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**POLITICAL ECONOMY AND GENDER IN
LATIN AMERICA: THE EMERGING DILEMMA**

María Patricia Fernández Kelly

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Preface

The Latin American Program is pleased to publish the following work as part of its occasional Working Paper series. This paper by Dr. María Patricia Fernández Kelly, Research Scientist and Associate Professor of Sociology at the Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies, is one of three commissioned by the Latin American Program for the workshop, "Contemporary Gender Studies in Latin America: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," held at the Wilson Center on October 29, 1993. Commentary was provided by Dr. Marguerite Berger, Senior Advisor of the Inter-American Development Bank's Department of Project Analysis.

The project, "Contemporary Gender Studies in Latin America: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," was designed to promote a greater exchange of ideas among scholars in various disciplines concerned with the study of women and gender. As we consider contemporary gender studies in Latin America, it becomes evident that various disciplines are involved, that their approaches vary significantly, and that there is a wide divergence among practitioners on how to carry out their work. Many scholars clearly recognize this divergence and are seeking to further the study of gender by promoting an interdisciplinary exchange.

In response to this concern, the Woodrow Wilson International Center's Latin American Program initiated a project to test the hypotheses that different perspectives are of value to one another and that, like women's studies programs in many universities in the United States, an interdisciplinary approach would enrich our understanding of the general problematique. Our project aimed to review major issues, methods of research, and new work in the field of Latin American gender studies from the perspective of three disciplines. Dr. Sara Castro-Klarén, Professor of Latin American Literature and Culture at Johns Hopkins University, was commissioned to write a paper examining gender studies from a literary perspective; Dr. María Patricia Fernández Kelly, also of Johns Hopkins, was asked to write a paper providing a political economy point of view; and Dr. Edna Acosta-Belén, Director and Professor of the Center for Latin America and the Caribbean at the State University of New York in Albany, was asked to write a paper examining gender studies from a historical perspective. Each author was asked to discuss the evolution of gender studies in her field, examining major issues, research methodologies, and supporting literature.

In the paper, "Political Economy and Gender in Latin America: The Emerging Dilemmas," Dr. Fernández Kelly examines the intersection between development approaches and the study of women and gender. She begins by summarizing perspectives on development, outlining the evolution of the concept from a focus on economic growth and capitalist expansion in the 1940s to alternative approaches focusing on development

and underdevelopment as products of unequal exchanges between industrial and developing nations.

The second part of the paper examines the concept of gender and its relationship to development and feminist currents of thought. Dr. Fernández Kelly argues that gender is an analytical category affecting the allocation of political, social, and economic resources. Perceived sex differences help determine patterns of social, political, and economic organization. Dr. Fernández Kelly asserts that the concept of gender is used to assign men and women to different areas of production and thus contributes to the distribution of power in both public and private spheres.

The paper's third section analyzes migration along the U.S.-Mexico border and the expansion of Mexico's *maquiladora* program as examples of how the increased internationalization of economies has challenged gender definitions. Trends in Latin America toward integration into the global economy through the liberalization of national economies and the expansion of export production has been accompanied by an unprecedented incorporation of women into the labor force. Women have become labor participants rather than simply domestic actors limited to the private spheres of family and unpaid work. While the labor force of the *maquiladora* program was once predominantly female, recent changes have resulted in the growth of male employment. Changes in production, investments in capital goods, and the integration of advanced technology have resulted in a recomposition of tasks and labor. These shifts, combined with the demands generated by increased poverty, have changed the kinds of work men and women do, exemplifying that gender as a category is a dynamic and continually evolving concept.

The paper provides a useful analysis of changes in the fields of development, gender studies, and the global economy. It represents an important contribution to the study of women in Latin America and the theoretical debates surrounding the concept of gender and the participation of women in the international labor force.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND GENDER IN LATIN AMERICA: THE EMERGING DILEMMAS

Introduction

In a documentary recently aired on public television, Latin America is introduced as "a rich, vibrant region vital to our interests and close to our borders. [Its people] are our allies, our major trading partners, our closest neighbors; their choices will change our lives. Thirty-three nations, a half billion people, and all of them, as American as we are." This is a poignant reminder that, as we rapidly approach a new century, it is impossible to discuss the events occurring south of the U.S.-Mexico border without relating them to larger economic and political processes that involve other countries and, increasingly, the whole world.

In this paper, I approach gender from the perspective of political economy and with a special interest in Latin American development. Rather than detailing the empirical record for the whole region, I present a conceptual framework supplemented by insights from my own research and, when pertinent, that of other scholars. My purpose is to highlight the role of gender as a principal vector in the distribution of power and resources in a continent increasingly affected by international economic trends. I subscribe to the view that development--the transformation of social, economic, and political structures over time--is a global phenomenon that affects countries and regions in diverging ways. This is especially true at present when economic internationalization is altering the conditions under which Latin American nations seek to develop. The growth of export-processing zones and maquiladora programs, as well as the North American Free Trade Agreement, are some of the symptoms of an accelerated tendency toward integration into the world economy.

Among other consequences, internationalization has resulted in the unprecedented incorporation of Latin American women into the formal labor force and paralleled their continued involvement in the informal sector. The influx of women into paid employment raises questions of theoretical and practical import. As work forces reconfigure on the basis of gender, men and women confront emerging contradictions, and ideologies about the natural roles of the sexes are altered. This presents new intellectual challenges for the social sciences and for feminist studies.

In the first section, I offer a summary of perspectives on development, a term that has undergone several metamorphoses throughout the twentieth century. The concept first evolved in the 1940s in association with images of economic growth and capitalist expansion. Alternative interpretations, first formulated in the late 1950s, rejected the identification of development and economic growth and gave priority to the relationship between prosperity in hegemonic nations and continued stagnation in poor countries. Both

development and underdevelopment were recognized as a consequence of unequal exchanges that had benefitted the former and harmed the latter.

Despite different ideological stamps and theoretical bends, writings on development were mostly silent about the different effects of capitalist penetration on Latin American men and women. In the second section of this essay, I examine the concept of gender and its relationship to the scholarship on development and feminist currents of thought. The central point is that gender is more than a fashionable label for the study of women. As an analytical category, it points to interactive processes that affect individuals of either sex in varying manners. It is, therefore, one of the pivotal demarcations for the allocation of political, social, and economic resources.

