

BEYOND EXPLOITATION  
AND INTEGRATION:  
New Scholarship on Women in Latin America

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- RESEARCHING WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.* Edited by Edna Acosta-Belén and Christine E. Bose. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993. Pp. 201. \$29.50 paper.)
- UNEQUAL BURDEN: ECONOMIC CRISES, PERSISTENT POVERTY, AND WOMEN'S WORK.* Edited by Lourdes Benería and Shelley Feldman. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1992. Pp. 278. \$52.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)
- WOMEN IN THE LATIN AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.* Edited by Christine E. Bose and Edna Acosta-Belén. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1995. Pp. 290. \$49.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)
- ENGENDERING WEALTH AND WELL-BEING: EMPOWERMENT FOR GLOBAL CHANGE.* Edited by Rae Lesser Blumberg, Cathy A. Rakowski, Irene Tinker, and Michael Monteón. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995. Pp. 311. \$59.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)
- PRECARIOUS DEPENDENCIES: GENDER, CLASS, AND DOMESTIC SERVICE IN BOLIVIA.* By Lesley Gill. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Pp. 175. \$45.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper.)
- GENDER TRANSITIONS: MEXICAN EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRATION.* By Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. Pp. 258. \$45.00 cloth, \$16.00 paper.)
- WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS: BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP.* Compiled by the Inter-American Development Bank. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. Pp. 222. \$14.95 paper.)
- DOLOR Y ALEGRIA: WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN URBAN MEXICO.* By Sarah LeVine in collaboration with Clara Sunderland Correa. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993. Pp. 239. \$37.50 cloth, \$12.95 paper.)
- PATRIARCHY ON THE LINE: LABOR, GENDER, AND IDEOLOGY IN THE MEXICAN MAQUILA INDUSTRY.* By Susan Tiano. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1994. Pp. 260. \$44.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)

Latin American feminist scholars have long been more sophisticated than U.S. feminist scholars in understanding the importance of structure and macro-economic trends for women. Their understanding of structure is part of the neo-Marxist tradition dominating Latin American studies throughout the hemisphere, which was reinforced by the debt crisis of the 1980s. The first response among feminists to structural adjustment policies was to go beyond the studies looking at increased inequality according to class, as the poor got poorer (Cornia, Jolly, and Stewart 1987), and to include the gendered aspects of structural adjustment, which was placing a greater burden on women.

Books published in the early 1990s have documented and analyzed the micro impacts of macro policies. *Unequal Burden: Economic Crises, Persistent Poverty, and Women's Work* came out of a 1988 workshop at Cornell organized by Lourdes Benería (a Latin Americanist) and Shelley Feldman (an Asianist) to assess the impact of structural adjustment at the household level. Their goals were to achieve a comparative understanding of coping strategies and the role of gender in determining women's role in the adjustment process and to develop alternate policies and strategies. Another comparative volume resulting from a workshop is *EnGENDER-ing Wealth and Well-Being: Empowerment for Global Change*, edited by Rae Lesser Blumberg, Cathy Rakowski, Irene Tinker, and Michael Monteón (all Latin Americanists except Tinker, an Asianist). This workshop was held in 1992 at the University of California at San Diego. The contributors to the resulting volume address global restructuring rather than the specific issues of structural adjustment and focus on women as a source of creating wealth, one of their survival strategies.

By the 1990s, scholarship on women in Latin America had reached a critical mass. *Researching Women in Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Edna Acosta-Belén and Christine Bose, provides a critical review of scholarship on women and identifies key issues for further study in particular disciplines (history, anthropology, and literature) and issue areas (development, politics, and migration). These well-done bibliographic essays bring together women's studies, ethnic studies, and area studies, as summarized in Acosta-Belén's theoretical synthesis of the contents.

All nine of the works under review here link structure and agency. They range from sophisticated analyses by Leslie Gill of domestic service in Bolivia and by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo of Mexican migration to California at one extreme to a more simplistic acknowledgment of economic changes by Sarah LeVine and Clara Sunderland Correa in studying women's life cycles in a Cuernavaca neighborhood.

