

DEVELOPMENT, RESTRUCTURING AND WOMEN'S POVERTY

The transformation of Latin American economies, especially in the past half-century, has had a complex and contradictory impact on the position of women within both the labor market and household. Economic expansion and modernization has led to unprecedented participation by women in the labor force and, it would seem, the opportunity to generate and control income, widely believed to be positively correlated with women's improved economic independence and social status and leading ultimately to greater gender equality. Yet international data indicate that, despite high rates of female participation in the paid labor force, in no country of the region does the quality of life of women equal that of men; women hold less power and control fewer resources while they work longer hours and assume heavier burdens (Seager and Olson 1986; UNDP 1993). Here, as throughout the world, the majority of the [end p. 120] poor are women and dependent children (Seager and Olson 1986; FLACSO 1993; Feldman 1992). Female-headed households represent the most rapidly growing segment of population and are estimated to comprise from 20 to 50% of urban households (United Nations 1995,22; Moser 1989a, 1802)--most of which experience high dependency ratios and limited access to meaningful employment and basic services.⁵ Working women are disproportionately represented among low-wage workers in occupations with little hope of advancement and hold few positions of power in labor organizations. Women in general are largely disenfranchised from the formal political system and, thus, have little recourse for their concerns and aspirations.

The international debt crisis and concomitant structural adjustment policies in particular have impacted the daily lives of poor urban women in disproportionate and multidimensional ways. In meeting household needs, women are increasingly forced to balance greater amounts of wage work with higher levels of subsistence and domestic production (Feldman 1992; Nash 1995; Moser 1989b). As public expenditure on social infrastructure has declined, women's double-indeed triple-burdens have soared as they assume additional responsibilities within households and communities.⁶ It would seem that women's unpaid and underpaid labor are at the core of new development policies that accompany structural adjustment programs imposed by the international financial community. Indeed, it has been suggested that the current world economic crisis represents not another cycle of capitalism but rather a new phase of development which relies on female forms of labor within both the productive and reproductive realms (Acosta-Belén and Bose 1995:27).

While there is widespread agreement among feminist scholars and activists as well as development theorists and practitioners that women play a central role in the economic and social life of a country, there is continued debate as to the ways in which gender interests and development should be reconciled. Growing evidence suggests that the current course of development has not been effective in solving women's problems of poverty and subordination and, in many cases, has worsened their economic and social positions (Molyneux 1992; Bhatt 1989; Prigoff 1992; Faulkner and Lawson 1991).⁷ Indeed, a new perspective is emerging which recognizes that the impact of development on women is complex and cannot easily be categorized into simple dichotomies, that is, as helping vs exploiting women, integrating vs marginalizing them, incorporating them into paid employment vs excluding them from it (e.g., Bose and Acosta-Belén 1995). Rather, we are recognizing that development simultaneously brings positive and negative consequences for women, depending on their individual positions and experiences.

This conclusion is the outgrowth of new conceptual frameworks and research methodologies that make visible the central role of women in the economic and social life of societies. For example, research that probes the nature of women's work--both economically productive and socially reproductive tasks--is giving rise to arguments for a reconceptualization of "work" itself which would include combinations of formal wage work, informal paid work and unpaid household and community management work so to more accurately reflect the reality of women's lives as well as society at large (Ward and Pyle 1995; Acevedo 1995; Nash 1995; Rathgeber 1995).⁸ This is leading us further to recognize the value of simultaneously and interactively linking macro, meso and micro levels of analysis by assessing, for example, the relationships between globalization, national economic development policies, household organization and the life experiences of individual women. To place this discussion in context, it is necessary to examine the patriarchal system of social relations that characterizes traditional Latin American society (and hence serves as backdrop to any gender-informed analysis of Latin American society) as well as the nature and implications of gender bias in conventional development praxis.