In the third section, I discuss the involvement of women in some critical sectors defining Latin American development. I give attention to migration and to the expansion of Mexico's maquiladora program as an example of trends that are contributing to alter gender definitions not only in Latin America but also in advanced industrial countries like the United States.

The concluding section summarizes the argument and considers some of its implications.

A Synthesis of Perspectives on Development

Despite differences in explanatory emphasis and conceptual repertory, theories of development shared, from their inception, four main characteristics. First, they took an elevated theoretical stance and based analysis on aggregate data, often to the neglect of national or regional differences. Second, they gradually shifted emphasis from culture and national character, as explanations of underdevelopment, to structural forces shaped over time by the relationship between industrialized and poor countries. Third, they moved slowly away from an exclusive attention to underdeveloped countries to also encompass parallel processes in advanced industrial centers. Fourth, most studies originally underplayed the impact of development policies upon segments of the population differentiated by class, gender, and ethnicity.

Approaches to economic development varied in agreement with two major paradigms: the first, orthodox approximation, derived from classical and neoclassical economics and sociological approaches that assign priority to individual action and institutional analysis; the second, critical discourse, evolved from Marxism and thus emphasized class antagonisms and structural arrangements in production.

During the 1940s and 1950s theories of modernization, based on orthodox economics and mainstream sociology, set the terms for future debate in the study

of development. Proponents emphasized the need for transferring economic, political, and cultural norms from industrialized to poor countries, expecting that transposition to lead the latter to levels of economic growth commensurate to those found in the former. Modernization theories strongly influenced international development organizations and policymakers in the Third World. Similar perspectives are found today, among the advocates of monetarism and export-oriented industrialization.

Early writings on development centered on culture and national character as part of the explanation for underdevelopment. Although bereft of a sophisticated understanding of gender, those writings gave attention to *machismo* as part of a cultural syndrome that maintained Latin American countries, especially those characterized by indigenous and mestizo populations, in a state of economic and political backwardness. Conquest and colonial domination had presumably molded pernicious values, habits and beliefs. Understood as a collective liability, machismo pointed to features judged to be antithetical to progress: traditionalism, the absence of a firm work ethic, fatalism, an excessive dependency on familism, authoritarianism, corruption and, most importantly, a voracious sexual appetite. Years later the term *marianismo* was used to describe a complementary series of attributes among Latin American women: passivity, self-denial, a vocation to subservience, and an exaltation of motherhood.

Mirror images of one another, machismo and marianismo sexualized larger relations of domination. Underdevelopment, poverty, and economic and political stagnation were conceived as effects of men's inability to control their sexual proclivities and of women's ample interest in procreation. For that reason, fertility rates were, from the beginning, a major concern among development scholars and policymakers. The demographic explosion was presented as the consequence of unbridled sexuality that prevented the accumulation of assets, the leading of responsible lives, the attainment of prosperity--in other words the fulfillment of development. It is revealing that the cultural features encapsulated in the notions of machismo and marianismo were assumed to be just the opposite of those invoked as an explanation for economic success in advanced countries. To this day, the fixation with overpopulation overrides concerns about inequalities in the distribution of wealth in less-developed countries.

Also during the 1940s, and side by side with Anglo Saxon interpretations, several currents of thought grew in Latin America. Some shared with modernization an emphasis upon psychological, cultural, and philosophical explanations. Some stressed the effects of colonialism and imperialism while at the same time celebrating the potential of free markets. The most influential view, formulated at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), pointed to the unique structures that distinguish the Third

World from advanced industrial countries, and proposed models of import-substitution industrialization as a solution to underdevelopment.

In the 1960s, the spread of national liberation movements throughout the Third World, and the euphoria that followed the Cuban Revolution, spurred attacks against modernization denounced for its ideological concealment of the links between industrialized and less-developed countries. The most articulate critics of modernization were the proponents of dependency theory who, following Marxist logic, rejected the idea of underdevelopment as a primal stage, characterizing it instead as an outcome of long-standing unequal exchanges between advanced and less-developed nations. One of the lasting contributions of this radical critique was an understanding of the world economy as the appropriate unit of analysis for investigating development processes.

Although dependency theory improved our understanding of economic development, some of its tenets crumbled in the 1970s. Critics underscored two main limitations. First, dependence is an equivocal term that cannot explain differences in economic growth and varying standards of living among Third World countries. Second, dependency theory tended to exaggerate the homogeneity of both advanced and less developed countries; internal class inequalities were thus obscured.

An alternative world-system perspective was also forged in the 1970s; it combined elements from Marxism, exchange systems analysis, and typologies first coined by ECLA. Although eclectic, and not altogether innovative, the strength of this view rested on (a) an elaboration of world system as the appropriate unit of analysis in the study of development, and (b) a reliance on historical research to elucidate the fluid relationship between countries and geopolitical regions. The world-system perspective inspired an abundance of creative research over the next decade. Nevertheless, critics questioned the taxonomic division of the world into core, periphery, and semi-periphery, and its functionalist bias, which rarely moves away from exacting historical description.

Towards the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, new understandings of development resulted from changing political conditions throughout the world. The deficiencies of centrally planned economies as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the indefinite success of workers' mobilization efforts in various settings, the easing of tensions between East and West, and the ossification of the Cuban Revolution raised doubts about socialist models and altered the tone and substance of intellectual exchange. Two opposing views flourished against that backdrop: one stressed the coming of postindustrial society, the other focused on the emergence of a new international division of labor. The former proclaimed the demise of Marxism, the latter declared just the opposite.

Writings on postindustrialism assigned major relevance to computer technology, characterizing it as the trigger of economic development. Advanced technology, proponents affirmed, will render class struggle obsolete by

eliminating exploitative jobs and replacing them with occupations based on symbolic skills. Less-developed countries will specialize in manufactures for the world market while more advanced nations will shift towards scientific research and technological innovation. From this vantage point, postindustrialism is a variant of comparative advantage approaches that flourished since the 1880s and were popularized, in the twentieth century, under the guise of production-sharing.

