

INTRODUCTION: STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND GENDER RELATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN¹

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Economic restructuring has reshaped social, economic, and political systems around the world. With economic restructuring, there also has been a restructuring of daily life, including changes in consumption patterns, cultural practices, community and family networks, and household expenditures (Benería 1992). As Lind (this volume) observes, a defining feature of this restructuring is the introduction of specific neoliberal policies (e.g., privatization, economic liberalization measures, regional trade initiatives) and decreasing state expenditure in order to integrate (and “globalize”) national economies, cultures, communication, and ideas at a historically unprecedented pace.

The conditions within which economic restructuring occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean had been shaped since previous decades. With the shortcomings of the predominant development model (Import Substitution), deteriorating terms of trade, and the oil crises, these economies needed help to repay their increasing external debts. Thus, in the early 1980s international agencies and the United States offered the possibility of debt restructuring, provided that the debtor countries conduct some structural adjustments (Enríquez 2000). Such adjustments were characterized by liberal reforms, decentralization, increased privatization of state-owned enterprises and the health system, shrinkage of the public sector (and accompanying lay offs of government workers), elimination of consumer subsidies, decreased social spending (particularly in education and health), and expansion of a market economy regulated by capital and commodities. Thus, while these policies were broadly conceived as fostering economic growth (and specifically as strategies to insure that the debtor countries repay their debts) (Enríquez 2000), they contributed to normalize the practice of flexible labor and to minimize basic workers’ rights (Follari 1998; Weeks 2000).

In this new scenario, endorsed and implemented by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the position of the state as a “social manager” has been diminished in favor of more “efficient” private enterprises. Harris (2000: 147-148), however, points out that in spite of the privatization of state assets throughout Latin America, the state still retains a considerable degree of power and an authoritarian governmental bureaucracy; it is its role in the economy that has been redirected away from serving the needs of the poor. In fact, Robinson (1998-1999) observes that structural transformations (and neoliberal reforms) in Latin America have simply provided the capitalist elite with the opportunity to reconstitute state and business institutions.

The impact of these reforms has been assessed in many ways and contexts. Assessments indicate the contradictory nature of the policies and their

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unequal effects: they have not been felt equally in all regions or countries or even within the same countries. These reforms have had differential effects by gender, class, ethnicity, and race. For women, particularly poor women, reductions in public and social spending have translated into increased burdens in their efforts to care for their families.

Two important aspects of this economic restructuring have been women's increased responsibility for household maintenance and new forms of employment. Women everywhere in the world have always contributed to their households' subsistence from a young age; thus, what is new is not women's participation in the labor force per se, but the rate at which it has occurred, the forms it has acquired, and the context in which it has taken place. Women are now, increasingly, "breadwinners" on par with men (see Safa 1995) and this new position (and its perception) has reverberated throughout society. Women's increased responsibility as wage earners has impacted all spheres of women's and men's lives, from marital relations, to gender and generational dynamics in the home, to notions of family, to new forms of political and grass roots organizing that put women's interests at the center.

This volume examines the effects of neoliberal reforms on daily life in Latin America and the Caribbean, as seen through the eyes of women. There is already a sizable body of research that focuses on the effects of economic restructuring on women's daily lives. However, the contributions in this volume situate women in their sociocultural milieus, so that women's perceptions and assessments are examined through a lens that includes the lives of other women, men, and other members of the women's families, work settings, communities, and political and religious organizations. And although women in this volume are presented as social actors pursuing diverse personal goals, their experiences, views, and objectives are embedded within broader forces in the economy, polity, culture, and legal systems that organize their lives.