GENDERED SOCIAL RELATIONS AND WOMEN'S STATUS

Conventional analysis informs us that daily life in traditional Latin American society is organized according to a patriarchal pattern of relations that involves inequalities of power, sexuality and resource allocation which favors men over women and is replicated throughout society. Family is portrayed as a strongly cohesive group and the base of a broad system of social relations in which power is highly [end p. 121] authoritarian and organized on the basis of gender and seniority. Embedded in this system of social relations are gendered identities⁸ which, in the words of Bourque and Warren (1981), purportedly 'silence' women and award men public voice and authority.⁹ It is important to understand, however, that patriarchal social relations operate in subtle, complex and contradictory ways which work to subordinate women while simultaneously opening for them the opportunity to resist, challenge and transform prevailing attitudes and practices. This is because gendered social relations and identities are neither rigid, monolithic nor contextually static. Rather, they are

complex, fluid and historically and culturally specific processes that vary across Latin American societies as well as within them. Gender relations are under continual negotiation within an array of contexts and scales including the household, local, urban/rural, regional and national. Moreover, they are acted upon and interact with other defining variables such as class, race/ethnicity, age and locale. Hence, depending on the particular position of individual women along the multiple and intersecting axes that specify their lives, gendered social relations can variably constrain and/or empower women.

For example, as Schutte (1993) points out, throughout Latin America the family is a contradictory institution. It is as much a source of solidarity and support as of inequality and abuse. Within the family, "an ideology of mutual cooperation, communal solidarity and affective identification [is] juxtaposed with internal inequality and highly authoritarian and at times violent interpersonal relations" (Scott 1990, 205). Within societies experiencing rapid change such as those of Latin America, various patterns of patriarchy, with different consequences for different women, can exist. For example, as Safa's (1990,1993) analysis of the impact of industrialization on women in the Caribbean reveals, increasingly within households men's dominance is not absolute since women, especially those able to generate financial resources of their own, hold varying measures of responsibility and autonomy. Therefore, the predominance of patriarchal social relations in Latin American society does not necessarily mean that women are passive victims entirely excluded from decision-making processes within households and institutions. Rather, it suggests that because men and women perform different roles in society, they wield different types of influence which vary as contexts and circumstances change.

In most Latin American countries, state practices and discourses have done much to manipulate and hegemonize gendered identities. Through the sanctioning of legislation and institutions, states such as Peru have coopted the role of women as caretakers of social reproduction and constructed a gendered identity of women as non-working housewives and mothers (regardless of financial means), complementing the image of men as wage-earners and active political participants (see Radcliffe 1993). Through its rhetoric and action, the state promulgates an archetype of women as nurturing, dedicated and self-sacrificing mothers and wives (*marianismo*). Ironically however, the family in Latin America is deeply contested terrain and the hegemonic way in which it is deployed by the state is meeting significant resistance from women throughout the region.

As Martin (1990) and Schirmer (1989) illustrate in their analyses of, respectively, women's political participation in a rural Mexican community and the pressures brought by mothers of the disappeared in Guatemala, the ambiguities inherent in a state-promoted gender ideology of 'women as mothers' provide the symbolic framework for women to describe and interpret their active participation in the public arena. Women's identity as mothers, for example, conveys the responsibility to nurture and protect as well as to resist and challenge. In these settings as elsewhere, women have confronted the state through its own rhetoric and images concerning motherhood by presenting themselves as apolitical mothers whose lives have been disrupted by economic hardship or political repression. Acting as disobedient female subjects of the state, they turn their powerlessness (as protected females) on the state using the same language as used in the private sphere (Arizpe 1990). Hence, it is possible for women in Latin America to generate their own counterhegemonic identities by invoking the same image that the state deploys of them as good mothers in order to signal opposition and resistance to the state's inadequacies and/or excesses (Westwood and Radcliffe 1993).

Women's traditional role as caretakers of social reproduction may thus assume both constraining and **[end p. 122]** empowering dimensions within its broader social, political and economic context as women act and resist through their seemingly contradictory positions and multiple identities (e.g., mothers, wives, consumers, producers, citizens, neighbors) within Latin American society. This suggests that, under the proper circumstances, an otherwise neglected dimension of power may reside within the gendered social relations that characterize Latin American society. For most Latin American women, however, gender is a

compounding factor of oppression akin to that of race and ethnicity for women of color in First World countries (Acosta-Belen and Bose 1995; Antrobus 1989). Indeed, when the axes of gender and race/ethnicity intersect, the outcome is typically a specific and unique experience of poverty for the women involved. Therefore, it is necessary to conceptualize women's experiences of development and restructuring in Latin America within a new interpretive model which underscores the convergences of multiple oppressions, including race/ethnicity, class, gender, age and citizenship, in one complex but coherent system of oppression.