These hopeful views of development have been challenged for their utopian faith in technology, their neglect of obvious class inequalities in the computer age, and their inability to provide a plausible explanation of the links between advanced and less-developed countries. However, postindustrialism has retained its popularity as a catchword offering the advantage of apparent neutrality to those fearful of theoretical extremes.

A different picture emerges from writings that focus on the extension of a new international division of labor since the mid-1960s. According to this view, the consolidation of multinational corporations after the end of World War II was followed by increased capital concentration, the explosion of computer technology, and the strengthening of a new industrial power, Japan. Acute competition led investors to seek lower production costs through the relocation of assembly work to less-developed countries; the result was an integrated global economy.

Among the factors distinguishing the new stage were (a) unprecedented capital mobility on a global scale, facilitated by the availability of advanced technology; (b) the centralization in advanced industrial countries of decision-making processes affecting production, combined with the dispersal of manufacturing to Third World locations; and (c) the resulting extension of proletarianization in less-developed countries, in association with an increasing reliance on women as providers of low-cost labor.

Theories about the new international division of labor offered a credible portrayal of technology, not as an independent force, but as part and parcel of socioeconomic development processes. They also stressed the spatial reorganization of production and, for the first time, assigned priority to gender as a key variable in industrial restructuring.

Despite those contributions, students of the international economy promoted some crude generalizations. They overstated the significance of cheap labor even at a time when wages already represented an increasingly small percentage of the total cost of production. As a result, they anticipated the continued migration of corporations to less-developed areas and the consequent disappearance of manufacturing in advanced countries. In fact, the tendency has been toward investment in both advanced and less-developed areas as complementary rather than mutually exclusive strategies. Also questionable was the assumed inevitability of proletarianization resulting from investments in

export-processing zones in the Third World. Export-processing zones employ a relatively small labor force and continue to coexist with bloated service sectors and informal economies. Together with agriculture, these last two categories absorb most of the workers in the world.

The problems outlined above have been broached in recent years. Current studies of economic development give attention to variations within countries and to the role of the state in development. They also investigate parallel changes in advanced industrial nations. The study of economic development has thus ceased to be the exclusive realm of Latin Americanists and Africanists in order to become a larger field that emphasizes changes caused by the international economy in advanced and less-developed countries.

The next section discusses theories of gender and development. These too build upon Marxism and orthodox economics but introduce, in addition, a dialogue with feminist thought.

Feminist Currents of Thought, Development, and the Conceptualization of Gender

Feminism is not a recent phenomenon, nor has it flourished in the advanced world. The historical record includes references to women rebelling in ancestral times and in various geographical regions. More recently, Teresa de Avila, in Spain, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, in Colonial Mexico, wrote lucidly about the oppressive conditions that surrounded women in their time. Despite those pioneering manifestations, the systematization of feminist thought began in Europe in the nineteenth century with the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Friederich Engels and, especially, John Stuart Mill, whose work anticipated many contemporary theoretical and practical concerns. Suffragist activism in England and the United States, together with the antislavery movement in the latter country, injected new life into feminism during the late nineteenth century.

Under the influence of Europe and the United States, a vital but circumscribed feminism grew in Latin America, where the precursors of an autochthonous strand had also begun to address women's subordination. Although there is a dearth of studies on the subject, it is possible to identify two main kinds of feminism in Latin America. Middle-class women in urban settings have tended to mobilize in agreement with the precepts of liberal thought by emphasizing civic participation (especially suffrage), by claiming rights to divorce and abortion, and by emphasizing access to education and paid employment. Impoverished women in rural and urban environments have tended to stress participation in movements aimed at addressing collective problems, such as inadequate housing and medical services, unemployment, and the availability of affordable food and transportation. Regardless of class background, the widespread violence against women, whether perpetrated by men in their families or by men in positions of authority, has captured the attention of observers and led to collective mobilization.

Although not a new phenomenon, feminist currents of thought experienced their most vibrant resurgence in the late 1960s. In advanced industrial countries, concerns about women's subordination in the social, economic, and political spheres led to new awareness and the search for legislative means to ameliorate problems that were only dimly perceived before. The emphasis was upon the extension of legal and reproductive rights and women's participation in paid employment on a par with men. In Latin America, feminism confronted a tension between women's individual claims and the needs of their communities, which are often beleaguered by impoverishment and other ailments resulting from underdevelopment. The uneasy relation between individual and communal demands exposes class differences: for comparatively affluent women in Latin America, the agenda resembles that forged by feminists in advanced industrial countries; for impoverished women in rural and urban environments, an emphasis on equality with men skirts questions about the meaning and consequences of equality in deprived environments.

Starting in the 1970s, a new scholarship on women influenced by feminist avenues of approach began to emerge in the United States and Europe to be followed by equally stimulating waves in Latin America and other developing areas. The new scholarship, spearheaded by anthropologists, philosophers, and historians, drew from first-hand and secondary research to shape an interdisciplinary field that made visible the unique experience of women and pointed to new conceptual requirements. An interest in gender, as an analytical category, emerged from that literature.

Gender may be defined as a concept that designates patterns of social, political, and economic organization on the basis of perceived sexual differences; it is, therefore, a dynamic social construction and not a static biological feature. Gender entails an economic dimension in that it is used to assign men and women to different areas of production and reproduction. In the same vein, gender has political repercussions in that it contributes to shape areas of power and vulnerability, visibility and invisibility, activity and passivity in the private and public sectors. More specifically, we may disaggregate gender into the following components:

1. It is a process rooted in the political, social, and economic fabric;
2. It is a social construction based on perceived sexual differences but not identical to them. Strictly speaking, sex should be understood as a distinctive assortment of morphological, anatomical, and physiological attributes. Gender, however, does not flow mechanically from those characteristics; instead, it emerges as a result of a collective, and often contested, interpretation of sexual differences in specific political and economic circumstances. All human groups have definitions about appropriate male and female behavior but such definitions vary

dramatically from context to context and from historical period to historical period.

From that point of view, gender is part of a classification that also includes race and ethnicity. As in the case of gender, these two terms designate processes by virtue of which physical characteristics are collectively used to organize and explain socioeconomic relationships. This manner of conceptualization leads to a critique of perspectives that naturalize power differentials by assuming that the subordination of women, or racial and ethnic minorities, is solely the reflection of physical and biological determinants.