Feminist scholarship on Latin American women has become more refined and intricate in the last decade. The books included in this review exemplify that new direction. Approaches to research that dichotomized the roles of men and women and laid out a linear negative impact of cap-

italist penetration on women have been supplanted by nuanced analyses suggesting the complexity and flexibility of gender as a source of identity and behavioral norms. One finds less focus on gender roles as the main object of feminist discourse and more on issues of access and control of resources, domestic as well as political. Women in high office are no longer examined as much as the policies that move gender issues into the public sphere. Women as victims of economic restructuring have been replaced by women as creators of alternative survival and transformation strategies (see for example, the essay by Diane Elson in the Benería and Feldman volume). Studies of marginalization of women in the labor force have shifted to studies of the role of gender in constructing workers' identities within the labor process and structuring gender differences in production and labor markets. One example is Luz del Alba Acevedo's contribution to Bose and Acosta-Belén's *Women in the Latin American Development Process*.

Current research is linking macro trends such as economic and political restructuring and the debt crisis with micro phenomena of identity formation and resistance. These studies, carried out by scholars in Latin America, North America, and Europe, make it clear that the current globalization project cannot be understood completely unless gender is a part of the analysis. As a result, most of the works reviewed take a historical approach, stressing changes in the political economy and the concomitant changes in survival strategies that allow scholars to define women not as passive victims of global change but as strategic actors shaping as well as responding to the political and economic situation. Latin America is now defined less by traditional political boundaries and more by identity, despite ongoing attention by feminist scholars to the changing role of the state and comparative analyses (see Helen Safa's contribution to the Blumberg volume). Thus a number of the studies look at globalization in terms of gendered flows of not only capital but labor, particularly to the urban United States.

### *The Importance of Gender*

Latin American feminist scholars have seldom essentialized women by claiming that all women are innately alike. Their insistence on using the word *género*, a word created as a cognate from English, recognizes that gender is a socially determined construct, while sex is a biological one. This understanding of the difference between gender and sex has caused a number on the Right in Latin America—including some in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church—to condemn use of the term *gender*. The social nature of gender emphasizes relationships of differential power, which requires a deep knowledge of the heterogeneity of male and female relationships in Latin America.

These studies establish that gender and gender identities are nego-

tiated concepts that are constantly modified and re-created in the context of changing economic realities. In *Patriarchy on the Line: Labor, Gender, and Ideology in the Mexican Maquila Industry*, Susan Tiano demonstrates such re-creation beautifully in tracing the transformation of the image of the “ideal worker” in the maquilas of Mexicali from a young single woman to a married woman with children. Tiano argues that this shift has allowed for a reconciliation between patriarchy and capitalism as the maquila industries have matured and become more numerous in competing for “maquila-quality labor.” Earning a living has been redefined as part of the maternal and wifely role, while unmarried women are now viewed as too unstable to be good workers. Sarah LeVine and Clara Sunderland Correa substantiate this shift over time in a barrio in Cuernavaca. Husbands who once beat their wives if they attempted to work and even assaulted the men who employed them now help their wives find jobs. M. Patricia Fernández Kelly and Saskia Sassen (in the Bose and Acosta-Belén volume) found that expectations regarding the proper roles of men and women have changed. They attribute this shift to the context created by economic restructuring at national and international levels and view it as a structural component of contemporary capitalism.

### *Differences among Women*

The strong Marxist intellectual tradition in Latin America has forced all Latin Americanists to acknowledge the importance of class differences. Further, rich studies of women by literary scholars and anthropologists are forcing recognition of race and ethnicity as differentiating factors among women. But feminist research, as demonstrated by this group of qualitative and quantitative studies, brings together gender, race and ethnicity, culture, and class in innovative ways. The struggle of feminist activists in Latin America has encouraged researchers to let the voices of women otherwise inaudible be heard. The study of gender, like the study of class, emphasizes relationships of differential power. Gill is particularly successful in her analysis of Bolivian domestic service, Tiano in her study of employed women in northern Mexico, and Brígida García and Orlan-dina de Oliveira in their careful analysis (in the Blumberg volume) of working and middle-class households in three Mexican cities. Complex class analysis informs most of the other research in these volumes.