GENDER BIAS IN DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE

Recent scholarly research suggests that the underlying cause of the variable and, at times, debilitating experience of economic restructuring for women rests in a series of biases within the development process which operate in favor of men and against women (Elson 1991, 1992a, 1992b; Moser 1993; Afshar and Dennis 1992a). Elson argues that male-oriented biases concerning sexual divisions of labor, unpaid domestic work, and workings of the household pervade development theory and practice. These biases are encouraged and supported by economic, political and social structures and relations that make the practice seem rational. Directing attention to the conceptual bias against women which is built into the design and evaluation of structural adjustment programs, imposed in the name of development, helps us to understand how gender bias in current development paradigms operates to the detriment of women in particular and society in general.

Consider, for example, the especially gendered impact of the period of development reversal precipitated by the international debt crisis of the 1980s. For more than a decade, structural adjustment policies imposed on debtor states by the international financial community led to stagnating or declining levels of industrial output and economic growth throughout most of the region. State subsidies of basic foodstuffs and fuel vanished, and investment in both physical and social infrastructure was drastically curtailed. At the household level, access to income and basic services diminished and the demand for time to perform the tasks necessary to fill the gaps increased. While widespread underemployment and the well-documented decline in all indicators of human development (e.g., health and nutrition, education, housing, purchasing power and social security) caused a precipitous decline in living standards for most of the region's population, numerous empirical studies and official as well as unofficial data reveal that urban households—particularly those headed by women—were, and continue to be, forced to bear the brunt of structural adjustment in the name of development (see UNICEF 1989; Cornia et al 1987, 1988; Vickers 1991; Benería and Feldman 1992; Blumberg et al 1995; Green 1995).¹⁰

It is possible to identify two levels at which male bias infuses structural adjustment: the level of design and implementation and the level of assessment and mitigation (Elson 1992b). At the first level, discourses invoked by institutions responsible for designing and implementing structural adjustment policies (i.e., World Bank and International Monetary Fund) mask an underlying male bias. Because adjustment policies define the 'economic' sphere of economic development primarily in terms of marketed goods and services, the gendered and social implications of policies designed to 'increase productivity' and 'improve efficiency' are neglected. Such policies, for example, commonly shift the costs of social services, such as education, health care and welfare provisions, from the public and paid economy to the private and unpaid economy. Although this results in an increase in women's unpaid work within the home, its implications are ignored because unpaid labor, no matter how vital to the success of adjustment policies, is not considered relevant to the macroeconomic models on which structural adjustment is premised. Instead, structural adjustment implicitly assumes that women's unpaid labor is unproblematically available [end p. 123] and infinitely elastic and that it will continue regardless of the way in which resources are reallocated. Hence, the success of structural adjustment (in terms of improving balance of payments and promoting growth) would seem to rest on the capacity of poor women in particular to bear its hidden costs regardless of the human consequences.

Male bias also operates more subtly at the level of organizations charged with assessing and/or mitigating the effects of structural adjustment policies (Elson 1992b). For example, while the "Adjustment with a Human Face" approach of UNICEF and other official agencies makes women visible in the development process, it identifies them, together with children, as a vulnerable and isolatable group. This ignores the true problem of women's subordinate and inequitable position in society which should, instead, be conceptualized in terms of gender relations (Moser 1993). Approaching women as an isolatable category, rather than in relation to men (e.g., how relations between men and women as categories are socially constructed), at once prejudices and compromises adjustment policies. For example, heightening the visibility of women's interlocking productive and reproductive roles has reinforced the misconception that popular sector women possess a unique talent for managing crisis. Development agencies and state governments invoke this as justification for the curtailment of social services vital to poor women and their families, affecting not only women's productivity in the national economy but the productive capacity of the economy itself (Antrobus 1989). Additionally, by analyzing the impact of adjustment at the level of the household-rather than disaggregating it in order to examine the different positions of women and men-institutions such as UNICEF ignore the implications of the household as a possible site of subordination and empowerment for women.