3. Gender, thus, gives priority to social relations, not to individual attributes. The tendency to identify gender studies with the study of women limits the analytical potential of the concept. The aim should be to use gender as a tool to identify and analyze links between women of various ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds and between those women and their male counterparts.

4. Finally, gender connects the productive and reproductive spheres and affects the distribution of power and authority. For that reason, gender is one of the basic parameters along which socioeconomic processes evolve.

Elsewhere I have discussed in greater detail the evolution of writings on gender and development. Here it is sufficient to note that the field sought in feminist scholarship an answer to intellectual enigmas that neither Marxism nor orthodox economics--and by consequence, conventional studies of economic development--had been able to answer convincingly. What are the factors explaining women's widespread social inequality? How does the sexual division of labor relate to labor market segregation of men and women and to wage differentials between them? What is the relationship between wage labor and nonremunerated domestic work?

In the 1970s, scholars acknowledged the importance of those questions but they disagreed about the merit of different explanatory frameworks. Ester Boserup's landmark volume, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970), represented the first comprehensive attempt to examine the specific effects of modernization policies upon women in the Third World, including Latin America. Her pioneering contribution, and the research it inspired, viewed gender inequality as the effect of women's displacement from productive work caused by imperfections in the modernization process. Colonialism first, and then industrialization, had exacerbated women's subordination and distorted preexistent patterns of reciprocity between the two sexes.

The solution to the displacement of women from productive labor lay in the implementation of measures that bore striking resemblance to those supported by earlier advocates of modernization. Birth control programs, the

incorporation of women into the paid labor force, and most singularly, an improvement of educational levels were expected to narrow social inequalities between men and women. Almost three decades earlier, modernization theory had explained Third World backwardness as an effect of shared cultural and psychological inadequacies. It had also made a plea for cultural change through the assimilation of behaviors and world views originating in advanced industrial countries. In the 1970s students of gender and development invoked similar explanations for women's subordination and saw the path to upgrade their social condition in liberal notions of self-determination and equal opportunity in the labor market.

These liberal approaches to gender inequality were greeted with suspicion in many Latin American countries, but they raised awareness about the unique problems faced by women, and influenced the policies of international organizations and national governments. As a result, there was, in the following years, a limited but constructive emphasis on housing, employment, credit, education, and reproductive choices for women. However, sexual inequality persisted in less-developed and advanced countries. Demographic and historical research showed that neither women's participation in the labor force nor higher levels of education had succeeded in eliminating differences in status or income between men and women.

This led to a critique of perspectives that view the growth of sexual inequality as a temporary phenomenon that can be corrected by enhancing women's human capital and by making appropriate technologies, such as birth control, available to them. The continuance of structural imbalances in the economic system distorts the potential advantages of those technologies, as well as those of education and participation in paid employment. Boserup's view of modernization was therefore challenged for its inability to provide a critique of the structural arrangements in production.

Other shortcomings were found in modernization approaches to women and development. For example, they do not analyze the effects of capitalist investments on women of different classes, nor do they examine the impact of capitalist accumulation on technical change and women's work. Finally, those perspectives do not address problems stemming from ideologies that emphasize personal independence and fulfillment through paid employment. In countries where jobs are scarce and working conditions unsuitable for both men and women, the diffusion of ideologies that stress individualism can actually exacerbate women's vulnerability by charging them with new economic obligations that are difficult to meet with the wages they receive.

An alternative to the modernization perspective on women and development emerged from a blending of feminist and Marxist insights. The point of departure was *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884/1972), Frederick Engels's account of Marx's ideas on the subject. On the

whole, feminist scholars challenged, and then reformulated, some key Marxist concepts. In particular, they reconsidered the relationship between productive and reproductive labor and questioned the demarcation between use and exchange value. They also explored the historical transition from domestic to wage forms of labor appropriation, and the role of class hierarchies and the state in defining women's and men's social positions. This offered an opportunity to conceptualize gender as part of the productive system, and as a process that combined economic, political, and ideological facets. The major contribution of this inquiry was to locate the source of women's subordination in the separation between domestic and paid employment. Much intellectual energy was squandered during the 1970s debating whether women's domestic labor was productive or not. The argument eventually shed light on the domestic unit as a sphere of veiled but real economic activity where class, gender, and ethnicity mesh creating different modes of incorporation into wage employment, different forms of consciousness, and varying alternatives for economic and political expression.

Households may thus be conceptualized as flexible entities encompassing several mechanisms for gaining access to resources through subsistence activities and paid employment. This involves the allocation of household members to various economic sectors. The apportionment of labor power to interlocking realms of production occurs primarily on the basis of gender. The salient implication of this is that domestic units provide an economic substratum that enables the replication of unequal economic exchanges in outward-oriented and overlapping circles of production.

Denying the economic significance of domestic labor and household production had several consequences: it obviated the need to acknowledge the contribution of individuals whose work was rendered invisible by fiat of ideology not because of its lack of productivity. It also concealed the costs of reproduction of the labor force, largely assumed by women without compensation. Especially, but not exclusively, in rural environments, it obscured the character of subsistence agriculture, generally the responsibility of women.

From the point of view of the literature on gender and development, the relevant question became not whether domestic labor is productive or not but whether it is possible to specify the causes of the separation between two dimensions of economic activity, one characterized by unpaid domestic labor, and one typified by the presence of wage employment. This is an historical, not a theoretical, question.

In the West, including Latin America, the separation between home and workplace emerged gradually and was consolidated under industrial capitalism. The split between wage and domestic labor that followed early attempts to rationalize capitalist production also corresponded to redefinitions of the roles of

men and women. Increasingly, women were charged with child care and the regeneration of human energy. The advent of the factory, while allowing greater output and a more efficient organization of labor, also made it difficult for women to coordinate wage and domestic work. As mechanization advanced, remunerated employment became the prerogative of men even in those areas of production that had been a female domain. Women and children became dependent on men for access to resources in an increasingly monetarized marketplace. A complex body of legislation sanctioned these new arrangements.