Studies made in the late 1980s and early 1990s have not attempted linear causal models to explain women’s situations. Instead, these studies differentiate among women and between women and men. The growing understanding that gender is relational and involves women and men is best illustrated in Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s study of migration from Mexico to a neighborhood in Oakland, California. In *Gender Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*, she shows how the migration experi-

ence differed for women and for men and depended on the period of migration. During the Bracero Program and prior to the debt crisis (between 1965 and 1982), men came on their own under precarious circumstances (and learned domestic skills), with women following much later. After the debt crisis, the pattern shifted to families moving together and single women migrating on their own. Hondagneu-Sotelo demonstrates how gender-specific networks affect migration and integration following migration. Perhaps most important, she shows how subtle shifts in gender identity caused not by a transfer of gringa feminist consciousness but by a new perspective on options for themselves and their children result in women wanting to stay in the United States while men wish to return to Mexico and assume the patriarchal independence ascribed to their fathers as landholders.

Domestic service, traditionally the entree into paid work for Latin American women, has different faces depending on the context. In *Precarious Dependencies: Gender, Class, and Domestic Service in Bolivia*, Gill situates gender in the context of inequality by examining the relations between Aymara domestic servants in La Paz over a sixty-year period. For Bolivian women from the countryside, domestic service is a fate from which one hopes to escape. Yet perceptions of domestic service by the domestics are not uniform, even when there was a lifelong commitment of living with a family different in race, language, and social class who had almost absolute power over their servants. During political and economic restructuring, the commodification of the urban economy changed the relationship between domestics and their employers, with domestic service becoming a way station in the urban journey or a sporadic source of employment when other options fail. Hondagneu-Sotelo found that for Mexican women coming to the United States, domestic service was a good source of income, particularly if one had transportation and legal papers. But it could also be a source of exploitation, often by fellow migrants acting as subcontractors in employing these women.

### *Methodologies*

Feminist methodologies are increasingly eclectic, based on the question asked rather than on a commitment to a particular way of viewing reality. Several of the studies under review here excel in linking qualitative and quantitative data for longitudinal analysis. Gill demonstrates a creative yet rigorous mix of archival, interview, and ethnographic methodologies in demonstrating the constant creation and re-creation of ethnicity, class, and gender over time in domestic service and the viewpoints of employers and employees. Tiano does a brilliant job of analyzing census data, survey data, and in-depth interviews to portray the intersection of class, gender, and identity over time among maquila workers. Hondagneu-Sotelo uses life histories and qualitative analysis of major political and

economic trends to show gender roles during different periods of Mexican migration to the United States. She links historical trends to individual biography. Frances Abrahamer Rothstein (in the Bose and Acosta-Belén collection), through distinct cross-sectional surveys of women and men in the same rural Mexican village at the beginning and the end of the 1980s, demonstrates the shifts in who does what to generate income. These changing gender roles are consequences of external conditions—particularly the economic boom of the 1970s and the crisis of the 1980s—and internal family dynamics as well. All these studies stress the importance of agency and structure and find ways to measure them systematically.

Life histories are used creatively by LeVine and by Hondagneu-Sotelo to demonstrate historical changes in gender relations. In *Dolor y Alegría: Women and Social Change in Urban Mexico*, LeVine and Correa compare women of different generations at different stages of the life cycle. Hondagneu-Sotelo's study analyzes migration histories of men and women to establish the gendered nature of migration and how it changed over time. This methodology revealed the sexual vulnerability of women and its impact on gender relationships. The women in LeVine's study were consumed by their husbands' or their companions' involvement with "*la otra*"—the other woman. And the women left behind in Mexico while their husbands were in the United States were sure the husbands had become involved with other women. These concerns stemmed not from sexual jealousy but from economic vulnerability. Men who set up second households contribute less to their original one (several of the women in Mexico were that second household) and might cease to contribute at all. Thus one of the women's motivations for migrating with or soon after their men was to make sure that their husbands remained economically faithful. Yet one motivation of husbands in resisting their wives' entreaties to come to the United States was fear that the wives would succumb sexually to the greater freedom in the north. These men also knew that their low incomes would not support a family and would force their wives into the U.S. labor force.

Sexual vulnerability inhibits women's options. Domestic servants risk violation by male members of the employing household. And women often have to move from place to place when the husbands or sons of obliging relatives seek sexual relations with them. Lack of power to resist sexual advances is thus enhanced by lack of economic resources.

Only in long conversations over the years did such details emerge. They provide a significant background for understanding economic options available to women. Thus it can be seen that good qualitative work requires not only excellent scholarly skills but a willingness to commit to relationships and to the local community. Feminist research requires a willingness to engage in reciprocal behavior, to share one's own story, and to help out over time (Ehlers 1990). Validity is determined by internal con-

sistency of the stories and the facts revealed in the development of a relationship between writer and subject.