The gender bias inherent in the failure of this approach to consider the social relations through which human resources are reproduced and maintained, as well as through which household responses to structural adjustment are conceived and invoked, has important implications for popular sector women in particular and Latin American society in general. First, by minimizing the value of tasks necessary for social reproduction, a pattern of production based on the exploitation of the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of women is promoted which only exacerbates the triple burden of women who are often solely responsible for the nurturance and financial support of whole families, leading ultimately to increased levels of poverty among women and their dependent children (Antrobus 1989; Moser 1989b). Second, by conflating the interests of poor families and poor women, gender-biased development theories and practices force poor women to submerge their interests beneath those of their families, thereby hindering women from forming well-defined notions of what they as individuals want and need (Elson 1991; Moser 1993). Third, by simultaneously constraining the economic opportunities available to women and expanding the reproductive tasks for which they are responsible, gender bias limits the contribution of women to the process of development.

It is important to note that gender bias is not the only type of bias at work within the restructuring and development process and that it commonly operates in conjunction with other biases involving for example class, regional, age, racial and/or ethnic distinctions. Hence, gender bias in development affects women in different ways and to varying extents, and it is possible that some women may share with men in the same class, region or ethnic group the benefits and hardships accruing from diverse types of biases. As Mohanty (1991) admonishes, we must be mindful not to universalize the experiences of Third World women but rather recognize that women's oppression assumes different forms among women of different groups, positions and experiences and identify the lessons to be learned from the specificity of their experiences. For popular sector women in Latin America, this involves understanding the nature, causes and implications of their occupational subordination.

GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF THE URBAN LABOR MARKET

Until relatively recently, most research on women and development has been premised on the female-marginalization thesis which argues that, because women are perceived by development planners and practitioners as passive dependents, they are relegated to reproductive roles within development models and, hence, excluded from the empowering benefits of development (e.g., paid [end p. 124] employment). Current feminist scholarship, however, is forcing a reevaluation of such 'women as victim' models and redirecting attention, instead, toward the nature of women's incorporation into the paid workforce, suggesting that marginalization can also occur within employment (Faulkner and Lawson 1992; Scott 1991;

Femández- Kelly and Sassen 1995; Bose and Acosta-Belén 1995). This growing body of literature is based on micro-level data which reveal that less powerful groups, such as low-income women, tend to be concentrated in lower echelon tasks experiencing limited access to productive resources, autonomy and opportunity for advancement. Whereas conventional labor-market segmentation and female-marginalization theories emphasize the centrality of economic forces to understanding women's productive roles, current feminist approaches adopt a more holistic perspective as they theorize a relationship between patriarchal gender relations and sexual divisions of labor for understanding the persistence of gender as a differentiating factor within Latin American labor markets (e.g., Faulkner and Lawson 1991; Scott 1990; Elson 1992b; Benería and Roldán 1989; Ward and Pyle 1995).¹¹

Consider, for example, Scott's (1991) investigation into the gendered nature of employment in Latin American cities. Her detailed empirical analysis of Lima's labor market reveals a clear gender differentiation in terms of occupational status and work conditions that cuts across the commonly accepted informal/formal sector distinction. Women's employment in Lima (both formal and informal) is more apt to bear the characteristics typically associated with informal sector employment (i.e., unskilled, poorly remunerated, little opportunity for growth or advancement) than is men's employment which bears the characteristics typically associated with formal sector employment (i.e., skilled, wage employment, career mobility). By focusing on gender as an axis of labor segmentation, as opposed to the informal/formal sector concept, Scott's conceptualization offers a more perceptive and accurate depiction of Latin American urban labor markets which, like the lives of popular sector women, cannot be defined in terms of simple dichotomies. Moreover, it challenges us to look beyond simple economic factors to include more complex social considerations, such as the pervasive nature of gender bias in daily life, in explaining why women in Latin American cities do not enjoy the same employment opportunities as men.

Similarly, Faulkner and Lawson's (1991) research on women's and men's relative occupational positions in Ecuador provides a compelling argument for directing attention to the relationship between patriarchal gender relations and women's subordination in the labor market. Faulkner and Lawson enhance Scott's theorization that gender biases in everyday attitudes and practices condition the terms of women's employment by arguing specifically that gendered social relations maintain the sexual division of labor in the household and, consequently, directly restrict women's availability for wage work and indirectly condition the terms of employment for those women who do enter the workforce. Women tend to be concentrated in temporary, low-paid and low-status jobs that typically replicate their household tasks and serve to reinforce societal views of women's 'natural abilities' and 'proper place'.

