



LABOUR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

# FEMINIST VISIONS OF THE FUTURE OF WORK

LATIN AMERICA

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Feminists highlight the precarious working conditions across the region in productive work. They also call for recognition of and structural support for reproductive unpaid work mainly undertaken by women.



Women's and feminist organisations place importance on the need to change the economic order and rethink the capitalist development model.



Opportunities from technologicalisation and automation need to be analysed through frameworks which focus on regional specifics.

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*The*  
**FUTURE**  
*is*  
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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>LATIN AMERICA: THE ECONOMIC SITUATION AND THE LABOUR MARKETS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>WORK</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>WOMEN AND WORK</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>WORK AND ECONOMICS THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>FINANCIAL CHALLENGES FROM FEMINIST AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PERSPECTIVES</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>CONCLUSION: ABSENCES, CHALLENGES AND BLIND SPOTS</b>	<b>11</b>

## 1

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2017, women's and feminist organisations have called for a women's global strike every March 8<sup>th</sup>, which is International Women's Day. Their slogans are: "If our work doesn't matter, produce without us", and "If we stop, the world stops". The strikes are about work, consumption, and care. The political questions they ask are: under which circumstances do our contemporary society and historical capitalism occur and reproduce, and who carries the burden?

Through these strikes and other public actions, feminisms have focused people's attention on 'productive' and 'reproductive' jobs, women's place in the economy and social reproduction, gender orders, the field of work in a holistic manner—not limited to paid work—inequality gaps between men and women (specifically work related ones), and the entire operation of capitalism that is reproduced at the intersection of the 'factory', market and households.

In recent decades, debates around the aforementioned issues have developed through: a) the economic agenda of feminist groups; b) heterodox economic analyses that consider the differentiated effects of economic orders on women; c) the feminist economy<sup>1</sup>; and d) the discussion within Social Reproduction Theory<sup>2</sup>. These approaches show that economic policies and orders produce and reproduce gender inequalities; that crises have specific effects on women; that gender inequalities intersect with other inequality matrices (racial, ethnic, territorial, generational, etc.) which create persistent disadvantages for women when accessing and remaining in labour markets; and that the devaluation of life reproduction activities is of political interest and supports social functioning and accumulation of capital.

Reflections around these issues have gradually strengthened in Latin America and are being reconsidered regionally. The analysis of the world of work is starting to be con-

nected to the previous economic agenda of Latin American feminisms, which informs women's struggles for territories, material autonomy and their own bodies.

This paper can be read as an active pause at the juncture of intense feminist action to analyze the Latin American landscape on work, gender inequalities, and the socio-political and socio-economic contexts where these inequalities appear and are processed. What does it mean for women that Latin America is the most unequal region in the world?<sup>3</sup> Which has been the place of women in the Latin American economy in recent years, and under which conditions do they enter labour markets or remain outside them? How present are these debates in the region's feminist agendas, how are they politically processed and with which analyses do they engage? How should we consider the world of work and the future of work for women and for Latin American societies? These questions inspire the following reflections.

The paper will be as follows: first, a general characterisation of the Latin American labour markets. After that, we discuss women's place in that production structure and inequality gaps, as well as political opportunities and the obstacles women face to harness them. These sections mainly include information reported by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), as well as academic texts. On-going reflections on work and inequality gaps (including gender gaps) are relevant to this paper, although the approach is not necessarily feminist. The next section reflects on the economic agendas of feminisms in the region. Finally, we tackle issues that can inform debates about the future of work in Latin America.

1 Not all feminist approaches and/or approaches that consider the place of women in the economy participate in the Feminist Economics (FE) field. This is discussed later in the text.

2 The Theory of Social Reproduction has been fueled by debates within Marxist feminism. One of the main theses is that the capitalist system, apparently dominated by total commodification, is sustained by the unpaid labour of armies of women who support households and communities with their reproductive work.

3 At the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development held in April 2019 in Santiago, Chile, it was recognized that Latin America continues to be the most unequal region in the world: [www.foroalc2030.cepal.org](http://www.foroalc2030.cepal.org)

## 2

## LATIN AMERICA: THE ECONOMIC SITUATION AND THE LABOUR MARKETS

Recent years have witnessed a change in the political and economic landscapes of Latin America. The right-wing has risen to power in one part of the region, with the triumph of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro in Brazil being illustrative of the most dangerous face of this new cycle. Furthermore, the situation in most Latin American countries warns about the lack of rights and the presence of political restrictions for democratising efforts, civil society, and political popular dissent. Economically, Latin America is characterised by the end of the ‘commodity consensus’; politically, by the end of the ‘pink tide’<sup>4</sup>, two closely related phenomena.