Although the details have varied according to historical period and geographical area, the effects of this process have been strikingly similar. In Latin America, industrialization and the mechanization of agriculture have had a profound impact upon women. Those belonging to privileged classes benefitted to some extent in gaining access to paid employment in industry, government, or education, while leaving domestic work to servants, most of them also female. Rural women, by contrast, faced deteriorating living conditions as a result of the same changes. Investments in cash crops consistently expelled them from agricultural employment, and their artisanal goods have competed at great disadvantage with mass-produced commodities.

As servants, and factory or office workers, women have encountered new dilemmas: the need to support families leads them to become wage earners, but caring for families often prevents them from holding jobs over long periods of time. In Latin America and other regions, that tension, resulting from a systemic requirement to maintain a devalued reproductive sphere outside the realm of paid employment, was tenuously resolved in three complementary ways: first, women clustered in a few niches of the occupational structure where jobs were seen as an extension of their domestic responsibilities; second, those jobs have been assigned low productivity and wages; finally, the two phenomena have been captured in ideological constructions that define women's paid employment as a supplement to that of men.

Wage differentials between men and women may thus be interpreted as an effect of the belief that the former should have higher earnings because they have families to support, while the latter merely add to the gains of their husbands or fathers. That idea partly explains why, universally, women earn less than men when employed in jobs requiring similar levels of education, training, and responsibility. Gender acts as an independent variable affecting the alternatives of individuals in the labor market. Simply put, women earn lower wages than men simply because they are defined as women.

Three main points may be derived from the preceding discussion:

In Latin America and other parts of the world, the specificity of women's socioeconomic experience is rooted in the historical split between two complementary economic spaces, one where labor power is reproduced,

disciplined, and placed into circulation and one where labor power is recognized as a commodity.

As a result, the social definitions of manhood and womanhood vary with the ebb and flow of political and economic change in a nondeterministic way. To paraphrase historian Joan Scott, man and woman are simultaneously empty and overflowing concepts whose content depends on the articulation of production at particular moments in time. All societies assign roles to individuals on the basis of perceived sexual characteristics but those roles vary significantly.

Finally, gender interacts with but cannot be equated with class and ethnicity. The three are irreducible categories that designate specific relations of economic, political, and ideological domination. Merging these concepts obfuscates critical phenomena, for example, the role played by domestic labor in the formation of class hierarchies or the differential effect of gender on the adaptation of ethnic groups to labor markets.

Internationalization and Changing Definitions of Gender

Latin America emerged slowly from colonial domination during the nineteenth century, a region marked by a rich historical past and abundant natural resources but weighed down by the depredations of conquerors, settlers, and, in the nineteenth century, new capitalist ventures. As a result, the region exhibited features that seemed residual but that were in fact modern adaptations to the fluctuating demands of world markets. The *hacienda* and *estancia* systems are a fitting illustration. Originally understood as feudal legacies, both were instead complex institutional arrangements that expanded and contracted with the varying demand for exportable goods. As large expanses of land, they produced for the modern sector but also allowed for the maintenance of subsistence agriculture. Based on rigid ethnic and class hierarchies, the societies that grew around them perpetuated oppression and exploitation but also preserved asymmetrical relationships of reciprocity based on patriarchal honor. Peasants, most of them Indians and mestizos, and women of all kinds maintained a position of subserviency toward men of European descent.

Modernization began after the wars of independence that swept the continent during the nineteenth century. European investors sought advantages in the new, emancipated countries. National governments gave priority to cities at the expense of a languishing rural sector. Cities represented modernity; the countryside was seen as a throwback to a retrograde past. In the twentieth century, mechanized agriculture and investments in commercial crops displaced workers and eroded subsistence agriculture, leading peasant populations to the cities. Urbanization fostered rural-urban migration and the eventual undermining of the agricultural base. Latin American metropolises grew rapidly, partly as a result of industrial expansion. Industry, however, was unable to absorb the burgeoning labor supply. As shantytowns encroached upon the new cities, a vibrant informal economy also grew not as a legacy of the past but as yet

another peculiar adaptation to the pressures experienced by Latin American economies.

The transition from colonialism to modernity had a different impact on Latin American men and women. Mechanized agriculture, for example, displaced large numbers of men but also created opportunities for them. In some cases, men migrated to the cities searching for new jobs while women were left behind precariously to support themselves and their children. Although male migration has been sizable throughout most of Latin America, women have outnumbered men as rural-urban migrants. The reason is that it is easier for women to find work as servants in urban environments. This phenomenon has domestic and international dimensions. Several studies show that whether one is discussing Colombians moving to Caracas, Bolivians to Argentina, sierra people to Lima, or Central Americans migrating to Washington, D.C., women can always find jobs as domestics. Because employers prefer single, childless women, pregnancy has often led women to seek work in the informal sector as assemblers, street vendors, or purveyors of other services. The migration of daughters seeking wage employment in Latin American cities demonstrates the extent to which households must stretch to meet subsistence demands and maximize meager resources in a rural environment. This type of migration works in two different but often complementary ways. The movement of a young woman away from home lifts an economic burden from parents and close relatives, especially in areas where women have been displaced from subsistence agriculture and other income-generating activities. Once in the city, daughters may send remittances, which are often decisive for the survival of those left behind.

The dynamics of female migration extend to the present. For example, a recent study of three Mexican cities experiencing economic distress as a result of national indebtedness and austerity policies documents the way in which migration relates to survival. As more household members--especially wives--entered both formal and informal sectors of the economy, women began asking younger female relatives to move to the city to care for their children in exchange for room and board. Thus, economic crisis led to the addition of new members to working-class homes. Those adjustments cannot be understood apart from the sexual division of labor, especially the conflict between the demands of reproductive work--including child care--and wage employment.

Whether accompanied or not, female migrants will most likely work in paid employment on their arrival to cities or soon afterward. Migrant women consistently work outside the home to a larger extent than women in places of destination. Studies of employed migrant women also show that their labor-force participation is not strongly correlated to their educational level, training, or work experience. Instead, marital status determines women's entrance into the labor force: single, separated, or widowed women with dependents show extremely high levels of labor-force participation.

In addition to the need to earn money, women newly arrived in cities must rebuild networks that will bridge the gap between mere survival and prosperity. A man may need only to go to and from his place of employment, but because of their domestic responsibilities, women must become acquainted with schools, churches, medical and health-delivery facilities, markets, neighborhood associations, and public transportation in order to cope with a new environment. They may have to do all this while still learning a new language and fighting discrimination if they and their children belong to despised ethnic groups.