Therefore, following Scott (1991) and Faulkner and Lawson (1991), it becomes clear that the patriarchal nature of social relations within Latin American households establishes, first, which occupations are accessible to women working outside the home and, second, that these are characterized by limited access to resources, opportunity and autonomy. It now becomes clear that women's subordinate occupational status is caused by and, in turn, reproduces women's social subordination to and economic dependence on men. Hence, the systematic exclusion of women from economic power--defined as direct control over productive resources and one's own labor--ensures the perpetuation, in one form or another, of the patriarchal social system that characterizes Latin America.

The value of reconceptualizing the female-marginalization thesis in terms that emphasize gender relations, rather than simply economic forces, lies in the ability to accommodate varying forms of female marginalization, including marginalization within--as well as from--the productive system. Thus, it becomes possible to comprehend that employment alone does not necessarily ensure empowerment as well as to perceive the inherent contradiction of development for women; it at once integrates and marginalizes them within an **[end p. 125]** expanding web of economic relations. Most importantly however, reconceptualizing women's marginalization highlights for us the socially constructed nature of the ingrained yet subtle gender

bias that pervades structural adjustment policies and the organization of Latin American labor markets. By establishing that women's social subordination and economic dependence on men is not a 'natural' aspect of life, it should be possible to think in terms that can transform gender roles and relations within Latin American society. Acknowledging that gender bias is a social construction that works to the detriment of society as a whole should enable us to undertake the first steps toward designing more sensitive and transformative approaches to the development of women--indeed all people--throughout Latin America.

It is critical to recognize that this reconceptualization of the female-marginalization thesis in terms of socially constructed gender relations does not simply recast women as passive victims, but rather it enables us to comprehend, as argued earlier, how under certain conditions popular sector women throughout Latin America can be active agents of change who vigorously resist and challenge the power structures that specify their lives. While it can be argued that they do so on their own terms and in their own inimitable and gender-specific ways, this should not be invoked to justify either complacency or retreat on the part of national and/or international support. Instead, it should substantiate the imperative that the poor and largely disenfranchised women of Latin America be allowed to contribute directly to the production of knowledge about themselves and, hence, strongly influence the direction in which development proceeds.

CONCLUSION: GENDERING DEVELOPMENT

At this critical juncture of global restructuring and development reversal, it is clear that fresh thinking about women, gender relations and development is required. New feminist conceptual frameworks enable us to theorize the subordinating influence of patriarchal social relations on women's position in development planning and, hence, the paid workforce. Likewise, they allow us to theorize how women's marginalization in development planning and the labor market in turn reinforces women's subordination within households and society at large, thereby perpetuating patriarchal social relations. Such gendered perspectives provide valuable insights into the causes of women's poverty in general and women's occupational marginalization in particular. They suggest to us that, in order to understand the inherent contradiction of development on women's well-being and status, scholars and practitioners alike must adopt a more holistic view of women's position in society. That is, we must assume a perspective which not only integrates women's myriad roles into our analysis of women's participation in processes of change but also assigns value to the experiences, voices and know ledges of women's lived reality (Rathgeber 1995). Most importantly, gender analysis instructs us to look beyond simple economic forces in order to probe complex social relations thereby offering fresh perspectives on the organization of Latin American society as well as the implications of prevailing paradigms of development.

In conjunction with ample data--both quantitative and qualitative--documenting the deteriorating economic, political and social status of women in Latin America, new gender-informed interpretive frameworks illustrate that women, due to their socially constructed roles within society, experience poverty in gender-specific ways. This suggests that, to be effective, solutions to poverty and underdevelopment must likewise be gendered in a way that is at once mindful of providing spaces for women's voices to be heard and of the ways in which those spaces are shaped. Only then can development policies that foster self-reliance as well as address the problems and prospects confronting poor women in an increasingly complex and interdependent world be devised and implemented.

Research grounded in the specific historical, spatial and social contexts in which Latin American women live and work reveals that women actively resist and challenge the hegemonic power structures of both the international economic system and Latin American society. For example, recent investigation into women's grassroots initiatives to establish community-based banks and credit cooperatives suggests that such experiences are leading to women's enhanced physical and emotional well-being as well as altered and improved gender relations within families and society at large. By [end p. 126] giving women access to economic resources, greater control over their own labor and increased decision-making power, such

initiatives are contributing to women's empowerment within the labor market which, in turn, appears to be contributing to their enhanced levels of self-esteem and status within communities (Hays-Mitchell 1996).