The commodity consensus was characterised by the large-scale export of primary goods and by “the expansion of projects geared towards monitoring, extracting and exporting natural assets without greater added value” (Svampa 2013).<sup>5</sup> Further main features of the commodity consensus model were: large transnational corporations being major stakeholders with management powers; productive specialization (commodities); the consolidation of export enclaves; the creation of scarce endogenous productive chains; social and regional fragmentation; the configuration of socio-productive spaces dependent on the international market (Voces de Alerta 2011); and the discrediting of other logics of valorisation (Svampa 2013).<sup>6</sup> Food, metal, mineral and hydrocarbon prices increased sharply, which ensured the positive performance of Latin American economies.

During the period of 2000-2014, part of Latin American governments were called progressive. Their political programme

was expressed mainly, and with very important differences in each country, in relation to the social protection matrix (especially with the considerable increase of social spending), redistribution policies, and the democratisation of political spaces and international relations. They questioned the neoliberal consensus while coexisting with those who continued to deepen a neoliberal political agenda.

According to ECLAC, between 2002 and 2016, the average per capita social spending across Latin America almost doubled. This was essential to create general social policies and labour market policies and resulted in the reduction of poverty, inequality<sup>7</sup> (UNDG 2018) and improvement of other social development indicators.<sup>8</sup> However, the production matrix continued to depend on a primary and concentrated export structure (Olesker 2016), the internal political relationships were increasingly conflicting, and despite its relative reduction inequality persisted as a historical and structural mark.

Since 2015, there have been setbacks and a new political climate has emerged. The fall in the price of primary products on the international market put an end to the commodities consensus, with negative consequences for the growth of Latin American economies. The current landscape of the region is marked by the exhaustion of progressive governments and/or the shift to the conservative right. The world of work is a good entry point for assessing the impact of these changes.

<sup>4</sup> The ‘pink tide’ refers to the period known by the fact that governments in the region turned to the left

<sup>5</sup> The centrality of the exploitation and export of natural assets was not new in the region, but has long characterised the Latin American economy.

<sup>6</sup> This growth model had structural defects. Maristella Svampa points out two: 1) the demand for raw materials and consumer goods has led Latin American economies to rapidly become providers and to a gradual loss of food sovereignty (encouraged by the large-scale export of food and its destination) and 2) a stronger dynamic of dispossession (Harvey, 2004) of land, resources and territories whilst simultaneously creating new forms of dependency and domination. As a result, an extractive development model was consolidated (Gudynas 2009; Schultz and Acosta 2009; Svampa and Sola Alvarez 2010) based on a pattern of over-exploitation of natural resources (largely non-renewable) and the expansion of borders to territories previously considered “unproductive”. The agribusiness model and typically extractive activities expanded.

<sup>7</sup> The simple average of Gini indices (18 countries) dropped from 0.543 in 2002 to 0.466 in 2017 (ECLAC 2018).

<sup>8</sup> However, in both absolute and relative terms, social spending levels are significantly lower than those presented by the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union. This overall figure becomes more complex when we consider that the countries with the highest poverty rates have the lowest resources, both per capita and relative to their GDP (ECLAC 2018).

## 3

## WORK

ECLAC has stated that work is the key to equality and a main path for people to access the income that will enable them and their families to live a decent life. Over 80 per cent of household income is generated in the labour market, and policies aimed at improving working conditions can make it possible to overcome poverty and inequality (ECLAC 2018).

The 2000s brought policies which halted the deterioration in wage and employment conditions, which had taken place since the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> During the Latin American ‘pink tide’, central governments, responding to social pressure, implemented employment policies and increased wages. The average employment rate increased from 56 per cent to 58 per cent between 2000 and 2014; the quality of employment (expressed in the growth of jobs with social security benefits) improved; informality was reduced and workers’ job stability and income increased; workers’ access to social assets improved, especially in the health system and, to a lesser extent but equally important, in the education system; minimum wage policies increased minimum wages and average real wage rose (Olesker 2016). These policies helped to reduce the average of poverty and inequality in the region (UNDG 2018).

Despite these changes, the Latin American labour market is still characterised by insufficient job opportunities; high levels of informality; labour income that is lower than minimum wages (a high proportion of labour income is lower than what is required to overcome poverty and achieve adequate levels of well-being);<sup>10</sup> significant gaps in job quality, in access to social protection and in labour income. In addition, a large proportion of people are underemployed, work long hours to achieve minimum income,<sup>11</sup> and are self-employed or precariously-employed (ECLAC 2018). Despite the increase in

the average educational level of workers in general, their participation at the highest levels of formal education (tertiary and higher) is low (Olesker 2016).

Indicators show that employment conditions deteriorated again from 2015 onwards: employment rates fell, and the process of formalizing employment was interrupted. Gaps remain between urban and rural areas, with the latter area characterised by a greater presence of unpaid workers in lower-quality jobs (UNDG 2018).<sup>12</sup> Unemployment rates are higher among young people and, in particular, among young women. Specifically, gender inequalities within the world of work are one of the clearest.