### *Women, Work, and Family*

Most feminist studies and policies that encourage women's participation in the labor force assume that women's income is more likely than men's to be used to supply basic family needs. When this hypothesis is tested, differences among women emerge. García and Oliveira (in the Blumberg volume) outline differences among urban Mexican women according to class. When marital status is controlled, middle-class women are more likely to perceive their incomes as central to household survival than are working-class women. Looking at working women in Mexicali, Tiano found differences according to parental status. Mothers view their incomes as more important to household survival than do nonmothers.

Patrice Engle (in the Blumberg collection) addresses the impact of gender differences in parental support of children. In an intriguing two-country study, she measures the impact of different levels of paternal support and women's paid work on children's nutritional status in three ways: by height and age (reflecting early and long-term undernutrition), by height and weight (reflecting short-term deficits), and by weight and age (reflecting a combination of both factors in younger children). She found differences between the two very poor countries of Nicaragua and Guatemala. According to a 1989 survey, less paternal support exists in Nicaragua. Both paternal support and maternal employment make a major difference in children's nutritional status. In a 1987 survey taken in Guatemala, when wealth, the mother's education, and the child's gender were controlled, the effect of paternal support and maternal employment on nutritional status disappeared. Engle found that Guatemalan fathers were more likely to contribute at least partial support to their children than were Nicaraguan fathers. In Nicaragua, younger fathers were less likely to contribute. In Guatemala, the higher the proportion of the income contributed by women, the higher the children's nutritional status. But the father's income is also associated with better nutritional status. While it is clear that the mother's income can affect children's nutritional status, the gender problematic is not just to increase women's income and opportunities for employment by providing child care, transportation, and so on. Engle suggests that researchers should pay more attention to the factors that influence paternal commitment to children in different cultural situations.

### *Globalization*

The increased mobility of capital is mirrored in the greater mobility of labor. Elsa Chaney (in the Bose and Acosta-Belén volume) presents

a historic overview of the gendered nature of such mobility. In an excellent bibliographic essay in the Bose and Acosta-Belén collection, Kathryn Ward and Jean Larson Pyle link the gendered aspects of changing demand for labor in response to economic restructuring, particularly the growth of transnational corporations engaged in light manufacturing. The increasing importance of female labor within a country and across national boundaries is shown in studies of maquila-type industries by Helen Safa (in the Blumberg volume) and by M. Patricia Fernández Kelly and Saskia Sassen (in Bose and Acosta-Belén). Fernández Kelly and Sassen compare the garment and electronic industries in New York and southern California in the late 1980s. Foreign-born Hispanic women made up a large portion of the labor force in both industries in both areas. Hondagneu-Sotelo shows that migration is not explained simply by push-pull factors nor by family decision making to optimize familial well-being. All the new research indicates the complex nature of migration and employment, suggesting that each results from negotiations involving class, race and ethnicity, and gender. Further, in the United States, official migration status is a key determinant of negotiating power at household and job-site levels.

All the research on globalization and the integration of women into transnational corporations through work at home, subcontracting, and direct employment yield contradictory findings. Neither the integration hypothesis (that globalization integrates women into the economy and therefore increases their well-being) nor the exploitation hypothesis (that globalization uses women in the economy and thereby decreases their well-being) was supported by Tiano's careful research. Fernández Kelly and Sassen show (in Bose and Acosta-Belén) that the most vulnerable economic sectors are those in which women, immigrants, and ethnic minorities are defined as appropriate workers and that those vulnerable niches are typical of advanced and profitable segments of electronic production. Restructuring has also enhanced opportunities for entrepreneurship among Latinas in the United States. Safa (in the Blumberg volume) demonstrates that participation in export processing enhances women's self-esteem and their autonomy in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. But women's autonomy is greater in Puerto Rico. Several factors have given Puerto Rican women options for leaving abusive relationships: the erosion of men's role as providers, higher wages, state welfare subsidies in Puerto Rico, and the length of women's employment (export-oriented industrialization began in Puerto Rico in the 1940s with Operation Bootstrap but only in the 1980s in the Dominican Republic with the Caribbean Basin Initiative).