An important theoretical contribution of this volume is the complex examination of informal social networks—whether these are examined as sources of material or emotional support or as basis for political engagement—as they are situated in broader frameworks in the different contexts. While some contributions reveal the continued centrality of informal networks for survival and in the formation of a person's identity, others show the fragmentation and weakening of these ties in the context of limited material resources, as has been observed elsewhere (González de la Rocha 2001; Menjívar 2000; Roberts 1995).²

There are a few points that highlight the uniqueness of this compilation. First, the women's (and their families') lives are not assessed using only conventional (economistic) or "neutral" tools. Rather, this volume contains the voices, views, and subjective perceptions of those affected by the same policies implemented throughout the region. Second, the contributions focus on different spheres of life, from micro-processes within the family, to work and occupations, to community, and to political organizing, which reflect not only the disciplinary

background and research interests of each of the contributors but also the breadth and depth of the effects of structural reforms. Third, all the contributions focus on recent situations, as the data on which they are based all come from the second half of the 1990s. Thus, this examination reveals the cumulative effect that neoliberal policies have had on the lives of the women and men in Latin America and the Caribbean. And in contrast to other research that has been carried out with a similar focus (c.f. Dwyer and Bruce 1988), in this volume we examine negotiations within the household as well as in the public realm of political participation.

The first three articles focus on work and what engaging in new forms of employment (as well as new forms of work organization) has meant for the lives of women as members of their households and families. In these contributions we gain a good understanding of the effects their employment and work conditions have had in their lives and in their family dynamics. The next four pieces examine these family dynamics, including notions of the family, living arrangements, and intergenerational support. And the last three contributions look at women's political and community organizing in the face of increasing economic constraints, as well as the potential that exists for this kind of political participation. Together, the contributions in this volume present a comprehensive analysis of how the global economy, through the state and other local actors, affects the daily lives of women, men, and their families. They allow us a glimpse into what it means to live in a context of the increased economic vulnerability unleashed by neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and exacerbated by globalization in the 1990s.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

In the first piece, Safa examines the changes that globalization has brought to women in Villa Altagracia, a garment exporting community in the Dominican Republic, and the implications of their increased labor force participation on gender relations and family structure. Safa analyzes the links between gender and work globalization and shows how changes in the gender composition of the labor force have altered gender relations. As women have attained greater economic autonomy, these changes have undermined the myth of the male breadwinner. As in other areas of the world, the transformation from agroexporting to export manufacturing generated jobs for women in Altagracia, but it also affected male employment negatively, as sugar production and import substitution industries—where men predominated—declined. However, even though women dominate in the free trade zones, men predominate in the better-paid technical and managerial jobs and are increasing their numbers as operators as well. Thus, although the male breadwinner model has been substantially eroded at the household level, its reassertion can be seen at the public institutional level and in the masculinization of labor in export manufacturing and on pineapple plantations.

The increased economic and social independence among women as a result of their work in the free trade zones has unleashed a “crisis of masculine

identity” (Chant 1999 cited in Safa, this volume), marked by men’s concern about a loss in their own bases of security and authority in the household. Women now resist marriage and remarriage because there are fewer eligible men willing and able to support a family. Thus, an effect of these economic changes has been the increase in female-headed households, which is not new in the Dominican case, but its current trend is certainly noticeable. In this context, women rely on consanguineous relationships for emotional, domestic, and financial support. The case of Villa Altagracia shows how female heads pool resources from several sources to survive; and thus, it illustrates how globalization has contributed to reinforcing these ties. Safa warns us, however, that these ties have their limits because even kin support is predicated upon a minimal amount of resources.

Toro-Morn, Facio, and Roschelle, in their analysis of the Cuban case, also note the importance of extended networks. These have become even more crucial for survival amidst the severe shortages of food, medicine, and other household supplies resulting from the crisis in the Cuban economy during the Special Period. The Special Period resulted from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Cuba’s sudden integration into the global capitalist economy. Situating their analysis at the intersection of the state, the family, and the economy in the midst of profound socioeconomic changes, these authors examine how a state that once aimed to institutionalize gender equity, has given in to the demands of global capitalism. Unlike the other cases in this volume, Cuba is making the transition from a socialist to a capitalist economy—rather than from an agrarian to an industrial economy—and it has not entered the global economy via export processing zones. However, the dynamics in Cuba are similar to those in its Caribbean neighbors where the feminization of the labor market has occurred. Toro-Morn, Facio and Roschelle argue that traditional gender, race, and class hierarchies have been restored in both the public and private spheres in Cuba.