<sup>9</sup> The “Washington Consensus” ensured openness and deregulation in the political economy model (commodification of social goods, deregulation of foreign direct investment conditions and financial flows, and privatization of state owned enterprises), with direct consequences for the worlds of labour and state action in this field (flexibilization, deregulation, and lack of protection for the working class) (Olesker 2016).

<sup>10</sup> About 40 per cent of the employed population is in this situation, with higher rates among young people, people over 65 and women throughout their life cycle. (ECLAC 2018)

<sup>11</sup> In 2016, approximately 20 per cent of those employed were in that situation, and the percentage was much higher in rural areas (35 per cent) than in urban areas (16 per cent). (ECLAC 2018)

<sup>12</sup> In 2014, urban wage employment was 68.3 per cent, while rural wage employment reached 40.6 per cent. (UNDG 2018)

## 4

## WOMEN AND WORK

In its latest report on the Social Panorama of Latin America, ECLAC (2018) notes the structural barriers in the region that limit women's full enjoyment of rights and progress towards gender equality. In addition, globalization, changing demographic patterns, climate change, economic conditions and inequality in technology access and use within and between countries deepen gender inequality in the worlds of work.

However, the situation of women in the worlds of work plays a crucial role in eliminating or perpetuating inequality in general. Increasing women's participation in the labour force can impact the economic development of a country and of families.<sup>13</sup> Klasen and Lamanna (2009) found that gender inequality at work has a negative impact on economic growth. Increases to income controlled by women have a positive effect on families, as they focus spending on their children investing in their health, education and life reproduction (World Bank 2012; Avolio and Di Laura 2017). During the early 2000s (especially between 2000 and 2009) the increased participation of women in the labour market was essential (especially low-income women, who were the ones who entered labour markets the most) for reducing socio-economic inequalities.<sup>14</sup> Analyses show that if female labour income had not changed during this period (with the rest of the variables remaining constant), extreme poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean would have been 30 per cent higher in 2010 (World Bank 2010).

Despite the above, there are persistent gaps. In 2017, women's participation in labour markets was 50.2 per cent (the world average is 48.5 per cent according to ILO, 2018a), compared to 74.4 per cent for men.<sup>15</sup> Unemployment rates also indicate gender differences: 10.4 per cent for women versus

7.6 per cent for men (ECLAC 2018). Indeed, many of the women entering the labour market are unable to access jobs, or find only low-quality jobs (ECLAC 2018; Avolio y Di Laura 2017). Women often have precarious and underpaid jobs in the informal sector. They earn 10 to 40 per cent less than men, and 28 per cent of poor households in Latin America are headed by women (World Bank 2012: 7, 23; Horton 2017).

The increase in public spending in the early 2000s benefited women directly and indirectly. The proportion of women without any personal income decreased from over 40 per cent in 2002 to less than 30 per cent in 2014<sup>16</sup> (UN Women 2017). However, not all women were able to benefit equally from the expansion of social initiatives fostered, especially by the governments of the pink tide. Gender inequalities intersected with socio-economic, geographic, ethnic and racial inequalities, hindering the full use of opportunities by rural or racialized women.

In fact, and despite the positive contribution of women's work to the socio-economic situation, poverty became feminised in the same period. Between 2002 and 2014, poverty in Latin America decreased by almost 16 per cent, but the index of femininity of poverty rose by 11 points.<sup>17</sup> In most Caribbean countries, female-headed households are significantly more likely to fall into poverty. Despite some progress, impoverished women benefited less from poverty reduction than impoverished men (UN Women 2017).

Moreover, labour markets continue to be segregated both vertically and horizontally. The first case (vertical segregation) refers to the difficulties for women in developing professionally and in accessing positions with greater decision-making power and better pay.<sup>18</sup> Some analyses have conceptualized

<sup>13</sup> According to Kanter (1977), the integration of women into labour markets was the most important silent social revolution of the 20th century. It was made possible by changes in the labour market and institutions (legal frameworks), educational achievements, declining female fertility rates, changes in family relations, and advances in access to decision-making (ECLAC 2004; Avolio and Di Laura 2017).

<sup>14</sup> According to the World Bank, both men's and women's labour income was the main driver of reduced inequality in that period in Latin America.

<sup>15</sup> Access to education is a key factor in this regard. Among those with high levels of education, the gap is 11 per cent, while those with primary education levels have a 34 per cent gap. The same applies to the place of residence: in rural areas, the gap is almost 37 per cent and in urban areas it is 23 per cent (UN Women 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Among women of childbearing age, a group that is often forced to reduce the amount of paid work to care for their children, the percentage of women without any personal income also went down. Increased labour participation and access to social protection (including cash transfers to mothers or caregivers) contributed to this. Women over the age of 60 also saw improvements in their access to their own income given the expansion of non-contributory pensions.