Even this most superficial review of Latin American women and migration presents a stark contrast to the portrayals of women that emphasize their passiveness and their disfranchisement from productive employment. Concepts like *marianismo* and *machismo* misconstrue a complex reality. Despite the prevalence of patriarchal ideologies, women have often engaged in behaviors that contribute to redefine their assigned roles. Recent research shows that the migration of men and women is often not the effect of concerted household strategies, but the outcome of contestation and negotiations surrounding gender expectations. For that reason, the study of gender and migration offers possibilities for understanding how definitions of womanhood and manhood change over time. Other opportunities to achieve a similar objective are being opened by current changes in the structure of the global economy.

Writings on the world economy have underscored the link between the internationalization of investments and the growing incorporation of women into the labor force since the 1960s. In the United States and other advanced countries, internationalization led to industrial restructuring and a shift from manufacturing to services. That, in turn, resulted in the expansion of technical and professional jobs, and the growth of an even larger number of occupations with features generally associated with women's employment, including temporality, comparatively low wages, and reduced union membership.

In less developed nations--particularly in Asia and Latin America--internationalization altered development strategies. During the 1950s and 1960s, many Latin American countries pursued economic growth through import-substitution industrialization. At present, the tendency is towards the liberalization of national economies, a concerted response to global market demands, and the expansion of export-processing zones. As in the case of advanced countries, these trends have paralleled the unprecedented feminization of the labor force. Why are women playing such a conspicuous role in the reconfiguration of the global economy?

In partial answer to that question, I explore two converging processes that are reshaping the participation of women in paid employment. The first process entails transformations in the system of production that have led to a

reorganization of industrial activity and the recomposition of the labor force. I focus on Mexico's maquiladora program as an example of changes likely to affect Latin America as a whole. The second process encompasses a reconceptualization of women as economic actors in contrast to preexistent definitions that emphasized their domestic role. In Europe, the United States, and most of Latin America, the early stages of industrial capitalism forged a widening gap between home and place of employment. This promoted gender definitions that tied women to the private sphere of family and unpaid work and men to the public world of remunerated employment. The reorganization of production on a global scale is changing those previous demarcations. The economic underpinnings sustaining the definition of women as specialized homemakers and men as providers is being replaced by an understanding of individuals with an obligation to participate in the labor market regardless of gender and/or domestic responsibilities.

An illustrative example of these trends is found along the U.S.-Mexico border where a booming industrial complex has grown over the last two decades. Mexico's maquiladoras were originally envisioned as a modest attempt to provide employment to workers displaced after the termination of the bracero program in 1964. While the majority of braceros were rural men, most of those employed in the maquiladoras were urban women between the ages of 18 and 25. Although male employment has increased since 1983, almost 70 percent of maquiladora workers continue to be female.

In 1979, when I first conducted research on this subject, there were eight hundred maquiladoras nationwide employing one hundred thousand workers. Currently, the program hosts more than two thousand plants and employs nearly five hundred thousand people--that is, ten percent of the national labor force. Mexico's maquiladora program has become the world's largest experiment in export processing. According to government officials, it is a key component of that country's strategy for development and a direct antecedent of the free trade agreement between Mexico and the United States. As the fastest growing sector of the Mexican economy for more than a decade, maquiladoras surpassed tourism as a source of foreign exchange in 1985. Today, they trail only petroleum-related activities in economic importance. Two types of production have dominated the maquiladora industry: electronics and garment assembly, with other light manufactures representing a third, smaller category. Since 1983, auto-transport equipment has emerged as the fastest growing subsector in maquiladora production.

The maquiladora program has been studied from two alternative vantage points. Early approaches, including my own, viewed export-oriented industrialization as an effect of international changes that led manufacturing firms to strengthen their competitive advantage by shifting labor-intensive operations from advanced to less-developed countries. Those analyses gave attention to hiring policies that targeted women as providers of cheap labor and

questioned the long-term effects of maquiladora employment on working-class households. The same writings proposed the rationalization of the program on the basis of policies aimed at fostering the incorporation of men, improving wage and work standards, and creating backward linkages with the domestic economy.

Other interpretations focused on aggregate output, productivity, and employment growth. They described the maquiladora program as a beneficial partnership between capital-abundant countries and countries where labor is plentiful but where capital is in short supply. That literature also emphasized the potential role of export-oriented industrialization for raising standards of living, transferring technology, and creating multiplier effects at the local and regional levels.

With the passage of time, the two views have experienced a degree of refinement. The maquiladora program has bifurcated, with a sizable number of factories preserving features similar to those that characterized them in earlier stages. Such plants harbor labor-intensive operations, often combine minimum wages with piecework, and hire a predominantly female labor force although, even in this sector, male employment has increased over time. Work tends to be unstable and overall conditions are harsh. Garment production, basic semiconductor assembly, and other types of light manufacturing are typical of that kind of operation.

In recent years, the maquiladora program has also attracted increasingly sophisticated forms of production, including automobile manufacture and advanced electronics assembly. Firms in that subsector have made substantial capital investments and are not susceptible to the abrupt plant-closings documented in the 1970s. They tend to use more complex technology and hire a larger number of men. Some of these plants are creating internal labor markets that allow for some degree of occupational mobility and higher wage rates.

Elsewhere, I have examined the particulars of women's employment and the implications of the maquiladora program for Mexican development. Only two points will be recapitulated here: the first concerns decisions by managers and plant owners affecting labor demand; the second entails recent changes that have resulted in the growth of male maquiladora employment.

From the beginning, maquiladora managers targeted women as a preferred labor force. In formulating hiring policies, they relied on a reserve of definitions about the proper behaviors and natural predispositions of the sexes. Notions of domesticity, manual ability, and conformity were used to explain the incorporation of women into low-skill, low-wage operations. According to a typical statement by a maquiladora manager:

"[Because of] their mothering instincts, women are...more responsible than men; they are raised to be gentle and obedient, and so they are easier

to deal with. They are also more nimble and meticulous and they don't get tired of doing the same thing nine hundred times a day....We hire them because we know we'll have fewer problems.