### *Political Participation*

Many of the studies reviewed here find the distinction between practical and strategic gender interests, first suggested by Maxine Moly-



neux and later operationalized by Carolyn Moser, to be useful in understanding women's mobilization and political impact. Women's practical gender interests relate to their daily survival needs, which stem from women's ascribed domestic roles and the gendered division of labor. What is defined as a woman's practical gender interest (such as transportation to work) could be a strategic gender interest in a different context. Strategic gender interests involve empowerment, demands for institutional change, and overcoming gender inequality. Feminist scholars view the politicization of practical gender interests and their transformation into strategic gender interests as the basis of feminist practice.

Studying women's social movements in Latin America reveals how difficult it is to move from practical to strategic gender interests. Tiano's research reports little mobilization around working conditions among the workers she surveyed. In her total sample, she found that only 7 out of 194 women could be classified as displaying resistance as a mode of consciousness. Her operationalization of the term *resistance* includes high autonomy, high support for gender equality, low domestic primacy, high class solidarity, high gender solidarity, and high criticalness of the workplace.

Safa (in Bose and Acosta-Belén) demonstrates the mobilizing power of women's practical needs in response to political and economic crises and the resulting erosion of the traditional division between private and public spheres. She shows how women's political protest, based on their traditional gender roles, was nurtured by Catholic authorities under repressive military governments in Brazil and Chile. And with the increased inequality resulting from the debt crisis of the 1980s, governments as well as international donors encouraged women's organizations to form voluntary groups to meet basic needs that the state was no longer willing or able to address. Safa points out the controversy surrounding mobilization based on practical interests stemming from traditional gender identities and roles, yet she perceives in that mobilization a shift in feminine identity from obedience and passivity to participation in struggle. Safa makes it clear nonetheless that the struggle is ongoing, pointing out the impediments to transforming women's mobilization into institutionalized representation. Norma Chinchilla (in Bose and Acosta-Belén) and Paola Pérez-Alema (in Benería and Feldman) both note the obstacles in Nicaragua, particularly the twin pressures of economic necessity and political co-optation by male-dominated movements, once a crisis has passed and a situation becomes chronic.

Yet crisis alone is not enough to trigger collective responses by women to meet practical needs. Lourdes Benería found in Mexico City that response to the economic crisis of the 1980s was privatized, as the state decreased services and subsidies and the private sector reduced employment and wages. Women's organizations did not develop to meet household needs collectively, despite (or perhaps because) of the varying impact of the

crisis on women. In contrast, Bolivian miners' wives, building on their past organizing experience in the *Federación de Amas de Casas Mineras*, took collective action to obtain and generate resources (see Wendy McFarren's contribution to the Benería and Feldman volume), even as they migrated to the outskirts of La Paz. But the degree of collective action varied by neighborhood, depending on women's previous militancy and men's ability to not feel threatened by women's organization. Consciousness (class and gender-based) as well as empowerment (also related to class and gender) were key factors in determining the point at which political differences broke down gender and class solidarity in two migrant communities.

Analysis of the transformation of practical gender interests to strategic ones, combined with resource mobilization theory and a symbolic cultural approach, is used brilliantly by María Pilar García-Guadilla in the Blumberg volume to assess gender, environment, and empowerment in Venezuela. Using a fifteen-year longitudinal study, she places three different kinds of environmentally oriented social movements in political and historic context and compares their effectiveness. García-Guadilla analyzes both women and men as political actors in relation to their organizations and the state. By the 1990s, environmental issues had become strategic in Latin America, a politically legitimate locus of struggle. She compares strategies—whether practical or strategic—and degrees of political success for three types of organizations that address environmental issues in Venezuela. Women-only environmental organizations focus on public services that enhance the quality of life, thus transforming practical needs such as sewage and garbage services, potable water, and parks into strategic needs. Urban organizations with mixed-gender membership (primarily neighborhood associations) focus on a broad range of issues that include those addressed by women's environmental organizations. Finally, ecological organizations (some led by men and two by women) demonstrate an explicitly Western environmentalist ideology.

The first two groups take a Third World perspective on environmental problems, approaching them through issues of poverty, quality of life, and day-to-day domestic problems. But the efforts of women's environmental groups' have been trivialized as domestic concerns and ignored because of invisible leadership. They have remained small and focused on practical needs. The urban organizations' demands were also ignored during the 1980s as domestic but were reclassified in the 1990s by planners as environmental, which moved them almost automatically into the strategic category. Yet because of their increasing importance in the move to decentralize government in Venezuela, they were soon co-opted by traditional political parties.