<sup>17</sup> Percentage of poor women aged 20 to 59 compared to the proportion of poor men of the same age range.

<sup>18</sup> Women's participation in management positions ranges from 23 per cent in Mexico to 16 per cent in Argentina (Grant Thornton 2015; Avolio and Di Laura 2017).

that situation as a ‘glass ceiling’ consisting of gender stereotypes and prejudices, unfavorable business policies, and lack of access to experience needed to obtain managerial positions (ECLAC 2013; 2018).

But gender inequalities in the labour market also appear in horizontal segregation. That is, the extent to which women’s participation is concentrated in specific sectors of the economy, such as education, health, social assistance, and domestic work, which is their largest source of employment – at 27.7 per cent, or in service; a fact that proves the sexual division of work in the labour market. In general, women are concentrated in less skilled, more vulnerable, low productivity occupations; they have high incidences of informal and part-time work, relatively low wages<sup>19</sup> (ILO 2016; Avolio and Di Laura 2017) and low access to social benefits (Weller and Roethlisberger 2011; ECLAC 2017a). These precarious conditions affect their ability to consolidate retirement rights in the contributory pension system, to the detriment of their economic autonomy in old age (ILO 2018; ECLAC 2018).<sup>20</sup> The horizontal segregation shows the presence of “sticky floors” rather than a “glass ceiling”. That means that women have more difficulties in the labour markets in all its extension, not only in top positions.

Furthermore, it is important to analyse the dynamics of the domestic sphere to understand the participation and/or exclusion of women from labour markets. Inequalities within families, an increase in female-headed households and violence, pose economic risks for women (UN Women 2017). Other risks to women’s labour market access include limitations on the control of their own sexuality and difficulties in gaining access to safe and affordable reproductive health services and sex education (Horton 2017).

Changes in labour markets caused by technological development should encourage reflections on the future of work through the lens of gender relations. The so-called ‘technological revolution’, while creating opportunities, poses challenges to societies and economies and is reconfiguring the world of work. Technological labour relations include, in some cases, more flexible but also more precarious systems, with weaker employer-worker links and limited access to traditional social protection mechanisms. Furthermore, the sectors where the greatest loss of jobs is expected are those where women tend to be mostly employed, such as services. Women also may face more difficulties in accessing the jobs that will be created by new technologies due to their underrepresentation in these sectors. In addition, if cultural norms which consider social reproduction to be a responsibility of women are maintained, domestic and care tasks will contin-

ue to be allocated to women. New forms of work organisation promoted by technological changes may perpetuate traditional gender roles, jeopardizing advances in equality between men and women (ECLAC 2018). In the absence of specific policies to address gender inequality in that sense, gender gaps could deepen.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Given the same level of education and experience, women tend to earn lower wages than men. The biggest gap occurs in the sector with the highest level of education, showing that greater investment in educating women does not necessarily bring them closer to men in their capacity to increase their income (ECLAC 2016).

<sup>20</sup> This is not homogeneous across countries and varies depending on the structure of the labour market and labour institutionality (legislation, duration and dynamics of collective bargaining, and labour control, among other factors).

<sup>21</sup> In Latin America, the analyses of the changes in labour markets caused by technological development are still rare. Developing them would involve deepening the roles and technological forms of the highly precarious and exclusionary regional structure of political economy, with the presence of sweatshops and basic labour segregation, crossed by racial, ethnic and gender exclusions, among others.

## 5

## WORK AND ECONOMICS THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS

Labour markets produce and reproduce gender inequalities. But feminists have pointed to the importance of also considering inequalities outside of labour markets, such as by taking into account the contributions women make through unpaid work. This encourages analyses of the economic and social contributions of unpaid work (mostly undertaken by women) and how this work intersects with paid work.

Feminist Economics (FE) is making fundamental contributions in this regard. First, it argues that the economy is more than merely markets, that consideration of gender is essential to understanding the economy, and that knowledge is not technical but political (Pérez Orozco and Agenjo 2018). FE considers the economy to be “all the resource generation and distribution processes aimed at meeting people’s needs and promoting well-being, whether these activities are part of the market or not” (Pérez Orozco and Agenjo 2018, 7). Additionally, work is considered as “all human activities that underpin life, not just those that are performed in exchange for income” (ibid). Therefore, it is necessary to analyse entire structures of production/reproduction, paid work/unpaid work, and market/State/households (Pérez Orozco 2014, 47).