This statement reflects a delicate balancing act; it extols the advantages of women's employment by reaffirming simultaneously their primary role as mothers and wives whose proper place is in the home.

Ideologies about the appropriate roles of men and women are not held by managers alone. They are shared by women who aspire to have families of their own, and by their male companions who nurture patriarchal aspirations, including hopes of withdrawing wives and daughters into the protected confines of the home. However, most of the jobs being created along the U.S.-Mexico border do not offer family wages able to sustain the definition of men as providers. The majority of males (fathers, husbands, brothers, etc.) sharing households with maquiladora workers are either unemployed or underemployed. Many resort to intermittent illegal work in the United States or eke out a living as laborers and petty vendors in the informal economy. As a result, many women cannot afford to specialize in domestic chores and mothering; instead, they seek jobs to support families, especially children.

Paradoxically, maquiladora workers are considered supplementary wage earners. As a result, their low wages are not seen as a problem by government officials, legislators, and union leaders. Because most maquiladora jobs do not provide channels for occupational mobility, increased earnings over time, or improvements in status, women tend to see them as an expedient way to earn modest wages and not as a source of personal or collective identity. They alternate periods of paid employment with periods during which they withdraw into their homes. The ebb and flow of female labor helps firms to maintain their flexibility in highly competitive markets.

While the reasons for female employment in Mexico's maquiladoras are well understood, the rise in the number of male workers seems baffling. In 1979, eighty-five percent of the maquiladora labor force was female. Currently, the equivalent figure is seventy percent, and in some places the proportion is smaller. In Ciudad Juárez, which accounts for more than a third of total employment in the maquiladora sector, forty-five percent of workers are men. What is the meaning of these transformations? How can we explain the incorporation of men into a predominantly female sector, especially when wages, for the most part, have remained stagnant?

Answering these questions leads to a better understanding of gender as an interactive process. The increase in the number of male maquiladora workers is partly the result of shifts in type of production, investments in capital goods, and the incorporation of advanced technology. Examples of this are automobile and advanced electronics plants where men are hired in large numbers as professional and technical workers. The expansion of those manufacturing

activities was spurred, to some extent, by the new presence of Japanese companies in the early 1980s and by a new wave of U.S.-based investments in the most advanced sector of maquiladora production.

Varying perceptions about occupational opportunity along the U.S.-Mexico border have also influenced the growth of male employment. In the late 1970s, there was a widespread perception, among employers and workers alike, that maquiladoras offered mostly "women's work." Advertisements openly called for young single females with relatively high levels of instruction. However, during the early 1980s, the shrinking supply of workers led employers to seek alternative labor pools, prompting them to hire older women, women with very low levels of schooling, and men newly arrived into the cities from rural environments.

Employers saw shortages as an effect of the growth of maquiladora employment that had come close to exhausting a preferred labor supply formed by young single women. However, exploratory fieldwork I conducted in 1983 and 1984 in Tijuana, Baja California, indicated that the reduction in the availability of female labor was owed to workers' changing perceptions about the advantages offered by maquiladora employment. In the wake of currency devaluations, a severe national debt crisis, high rates of inflation, and austerity policies imposed by the Mexican government under pressure by international development organizations, wages earned in the maquiladoras were no longer sufficient to maintain adequate standards of living. Women shifted their attention to other sectors, including participation in the informal economy and, especially, paid domestic work in neighboring U.S. cities. The vacuum created by their defection was filled by other, even more vulnerable groups that included recent male migrants from Mexico's countryside whose possibilities for subsistence had been severely curtailed by the same process.

Ironically, part of the explanation for increased male employment in labor-intensive manufacturing, including garment plants, occurred as a byproduct of deteriorating conditions surrounding working-class households in border cities. Men sought maquiladora employment as a measure of last resort, to supplement earnings in the underground economy, and, sometimes, as a stepping stone toward migration across the U.S.-Mexico border. A redefinition about the suitability of assembly work for men followed structural adjustments.

Thus, the bifurcation of the maquiladora industry has paralleled the differentiation of the labor force by type of household, level of schooling, employment trajectory, migratory background, and size of earnings. There is, in addition, increasing fragmentation on the basis of gender.

As sketched above, the dynamics of domestic and paid labor are critical for appraising new definitions of national development. Earlier in the century, Latin American governments attempted to consolidate domestic industry through import-substitution strategies allied to nationalist agendas. The

prescriptions put forth by the Economic Commission for Latin America carried an implicit affirmation of men as providers and heads of households. By contrast, current modalities of export-oriented industrialization rely on the opening of borders to foreign investment through the implementation of incentives that rely heavily on comparatively low wages and disciplined workers, many of whom are women and none of whom are expected to earn a family wage. The goal is development through direct competition in the world market on the basis of pliant, low-cost labor. Thus, many government officials in developing nations now perceive the erosion of workers' earnings and the curtailment of political demands as requirements for successful economic integration on a world scale. As shown by the case of the maquiladora industry, those changes affect men as well as women.

Over the last decade, several interpretations about growing female employment have been advanced. Some observers minimize the novelty of women's paid employment by pointing out that they have always worked within and outside the home, even in Latin America. What is new, those observers note, is not the extent to which women have been, and continue to be, economic actors but, rather, their recognition as workers concealed by earlier ideologies that defined them as domestic beings.

Others argue that, although women have always worked, the extent to which they have pursued paid employment since the 1960s merits additional explanation. In this view, changes in consciousness, particularly in advanced countries, explain the influx of women into the labor force. Propelled by feminist ardor, women are presumed to be seeking personal fulfillment outside the home. A variant of this perspective is found in places like the U.S.-Mexico border, where even representatives of the private sector see economic liberalization and the shift toward export-oriented industrialization as processes that are opening new opportunities for women and breaking the shackles that subordinated them to men.

The case of Mexico's maquiladora workers suggests that changes in consciousness are a significant but small aspect of a complex process rooted in the structural requirements of contemporary production. Heightened awareness cannot fully explain the rapidity with which women have strived for paid employment in recent years. Instead, labor demand has to be considered. Women in advanced and less developed countries were originally targeted by employers because they represented one of the most vulnerable segments of the labor force. At present, the deterioration of living conditions in Mexico's countryside is leading men to seek employment in sectors previously defined as women's domain.