Findings such as these extend analyses of the hegemonic influence of gender relations (as they exist within the household) on the nature of women's work within the labor market by exploring the degree to which *true* empowerment within the labor market can lead to new power relations within society. It is my contention that in addition to revealing a linkage between the *quality* of women's employment and the nature of women's well-being, further investigation will uphold a more subtle and compelling relationship between the *quality* of women's employment and the nature of gender relations within the household, economy and society at large. Hence, I maintain that it is possible to envision how the economic empowerment of women can translate into their social and political empowerment and lead ultimately to greater gender equality and a more equitable and prosperous society. In order to achieve this, it is incumbent upon us, as development scholars, practitioners and/or activists, to broaden our notion of control over one's own labor to include the alleviation of excessive and debilitating gender-specific demands on women's time.¹² Moreover it requires that as we strive to eradicate gender bias in the labor market, we adopt a more flexible conceptualization of the notion of 'work' that more accurately approximates the realities of women's lives in Latin America and that transcends the artificial dichotomies imposed on them by prevailing development paradigms.

It is important to note that this conceptualization not only approximates but also extends the newly defined Gender and Development (GAD) perspective by calling attention to the importance of linking the material aspects of women's condition (i.e., practical gender interests) to the intangible and ideological aspects of women's position (i.e., strategic gender interests) in discussions of women's empowerment. I maintain that it is counter-intuitive to assume that daily tangible concerns such as improving access to education, finance capital, health care and legal assistance for women are unrelated to women's ability to resist, challenge and transform biases ingrained in the social and power relations between genders. Clearly, both aspects of women's lives are intrinsic to empowering women within Latin American society and both operate concurrently and complementarily. Indeed, careful examination of women's participation in grassroots collective struggles throughout Latin America (typically associated with promoting practical gender interests) reveals a profoundly feminist content and consciousness and breaks down the false dichotomy imposed on women's gender interests (e.g., practical/material vs. strategic/ideological).¹³ Such collective struggles reveal that the material and ideological aspects of women's lives are not necessarily mutually exclusive but rather closely related. In short, organizing to meet women's practical gender interests necessitates addressing strategic, or ideological, gender interests.

Understanding this subtlety is central to being able, first, to comprehend the impact of the implicitly gendered changes in development paradigms and economic restructuring in Latin America on the lives of popular sector women and, second, to effectively incorporate their perspectives, understandings, know ledges and experiences into the design and implementation of more holistic and, hence, more transformative development strategies. This is especially critical at this point in time when women's concerns in general are receiving less attention from the international development community and when current trends in global restructuring are challenging the conventional foci of both gender and development theory. It is possible that new, more sensitive, flexible and holistic thinking-and listening-such as that espoused here can begin to provide the contours for the new and empowering meditation about women, gender, employment, restructuring and development that is so critically required at this juncture in time. [end p. 127]

NOTES

1. For discussion of the heritage of political and social activism among Latin American women, see Arizpe (1990), Bourque (1989a, 1989b), Jaquette (1991), Jelin (1990), Logan (1990), Nash and Safa (1986), Safa (1990) and Vargas (1992). For overviews of the women's movement in Latin America, see Sternbach et al (1992), Navarro-Aranguren (1992) and Jaquette (1991).