ECLAC (2017) highlighted a well-known fact: women’s limited participation in the paid work market is in stark contrast with their high involvement in unpaid work in the household. Unpaid care and domestic work contribute to a country’s economy and individual and social well-being, however, most of this work is not acknowledged, is not represented in national accounts, nor does it inform decision-making on public policy. Surveys undertaken in some countries show that the financial contributions of unpaid work account for between 15.2 per cent (Ecuador, 2012) and 24.2 per cent (Mexico, 2014) of the GDP. It is mostly undertaken by women, whose contribution ranges from 11.8 per cent and 18 per cent of the GDP respectively (ECLAC 2016; ECLAC 2018). However, in most countries such calculations still do not exist.

Gendered divisions of labour is based on the naturalization of a thesis: women should meet requirements of domestic and care work. Women are more likely than men to be responsible for taking care of children and dependent individuals, and they must do so with limited resources and in the absence of public policies on care work. In fact, Latin American time-use surveys show that 77 per cent of unpaid work is undertaken by women (especially care and domestic work).

While women are almost exclusively responsible for the re-production of life and caregiving this is not recognized as work, and is a hurdle for their integration into the labour market. In that vein, when women do enter the labour market, they experience the so-called ‘double burden’ – working in paid employment with no reduction of their responsibilities in care work - manifested as double and triple the amount of working hours (paid and unpaid), and in detriment of their well-being, autonomy and personal fulfilment.

For this reason, feminist economists insist on the need to think about the work of care and reproduction of life (mainly unpaid and performed by women) to understand the worlds of work and gender inequalities. Only in this way is it possible to understand that the worlds of work and socio-economic inequalities are reproduced integrally: in labour markets, in family orders, in public policies, in community spaces, and in all those social places that contribute to the naturalization or invisibilization of all women’s work that takes place outside of labour markets. That is one of the main contributions to the feminist approach.

How do the ideas discussed so far connect with the economic agenda of feminist groups and organisations and Latin American women? What are the challenges?

## 6

## FINANCIAL CHALLENGES FROM FEMINIST AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PERSPECTIVES

Not all studies addressing women's situation are feminist. For example, some academics insist on "stimulating women's capacities" as the main way to reduce obstacles and increase their chances of success in the business world.<sup>22</sup> The main thesis is: if women improve their capabilities, they can deactivate their disadvantage. Such proposals ignore the social structures that reproduce inequality in general and gendered inequality: lack of access to labour markets, female overrepresentation in poverty zones, sexual division of work, etc. They also ignore how past and current development models fail to address gender inequality, and what inequalities have to do with the forms of reproduction of capitalism.

Another type of analysis, such as that which we can find from some of the international organisations, indicates there is a need to raise awareness about the interactions between gender orders, labour processes, development, equality and social justice. ECLAC, for example, has stated that equality is a necessary condition for socio-economic development and acknowledges that women's full participation in decent work is a right (not only a means of achieving economic growth) and that, for achieving this, it is necessary to strengthen human capacities, mobilise the State, and grow based on progressive structural change (ECLAC 2018a). State settings and 'structural change' are therefore relevant variables for thinking changes in respect to gender subordinations. Therefore, that institution proposes the design and deployment of "active policies that make it possible to bridge the structural gender gaps that limit women's access to and permanence in the labour market" (ECLAC 2018).

Also, ECLAC defends "the economic potential (improved income distribution, poverty reduction and access to contributory social protection) of women's full incorporation into the world of work" (ECLAC 2018). In fact, ECLAC insists on the possibility of "taking advantage of the instrumental role of equality as a driver of sustainable development" (ECLAC 2018a), and on the directly proportional relationship between gender equality and economic growth (ibid).

<sup>22</sup> For example, they advocate for specific support programs for female entrepreneurs based on their needs, mentoring, and entrepreneurship incentive programs to develop their business administration capacities and increase their potential and facilitate access to credit, among others (Avolio and Di Laura 2017).

However, their proposed agenda to achieve those objectives supposes: labour policies to reduce gender gaps, social co-responsibility policies for care work, education and capacity building, comprehensive social protection, labour statistics with a gender perspective, and policies with an intersectoral scope. This agenda leaves out the issue of structural change, although it had been considered a relevant variable for explaining women's situation, as stated before. The feminist awareness about the whole system of production/reproduction and capitalist structural inequality is left out.

On the other hand, there are women and feminists' perspectives and movements<sup>23</sup>. A regional review of their priorities shows there are three main subjects: violence against women, political participation, and sexual and reproductive rights. However, these movements also take into account an economic agenda and take a stance with regards to the region's economic challenges.<sup>24</sup>

It is not possible to do one single characterisation about how feminist movements face economic challenges. Therefore, there is neither a single agenda nor consensus about what the challenges or strategies are. Feminist actors include diverse groups, movements, and voices (feminist and close to feminism), but the clearest continuity is their concern about social justice.