The magnitude of these changes has to be judged against the backdrop created by the historical record. Earlier in this essay I noted the widening gap between home and place of employment that followed industrialization in

Europe, the United States, and Latin America. As remunerated employment became a masculine privilege, women and children became dependent on men for access to resources in an increasingly monetarized marketplace. Thus, the casting of women as domestic beings did not occur in isolation. It was matched by a complementary process that defined men as providers and charged them with the support of women and children. The ideal of a wage that could adequately support an entire family emerged in the United States as early as the 1920s and 1830s. It consolidated in the early years of the present century. In Latin America, the struggle for a family wage followed attempts to consolidate labor movements and strengthen men's ability to support women and children--all this as part of an effort to increase the standard of living of the majority of workers who earned only enough to support one person. The belief was that men should be the legitimate recipients of family wages. While this placed women in a position of dependence, it also contributed to define men's responsibilities. From its inception, the ideal of the family wage was rooted in diverging gender definitions: men should earn wages commensurate with the maintenance of families; women, if they had to work outside the home, should earn a smaller, supplementary, wage.

Although the family wage remained only an ideal for most Latin American workers excluded from well-paid and unionized jobs, it set the tone for defining national aspirations. The privileges and responsibilities that accompanied the role of provider also made it possible for employers to gain tighter control over a predominantly male working class. In Latin America, as well as in other parts of the world, modernization paralleled an increased polarization of gender definitions. What made the domestic sphere unique, in this new world view, was its presumed lack of economic significance and, therefore, the invisibility of women's work. Economic reality was only acknowledged, and inscribed, in the public sphere of paid employment.

Two corollaries of these gender constructions are of special interest to this essay. First, women's work at home became invisible from an economic standpoint, and their work outside the household--no matter how widespread--was viewed as an exception, that is, in terms significantly different from those accompanying the work of men.

Second, the casting of gender identities did not emerge as a secondary contradiction; to the contrary, gender definitions were embedded in class conflict and in the gradual establishment of a tacit pact between employers and workers in the early stages of industrialization. In other words, the stabilization of the tensions between capital and labor in the early twentieth century entailed a validation of the concept of family wage and other entitlements aimed at bolstering the emerging gender identity of male workers. To be a real man, an individual had to first become a provider; that condition, in turn, was predicated upon his ability to secure and maintain a job. In the geometry of class and

gender, males were directly subordinated to market demands while women were subordinated to men in their families and only indirectly to the market.

Economic globalization transformed this order over the last three decades. Several economic and political factors altered the relationship between capital and labor that had been modeled in consonance with the definition of men as providers and women as housewives. The concentration of industrial production in core countries since the nineteenth century and the associated rise of real wages resulting from successful mobilization by--predominantly male--workers eventually led to a crisis of profitability. That, in turn, provided a stimulus for technological change and the relocation of manufacturing. Relocation to less-developed countries allowed employers to tap large wage differentials while, at the same time, eluding rising workers' demands in advanced countries. The same trend permitted investors to sidestep comparatively high wages and unionization rates in advanced nations and to harvest benefits derived from low-cost labor in less-developed countries. Host governments in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean provided incentives that led to the growth of export-processing zones and maquiladoras where millions of workers, most of them women, assemble products for the world market. From this standpoint, internationalization and the feminization of industrial work forces entailed large-scale attempts at disciplining labor.

Despite their growing importance as paid workers, women continue to assume major obligations in the home, especially regarding the care of children. Ironically, the reconstitution of gender definitions occurs at a time when there is no evidence to suggest that men are significantly increasing their share of child-care and other domestic chores. In that respect, patriarchal mores remain largely unaltered. What has changed, nevertheless, is the perception that domestic and reproductive work are women's only responsibilities. Increasingly, men and women are expected to support themselves and make substantial contributions to their households. These perceptions are not only the function of new value systems. They also correspond to transformed arrangements of production that have led to the growing atomization of the labor force in terms of gender. The shift is toward a collective understanding that every individual, whether male or female, should support at least one person: him or herself.

In the past, work outside the home could be an option for affluent women and was always a necessity for working-class women. In both cases, men and women saw the latter's employment as a departure from the natural order. At present, that perception is changing, although not smoothly. Specializing in motherhood and nonremunerated domestic work has become an expensive choice that many women would not anticipate and most men would shun.

Conclusions

A few points are worth noting in these final pages. The first concerns my analysis of changing definitions of gender in Latin America as an embedded

aspect of social, political, and economic life. The second, related point, is that the study of women cannot be conducted in isolation from an examination of the parallel experience of men. Both conclusions are of interest to the literature on gender and development. Authors in that field have stressed and documented the extent to which women have been placed in a situation of disadvantage vis-à-vis men. What has not been sufficiently emphasized in that literature is the extent to which women's subordination is part and parcel of larger systems of domination entailing class. In the age of internationalization, gender dynamics permeate the reorganization of production within and across borders. The recasting of women in the global economy is occurring in consonance with shifts in the structure of national dependence and structures of domination among nations, and among classes within those nations.

Both in advanced countries and in Latin America, the early stages of industrial development coincided with the definition of women as mothers and wives, exacerbating their subordination and dependency to men. Nevertheless, the same process was also associated with the consolidation of workers' organizations and the uplifting of the standards of living for many, if not the majority of, working-class people. Import-substitution industrialization strategies, despite their limitations, entailed that aspiration.

Although generalizations are hardly warranted, the separation of home and workplace created domains where women could potentially wield power and find autonomy without directly confronting the shocks of competition in the marketplace. This alternative was more common among affluent women but not absent in working-class environments. On the other hand, atomization of the labor force on the basis of new gender definitions has brought about the promise of economic and personal independence for women, as well as greater equality between the sexes. But, as the example of workers in Mexico's maquiladora industry suggests, greater equality between men and women may be the result of deteriorating conditions for the former, not solely the effect of gains by the latter.

The question remains as to whether Latin American governments can translate integration into the global economy into more extensive benefits for workers regardless of gender, and whether reshaped definitions of manhood and womanhood can occur in association with the fulfillment of still distant visions of prosperity and equality throughout the region.