As a result of Cuba’s economic restructuring during the Special Period, women and men have suffered from low wages, unstable working conditions, and unemployment, and must engage in *la búsqueda* (or search). This is a survival strategy that includes the formal and informal sectors but operates mostly as an underground economy. Within this context, Toro-Morn, Facio, and Roschelle find that women have been more negatively affected as they have engaged in low-wage, part-time, temporary work in the service sector and in typically female-classified occupations. Even college-educated women work as secretaries, waitresses, and hotel domestics in the tourist industry. Additionally, many have left secure professional jobs to open small businesses that cater to tourists or work in *jineterismo*, or prostitution (mostly catering to a foreign clientele), which had been almost eradicated by the revolution. Thus, Cuba’s entrance into the global economy has unleashed a profound economic crisis that has contributed to undermine the gains of Cuban women as a result of the revolution.

Economic crises linked to globalization are not confined to countries undergoing post-socialist economic transitions. The following two contributions

examine the effects of broad structural factors in a context on intimate processes, revealing how individuals wrestle internally with deteriorating living conditions. They both expose the deleterious effects of economic crises on social networks, among the poor as well as among middle-class professionals. The case of Argentina demonstrates that crises can arise in economies that are well rooted in capitalism and have achieved a high level of socioeconomic development. Masseroni and Sauane examine the effects that the recent economic crisis in Argentina has had on the subjectivity of highly educated middle-class women in urban Buenos Aires. Although the economic transformations brought about by neoliberal policies have affected many poor women and men, these authors demonstrate that these policies have had broader repercussions, profoundly affecting (as in the Cuban case) the lives of professional, highly educated women as well. The neoliberal economic model, which has included flexibility and deregulation of working conditions, has given rise to more precarious working conditions. This situation has affected all sectors of society, but Masseroni and Sauane focus on its effects on the professional sectors, especially professional women. For middle-class professional women, work means much more than simply earning an income, therefore, the deterioration in their working conditions and life in general has led to high levels of stress and tension affecting their psychophysical health and their subjectivity. Previously feeling a sense of control, these professional women now feel that they are at the mercy of their managers and unable to change anything. Negative effects are manifested in these women's self-esteem and self-representation, their thinking process, and in their feelings and emotions. In the face of flexibility at work, unemployment, and ever more demands from management, these women also perceive their work-based social networks crumbling. This produces great anxiety, as they derive a great deal of their sense of self from these informal interactions.

At the other end of the region, Enríquez Rosas also examines the effects of economic crises on the subjectivity and informal social networks of the individuals who bear the brunt of these changes, focusing on poor, marginalized urban households in a suburb of Guadalajara. Enríquez Rosas argues that subjectivity is a key factor when examining poverty because it allows an understanding of the sociocultural dimension of what it means to be poor and the influence of family on the dynamics—expansion of or reduction—of poverty. Through the women's eyes, she observes that these households represent contradictory spaces where relationships of support and conflict coexist, and where gender and age affect distribution of resources and participation in decision-making. The Mexican economic crises, which have contributed to more irregular employment and to a decrease in resources due to cuts in public spending, have forced many women to work in jobs that do not pay enough to survive. Consequently, similarly to the Cubans depicted in Toro-Morn, Facio, and Roschelle's study, the women in Guadalajara spend their days searching for survival. This constant search leaves them no time for socializing, which has serious consequences for their informal

networks and for their potential to organize politically. And, as in the case of the Argentine professionals in Masseroni and Sauane's study, work is central for poor women in Guadalajara. However, in contrast to the high status that work carries for the professional Argentine women, for the poor women in Guadalajara work is key for survival. In both cases, however, work is part of the women's identity, subjectivity, and an important component of their social worlds. For these women in Guadalajara, having access to a job also ensures the family's survival is key for reducing poverty (which the women equate with hunger) in the city.