Feminist perspectives conceive their economic agenda in relation to other far-reaching issues such as neo-colonial and extractivist projects in Latin America, population displacements, free trade agreements with the United States, and authoritarian and/or conservative forms of political power. Reflection on the Latin American economy and on the world of work has also been forged in the debate on these issues and in diverse settings, some specifically convened by feminisms, others by organisations that do not

<sup>23</sup> Women's groups in the region do not always have the primary purpose of changing gender relations, nor do they all champion feminist principles and demands. These movements maintain a close link with feminism thanks to their „hidden gender insurgencies“ (Berger Gluck 1998), that is, because of their potential to transform gender relations.

<sup>24</sup> For a review of the evolution of women's economic demands, see, among others: Rodríguez y Madera (2015); Díaz Alba (2007); León (compiler) (2005); Valdivieso (2009).

declare themselves feminist,<sup>25</sup> and others by broader events.<sup>26</sup>

In general, women's organisations contribute to thinking about the economic challenges of the region in connection with the processes of racialization, impoverishment and the generation of inequalities.

In fact, feminist perspectives are constructed by a diversity of contributors, including stakeholders such as: a) feminist groups; b) indigenous and rural women's organisations and Afro women's groups which are not necessarily self-defined as feminists c) urban popular women's organisations; d) trade union women's groups; e) institutional referents with agendas for equality in the State, and e) feminists in academia (Rodríguez y Madera 2015). The ways in which economic challenges are thought of in the region, specifically in relation to the world of work, are closely tied to the histories of these stakeholders. Indigenous, peasant, and rural women, for example, contribute to the agenda by identifying specific challenges related to inequalities caused by land distributions, displacement of populations, extractive practices, and privatization of resources. At the same time, these groups generate different organisational forms; for example, hybrid organisations (such as militant feminisms within their social movements)<sup>27</sup> or organisational sub-units within their groups (secretariats and working groups within mixed social organisations).

Afro women's organisations raise special awareness about discrimination within the labour market. They expose occupational segregation and racial discrimination as mechanisms of economic injustice that particularly affect racialized women. Urban popular organisations challenge conditions of unemployment or underemployment, manage urban community life, etc.<sup>28</sup> Women union members develop important political movements, such as in the case of paid domestic workers who have been grouped regionally in the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers since 1980.

A study carried out with the support of UNDP identified eight supranational networks that promote specific econom-

<sup>25</sup> For example, the events convened by the Latin American Coordinator of Rural Organisations or the meetings of rural and indigenous women held since the mid-1990s, or the First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women of Abya Yala (Peru).

<sup>26</sup> The World Social Forum, the Forum of the Americas or the Peoples Summit, the Consultations within the Post 2015 Agenda framework.

<sup>27</sup> A case in point is that of the CLOC-Vía Campesina. Out of 72 national and local organisations, only about 10 are women's organisations. The rest are hybrid. (Rodríguez y Madera 2015)

<sup>28</sup> Some examples of these popular women's groups are the Espacio de Mujeres del Frente Popular Darío Santillán in Argentina (an active movement of unemployed workers), the Asamblea Feminista de Bolivia (which was created to manage food distribution in the neighborhoods of El Alto and La Paz in the context of the "gas war"), the Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres de Sectores Populares Luna Creciente in Ecuador (since 2001, with a national training school) and the Movimiento Mujeres por la Vida in Venezuela (made up of women from urban popular communities, created in 1992). (Rodríguez y Madera 2015)

ic agendas on women in Latin America (Rodríguez y Madera 2015). They include:

- Central American Network of Rural, Indigenous and Peasant Women
- Mesoamerican Women in Resistance for a Dignified Life
- Cartagena Feminist Initiative
- Marcosur Feminist Articulation
- Gender and Trade Network (Latin American Chapter)
- Latin American Network of Women Transforming the Economy
- Gender and Macroeconomics Group in Latin America and the Caribbean
- Popular Education Network Among Women in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, there are other spaces that contribute to economic analysis from the academia. For example, the Space for Feminist Economics, which operates within the Society of Critical Economics (Argentina and Uruguay); Sol Foundation (Chile); Cooperative Desbordadas (Chile); or Intersectorial Table on Care Economy (Colombia). All these are national or bi-national efforts that integrate into their agenda the reflection on the situation of women within the worlds of work from approaches based on feminist economics.

Women's organisations have observed that the economic agenda of the region set by women is being built with increasing integration between actors and countries, including an intersectional perspective. Compared to previous decades, there have been greater joint efforts and attempts at integration, although many times these are circumstantial and have a low to medium reach, and they mainly take place among organisations rather than between them and state stakeholders. However, these interactions allow for some common actions through alliances, networks and strategic encounters, and promote the participation of stakeholders from other fields, such as academia.<sup>30</sup>

As a whole, perspectives from feminist and women's organisations in the region contribute to producing micro and macro social analyses that observe both the productive structures and the specificity of projects, policies, and programs that reproduce poverty and inequality as well as relative disadvantages.