Many leftist men who had previously scorned environmental and feminist concerns as diversions from the class struggle adopted environmentalism as the new stance of resistance. In new ecological organiza-

tions, they tied the Venezuelan economic model to environmental degradation. The primary activity of these male-run ecological organizations was opposing megaprojects at the core of the Venezuelan development model. Working through existing party politics, they too were co-opted on a variety of issues. Mixed ecological organizations with female leadership had a more horizontal, flexible, and participatory leadership structure with close social relationships. Building on social capital rather than political capital, they have avoided becoming enmeshed in traditional political parties and have formed effective temporary strategic alliances. García-Guadilla's analysis suggests that these groups have been the most successful in achieving their objectives. They operate strategically in their demands, mobilize organizational resources in new ways, and utilize media and symbols effectively. By framing gendered environmental interests as strategic rather than practical, they can sharpen their demands and attract media attention. And by using a feminist nonformal organizational approach, they have been able to avoid being co-opted.

In terms of new scholarship, the link between research and action remains strong. Diane Elson (in Benería and Feldman) insists on moving beyond economic restructuring to a restructuring of social relations that constrain women by creating new institutions for oppressed groups. The market and the state are critical arenas for the transformation of gender relations, which are both global and local.

### *Institutional Change*

One of the most remarkable changes fostered by the increasingly sophisticated feminist scholarship and feminist networking may be the integration of gender into the practice of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Feminists have long attacked development banks and their subsidiaries, like the International Monetary Fund, for promoting policies (such as structural adjustment) and projects (such as major infrastructure construction) that favored men over women and the rich over the poor. Only in 1987, long after bilateral development agencies had instituted Women in Development offices and WID awareness programs, was the IDB's Operating Policy on Women in Development approved. This policy resulted from negotiations with donor nations (particularly Scandinavian countries and Canada) and among the member nations, reflecting pressure from national feminist constituencies. The struggle within the IDB to implement the policy is testimony to women and men working within an institution to promote attention to gender in order to enhance equity, efficiency, and empowerment. A 1990 publication of the IDB (Bonilla 1990) laid out the reasons that attention to women's concerns are critical for efficiency as well as equity. The 1995 publication under review here demonstrates the impact of the new feminist scholarship on policies and procedures.

*Women in the Americas: Bridging the Gender Gap* draws on the work of most of the feminist scholars reviewed here. The lively debate among feminist scholars comes through, despite an obvious bias toward integrating women into long-term development processes, public and private. The issues raised in the *Agenda for Action*, the final document of the Regional Forum on Women in the Americas: Participation and Development (held in April 1994) completes the volume. *Agenda for Action* reports and supports the recommendations of the IDB and the national governments of Latin America and the Caribbean. By examining differences and similarities among women in the Americas, the authors derive a sophisticated and interactive model of sustainable development with equity, aimed at facilitating what women already do through investment and program development that will increase their alternatives and ability to make choices individually and collectively.

For analytical purposes, the authors of *Women in the Americas* distinguish three types of women's work: reproductive, productive, and community maintenance. But they advocate taking a holistic approach to women's realities that allows for multifunctional investments with high levels of participation from project conceptualization to execution. Definitions of access and control need to be considered from the standpoint of gender, class, and race and ethnicity as well as culture. Barriers to access to resources are delineated, as are strategies for overcoming those barriers.

Institutional analysis of international lending organizations as well as political organizations suggests the need for radical changes in the way policies are defined and implemented. Devolution and fiscal austerity mean that local participation is critical in determining the use of scarce resources for local priorities. But centrally imposed structures must be established regarding who participates and whose priorities are to be met if current power relationships of class, gender, and race and ethnicity are to be changed. Certainly, programs claiming to meet locally identified needs have long been used to reinforce dependency in all these dimensions. The current participatory development practice of starting from an asset-based approach, where alternative investments of time and money are evaluated in terms of local visions of the future, is more sustainable than a needs-based approach. Including more social actors as citizens, rather than as recipients or clients, greatly enhances local social capital and flexibility. An assets-based approach cannot ignore power relationships and the need to redistribute resources. But by viewing women as actors rather than victims and understanding the complexity of gender as a social category, public policy—particularly public investment policy—can be used better to empower and to enhance the strategic interests of gender, class, and race. As current feminist research demonstrates, all these dimensions are critical in the Latin American context.

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