Similar to the approach in Masseroni and Sauane's and Enríquez Rosas' studies, Chant also examines the subjective interpretations of individuals; only in this case she looks at the views about the family among low- and middle-class women and men in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. There, some perceive changes in the family as new and even more egalitarian domestic arrangements, but others view them as a "weakening of the family." While the many changes in Costa Rican family dynamics in recent years—e.g., increases in lone motherhood, female-headed households, out-of-wedlock births, and rates of divorce and separation—have caused concerns about "family breakdown," not everyone understands them in the same manner. Age and gender, Chant observes, shape people's different experiences and interests. She finds that older men see these changes as "family breakdown" more often than their female counterparts or younger people. Women and younger groups view recent changes in a more positive light, as prospects for enriching and enabling continuity in family life. Chant argues that the reasons behind these different views are linked to social, legal, and economic processes that have destabilized "traditional" gendered divisions of labor, power, and rights within Costa Rican households. In spite of concerns about changes in the family, however, Chant points out that the family is in a state of relative health, provided one does not focus solely on the conjugal bond or the nuclear family. For instance, the extended family remains strong and represents an important form of support for women and men. Among her study participants, there was a will to retain "the family," broadly defined, as this was perceived as an essential part of people's development.

Through an examination of kin networks and their potential as sources of support, Gomes da Conceição also looks at notions of the family. Similar to Enríquez Rosas, she also analyzes how gender and age affect the allocation of resources and decision-making as well as intergenerational relations and kinship networks. Gomes da Conceição compares elderly women and men in Brazil and Colombia and observes that within the context of economic restructuring, and consequent crises, new social policies assume that the community and family will take on the economic and affective support of older generations. However, Gomes da Conceição's analysis shows the limitations of the family to assume all the informal care and support that the elderly demand.

National policies shape the manner in which kin networks operate. In Brazil the universal pensions system allows the elderly to live alone, whereas in

Colombia public resources to support the elderly are rare, and co-residence of adults and elderly represent the main form of support to the elderly. Within these contexts, new economic and social policies that circumscribe the provision of social services, elderly women's and men's experiences differ. Since elderly women and men are all beneficiaries of the universal social security system in Brazil, they can either live in separate households or with their adult children, as their access to pensions make them more attractive for intergenerational exchanges. In Colombia, the elderly depend on adult generations for their survival and often do not have financial resources with which to reciprocate. Thus, they contribute with domestic work, which places elderly women at the center of these intra-domestic exchanges, reproducing gender roles through the final stages of the life course, and encouraging women to work without remuneration. However, if family members, even if they are of advanced age, cannot contribute to an impoverished household and cannot obtain institutional resources to survive, they can face exclusion. Therefore, within new scenarios of fiscal crises, cuts in public spending, and unemployment, the capacity of extended families to support their members and to pool resources together has declined.

López Estrada examines the integration of home and work in the lives of women workers. Based on a case study of home-based work in Tijuana, Mexico, López Estrada focuses on the contradictions of the women's productive and reproductive roles in their daily lives, which are manifested spatially and temporally in how their households are reorganized to accommodate paid work. Home-based work, one of many forms of self-employment in Tijuana, has increased in recent years in response to economic crises and restructuring, as men have lost their jobs and women cannot find suitable formal employment. Even though many women now engage in home-based work, there are diverse arrangements—both harmonious and conflictive—that women make in their homes. These different arrangements are linked to the women's social class, occupation, educational level, stage in the life course, family structure, and the broader circumstances of their individual lives. Similar to the Argentine women in Masseroni and Sauane's study, middle-class women in Tijuana work to realize their professional aspirations or to maintain their class status. And, just as the women in Guadalajara in Enríquez Rosas' study, working-class women in Tijuana work to help with their families' survival. In both cases, these home-based workers make complex, negotiated arrangements in the home in order to balance theirs and their families' lives. López Estrada argues that home-based work can be advantageous for women because it permits flexible schedules (and therefore affords them more control over their lives) and it can provide a basis for negotiating gender relations within the family.