An analysis of the agendas of Latin American women's and feminist organisations allows us to identify three main pillars that show the order of the economic challenges: 1) the recognition and exercise of economic, social and labour rights

<sup>29</sup> Many other organisations have women's sections. For example, the Intercontinental Advocacy Network of the Social Solidarity Economy, or the Network of Networks of Alternative and Solidarity Economy. And other feminist organisations, with broad agendas, include financial issues, such as the World March of Women.

<sup>30</sup> Having established a more stable relationship between academia and popular organisations is one of the achievements of feminist and women's movements in recent years.

with regards to labour regulation (both the ‘capital/work’ relationship and the ‘reproductive work/paid work’ relationship) and of social protection; 2) the demands for gender mainstreaming in the State’s financial management (introducing a gender perspective in the national public budget and public finances); and 3) the need to challenge the general economic order and the capitalist development model. Under the last pillar, feminist stakeholders and women’s groups place at the forefront of the regional economic perspective the issues related to food sovereignty, opposition to extractive megaprojects (mining, forestry and oil) and the demand for access to natural resources such as land and water (Rodríguez y Madera 2015).

With regards to the perspectives discussed at the beginning of this section, feminist voices share the need to think about gender inequality as an integral part of the reproduction of social injustices. But they go one step further by addressing the relationships between development, inequality, and capitalism.

In general, women’s and feminist organisations acknowledge that it is not possible to take apart the logic of gender inequality without an economic agenda that exposes that the structural conditions that reproduce subordination still exist. The reflection about economic issues also shows that gender subordinations are embedded in the structures and dynamics that reproduce Latin American capitalism. At the same time, voices of feminists and women’s organisations warn about the absence of a comprehensive perspective on rights and inequalities, and distance themselves from any agenda that addresses economic challenges focusing mainly on economic growth.

## 7

## CONCLUSION: ABSENCES, CHALLENGES AND BLIND SPOTS

What has been said so far draws attention to a feminist need that considers the fields of work and the economy and the processes of life production/reproduction. The global strikes called on International Women's Day follow this spirit, and calls attention to the need to observe, in an interconnected way, the unjust processes of redistribution, recognition, and representation. In that vein, the feminist agenda on work can be considered as a setting to discuss key issues such as development, capitalism, inequalities, poverty, and the intersection of different exclusions.

The data shown in this paper confirm the existing gender inequality gaps in the Latin American labour worlds, the positive steps taken at the beginning of the 21st century, and the clear setbacks of recent years. At the end of the progressive cycle, women seem to be more affected by the new political moment.

The collapse of the 'commodities consensus' has had specific consequences for the Latin American labour worlds and has posed particular setbacks and challenges for women. These transformations are connected with others, such as social policies, financial flows, transnationalisation of economic sectors, education policies, and demographic transformations. It is therefore necessary to address these interactions in order to expose the quality, tensions, and balance of State/market/society relationships. One of the most pressing needs for the region is to continue thinking and debating in a comprehensive manner about the scope of these transformations.

The feminist approach highlights the relevance of thinking about the world of work in connection with Latin American development models (and their inter- and intra-national heterogeneities). The analysis of labour-related processes does not just involve work or the labour markets. It is necessary to consider the more general setting where they are embedded, their reactions to the capital cycle, and their limits and opportunities.

In spite of the legitimacy, pertinence and relevance of women's economic demands (and the specific ones related to the worlds of work), economic issues have a more subdued presence within current feminist agendas when compared with the efforts relating to, and public awareness of, issues such as gender violence and sexual and reproductive rights. How-

ever, the contributions by feminist economics, feminist analyses, and women's movements have begun to address the debate on the need to broaden the notion of 'work' (which should not be limited to wage work), and on the need to think about the relationship between paid and unpaid work. While the discussion about this relationship began in the 1970s, it has only recently permeated the analyses of international organisations and the practice of feminisms on a global scale. In Latin America this debate has a growing presence, although it is not yet fully established.

Probably the most urgent challenges are to align the discussions just mentioned with the previous economic agenda of Latin American feminisms and women's organisations, and to link different political agendas. For example: what do the economy of care and unpaid work have to do with anti-extractive movements, labour and social protection rights and the development matrix of Latin American capitalism? What does the structural subordination of women have to do with sexual violence and rights?

To explore those questions, a reflection on economic autonomy and social dependency needed for reproducing life is probably an interesting start. By exploring the analytical and political agendas with a focus on economic autonomy, one could reflect about the body, territory, and work. This could result in a heuristic approach to think politically about the reduction of gender-based structural asymmetries. But also, it is necessary to visualise the inevitable co-dependency of social life, and the social relationship as a whole.