2. It is important to note that the critiques generated by women of the South of the ways in which they are represented in feminist and social science discourse remind us of our responsibilities, as both scholars and women of the North, not only to provide a space for the voices of Latin American women to be heard but to be mindful of the ways in which those spaces are shaped.
3. While aspects of this discussion can be applied to women throughout Latin America, this discussion focuses specifically upon urban popular sector women of the region.
4. Research of this nature has been identified as critical to developing more empowering approaches to the development of women throughout the South and parts of the North (Parpart and Marchand 1995; Moser 1993; Feldman 1992; White et al. 1986).
5. Estimates of the incidence of female-headed households in Latin America fluctuate widely. For a critique of figures and methods commonly cited, see Varley (1996) who concludes that the most realistic figure is probably around 20 percent. Though at the lower end of the range, this figure should not mask the fact that the poverty experienced by female-headed households is severe and that the incidence of female-headed households subsisting within poverty is growing though not at the seemingly exponential rate some studies would have us believe.
6. 'Double burden' refers to the dual labor roles that define the lives of women throughout the world-that consisting of paid labor involved in the production of goods and services and that of unpaid labor in the reproduction and maintenance of human resources. This concept has been extended by Moser (1989b) who identifies the 'triple burden' carried by many Latin American women who assume community management roles as a means to mitigate the negative impact of structural adjustment policies on the well-being of their families.
7. Despite significant criticism from scholars actively engaged in the gender and development debate, development is typically defined in terms of economic growth and improved standards of living and is measured in aggregate terms.
8. It should be noted that a gendered perspective such as this is consistent with current theorizing within the postmodern feminist community which, while critical of approaches toward women in developing societies that reduce the complexities and specificities of their lived realities into a simple 'production-reproduction' matrix (see Hirshman 1995), calls for a focus within development studies on issues of power, difference and gender (Parpart and Marchand 1995; Mohanty 1991; Westwood and Radcliffe 1993). While such approaches might be criticized for reducing both the complexity of the development process and women's existence to the universal categories of 'labor' and/or 'gender oppression' (Chowdhry 1995), they nevertheless spring from the postmodern call for inclusion of other voices and the redistribution of power. In their focus on the multiple roles by which women participate in the process of social change and the multiple axes and identities that shape women's lives (e.g., gender, class, race/ethnicity, age, citizenship), they also take great pains to contextualize women's experiences by locating analyses within the specific historical and cultural settings within which poor women of Latin America live and work. In so doing, such approaches exhibit sensitivity to difference, awareness of multiple oppressions and contextual insight.
9. The term 'gendered identities' is used here to refer to Radcliffe's (1993: 200) understanding of the masculine and feminine identities created through everyday practices and discourses. According to Radcliffe, gendered identities are historically constituted and socially constructed and refer to the way in which male and female bodies behave to demonstrate their gender identification. They are multiple, and give representation and self-representation to underlying sexual difference, without being directly related to that biological opposition. Gendered identities are historical and in constant flux, changing with changes in social

practices, and become geographically and ethnically placed - although their components may be shared by different groups. Gendered identities can overlap in space, interacting and thereby defining themselves in relation to other gendered identities present in the same location. They are important not only because they locate and identify male and female persons, but because they give powers to act in various political contexts.

10. While recent improvement in macroeconomic indicators (e.g., GNP and inflation) can be noted in most Latin American countries, crisis conditions persist for the majority of the population throughout the region due to the uneven impact of structural adjustment on national populations.

11. In this analysis, patriarchal gender relations are understood to be a set of social relations in which there are hierarchical relations among men which enable them in turn to dominate women. The material base of patriarchy is men's control over women's labor power. That control is maintained by excluding women from access to necessary economically productive resources (Hartman 1981:18).

12. For more complete discussion of how excessive claims on women's time worsens their position, see Moser's (1989b) analysis of women's triple burden as well as Elson's (1992a), Afshar and Dennis' (1992a), Greenhalgh's (1991) and Rakowski's (1994) discussions of the ways in which social norms (e.g., familial demands) prevent women from competing equally in the labor market with men.

13. This dichotomous conceptualization of women's gender interests was first advanced by Molyneux (1985) who, in her analysis of post-revolutionary Nicaragua, distinguishes between gender issues which are 'practical' (i.e., immediate material needs) and 'strategic' (i.e., long-term ideological goals). While distinguishing variations in gender interests has proven useful for organizing understandings of women's activism, its dualistic nature has also proven misleading. **[end p. 128]**

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RESUMEN

Este ensayo analiza la esencia y las implicaciones de la implícita dimensión de género de los cambios que se han pasado en las paradigmas de desarrollo que se han acompañado la re-estructuración de las economías latinoamericanas para contribuir a la formulación de un acercamiento más transformativo hacia el desarrollo. Estudios sugieren que la marginación de la mujer en la planificación del desarrollo y en el mercado del trabajo es causado (y reproducido) por la subordinación social de la mujer y su dependencia económica. El dar poder económico a las mujeres logrará darles poder en todos los aspectos de sus vidas. Para que el desarrollo sea eficaz, este debe estar atento a todas las perspectivas, experiencias y entendimientos de las mujeres. **[end p. 131]**