Moving from the realm of family and the household to the political arena, Bickham Mendez focuses on the formation and organizational practices of the Working and Unemployed Women's Movement "María Elena Cuadra" (MEC) in Nicaragua. She provides us a lens through which we can understand the impact of

neoliberal reforms on women, the gender dynamics within the mass organizations of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), and the Sandinista labor movement's failure to respond to the needs of women workers and unemployed women. Bickham Mendez examines how place-centered, locally constituted political identities articulate with transnational flows of ideas and organizational practices and discourses to shape actors' collective strategies. She finds that MEC members have reformulated feminist notions and adapted feminist discourses to coincide with their vision of how an autonomous women's organization should be organized. MEC also has obtained considerable financial support from richer donors, which reveals existing global inequalities even within the (generally more egalitarian) nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) based in the North. In Bickham Mendez' analysis, feminist ideas, strategies, and practices do not move in a unidirectional manner from North to South, nor do they mean the same for all women in the South. Important class differences operate among women who organize politically, not only between the North and the South but also within the South. For instance, Bickham Mendez highlights the uneasy relationship of MEC with other Nicaraguan feminist organizations and with international and Northern NGOs, elucidating the complex ways in which power operates through and within transnational organizational relations.

Continuing with an examination of women's organizations, Lind looks at the emergence and institutionalization of women's struggles for survival in Bolivia and Ecuador in the context of neoliberal development policies implemented in the 1980s and 1990s. Lind observes that although neoliberal policies have contributed to the economic hardship and cultural/racial/ethnic degradation that many poor women face, they also have opened new opportunities for women's organizations and strengthened some women's NGOs. Paradoxically, by exacerbating women's workloads and worsening their conditions, neoliberal reforms have contributed to institutionalizing women's struggles for survival. Like Bickham Mendez, Lind also notes the dependent relations between the women's organizations, NGOs, and international donors or government-sponsored development programs that impose limitations on women's organizations and sustainability. Like in the Nicaraguan case, as women's organizations learn the language and discourse necessary to obtain state and development contracts, they become financially dependent on the state and the international development community. Lind observes, however, that while neoliberal policies have contributed to legitimate women's community organizations, they also have institutionalized poor women's second-class "neighbor" status.

Lind also notes the complex effects that neoliberal policies have had on women's efforts to organize. Whereas these policies have institutionalized poor women's second-class "neighbor" status, they have brought gains for middle-class feminists, as some women's NGOs that the state subcontracts have benefited politically and financially. Also, under pressure from international organizations, the state has extended more responsibilities to women's organizations and, thus,

middle-class feminists have acquired some power within the state and in public decision-making processes. However, Lind warns, the power that these organizations have gained might be temporary, as this can fluctuate with the political current of the day as well as with the objectives of the international finance and development communities at the moment.

While Bickham Mendez and Lind analyze the emergence and dynamics of women's organizations as responses to the conditions shaped by neoliberal reform, Agadjanian, in his analysis of work-based informal networks among street vendors in La Paz-El Alto, Bolivia, takes a step back and examines the potential for forming women's organizations. Urban street commerce, as a product of the informalization of Latin American economies, is primarily a woman's occupation. The extreme overcrowding and low, unpredictable profits that characterize this market niche create a complex dynamic of competition and cooperation among the women street vendors. Agadjanian argues that increased competition in the swollen marketplace, combined with the spirit of individual entrepreneurship and self-reliance promoted by the dominant class ideology, undermine women workers' collective strategies through alienating them individually and reinforcing compartmentalistic small-scale solidarities and alliances within them.

In sum, the contributions in this volume unveil the complex interactions within and outside the household (and those that link the two) as well as women's perceptions, subjectivities, and objectives as members of their families, households, organizations, and communities. And, though all the pieces add to our understandings of the lives of people in Latin America and the Caribbean—through their contributions to theories used to analyze the conditions that affect people's lives—these contributions' potential to inform policy should also be acknowledged. In this light, the pages in this volume should remind the reader of the authors' commitment and dedication to improving the lot of women and their families in a region struggling with new economic, political, and social regimes.

NOTES

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- 2 In fact, González de la Rocha (2001) points out that the “resources of poverty” model she developed based on household studies in the 1980s has been transformed into the “poverty of resources” model of the 1990s.

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