Women's participation in labour markets is becoming more complex due to the technologisation and automation of some employment sectors. The potential opportunities that this could offer, contrast with the exclusions that are foreseen and already demonstrated. A study of the forms and consequences of automation and technologisation in conditions of marked and structural inequality, and in consideration of widespread instability and informalization of labour markets, is one of the analytical challenges regarding the present and future of work in Latin America. This analysis has to be done in our own terms, and not with the same frameworks used to examine the global North.

Another urgent matter, and one in which little progress has been made, is the need to analyse macroeconomic policies

from a gender perspective. The realities described in this paper about women's subordination are often read as 'unforeseen effects' or 'unexpected effects' of national or supranational economic policies. However, they are not. Changes in political economy are gender-sensitive in their inception, deployment and results, and its gender impacts can be anticipated. It is essential to have a more systematic analysis of the tax structure and justice and development models that illustrate this fact, while at the same time, making visible the efforts already being made in this field which are providing excellent results and practices.

In the field of political organisation, it is necessary to address and promote the interactions between different stakeholders within the national popular movements, between stakeholders from academia and state institutions, as well as within movements and groups from the region and the Global South. One of the latest developments of recent years has been the interaction of academic voices with popular movements in the region (Rodríguez y Madera 2015). It would be beneficial to strengthen this relationship in order to make it more stable and achieve a wider scope.

Collaboration could be promoted amongst feminist and women's movements, such as: rural and indigenous women interacting with urban women, groups with feminist and Afro-descendant women's organisations, trade unionists, or with informal workers. Additionally, interactions between national, local, and supranational organisations could be promoted. Women from different continents should be encouraged to share experiences, undertake collaborative analyses and establish global networks. The economic agenda is, probably unlike any other, a place where sectoral agendas converge. This could be harnessed to develop better practices and promote social networks and oversight mechanisms. Feminisms are the most vital and interesting political field in the global context. The priority for gender democratisation, among the urgent needs described above, and others, is to support initiatives that promote the public presence of feminist voices and strengthen the deployment of the movements

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## GLOSSARY TERMS

ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FE	Feminist Economics
ILO	International Labour Organization
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDG	United Nations Development Group

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ailynn Torres Santana** finished her PhD studies in Social Sciences with a Major in History at FLACSO Ecuador. She originally studied Psychology and Communications in La Habana, Cuba and has been a researcher at the Cuban Cultural Research Institute (ICIC) since 2006. She has further worked as an invited professor in FLACSO Ecuador (2016-2018), University of Barcelona (2015, 2018) and UMASS (2018). Currently, she is a visiting scholar at Harvard University. Her research topics are feminism, gender studies, inequalities and citizenship in Latin America. She has published articles in a variety of journals and contributed chapters to a several books. At the moment she coordinates a Cuban Studies dossier (Harvard University) about gender in Cuba and is a member of the Editorial Board of Cuban Studies (Harvard) and Sin Permiso (Barcelona) academic journals. She is member of the FES regional project “The future is feminist” and of working academic groups of CLACSO and FLACSO, among other professional networks.

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“The Future is Feminist” is a global project of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, working worldwide with feminists to develop positive visions for a better future that focus on economic policy issues and critical economic perspectives. The project in particular analyses the effects of digitalization and the future of work. It identifies common concerns of feminist and labour movements to create space for new powerful allian-

ces aiming at social change. The project is a continuation of the work of feminist networks in the Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Northern Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa regions. It offers activists the opportunity to exchange ideas on burning issues, regional experiences and political strategies while serving as a space to experiment with new ideas.



## FEMINIST VISIONS OF THE FUTURE OF WORK: LATIN AMERICA



Feminists in Latin America highlight the precarious working conditions of women across the region in productive work. At the same time they call for the recognition of and structural support for reproductive unpaid work mainly undertaken by women. Contributions by feminist economics, feminist analyses, and women's movements are addressing the need to broaden the notion of 'work' - which should not be limited to wage work -, and the need to think about the relationship between paid and unpaid work.



Feminist perspectives in Latin America conceive their economic agenda in relation to other far-reaching issues such as neocolonial and extractivist projects, population displacements, free trade agreements, and authoritarian and/or conservative forms of political power. Among the economic challenges, women's and feminist organisations place importance on the need to change the economic order and rethink the capitalist development model. Gender inequality is an integral part of reproducing poverty and inequality, therefore the relationship between development, inequality and capitalism needs to be addressed.



While technological labour can be more flexible it can also lead to more precarious systems with weaker employer-worker links and limited access to traditional social protection links. It is important to analyse potential opportunities from technologicalisation and automation through frameworks which focus on regional specifics in Latin America. Without public policies that address current inequalities and shape future developments, it is expected that technological advances will reproduce and even deepen gender inequalities.



For further information on this topic:

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