Chapter 5

Feminism and Economic Geography: Gendering Work and Working Gender

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Two decades ago, a chapter on feminism in an economic geography reader would have been unlikely. The role of gender in labor migration, commuting patterns, and the globalization of capital, however, is increasingly recognized as an important dimension of economic processes. This chapter examines the relationship of feminism to economic geography, from its initial roots in political economy to its contemporary forms turning on poststructural theories of embodiment and identity in the workplace. It is argued that feminism has increased our understanding of economic processes through its analyses of how gender and work are socially constructed at multiple scales and in diverse geographical contexts.

There are three compelling arguments for the relevance of feminism to economic geography. First, feminist theory forces us to confront the heterogeneity of the workforce. Disaggregating economic data by gender reveals two separate patterns and trends in labor force participation, unemployment, and occupational status, one for men and a very different one for women. Identifying and exploring these differences in men's and women's labor contributes to our understanding of not only the complexity of the workforce, but also the role of gender in economic processes.

Second, feminist geography helps us to realize that the economy and its geography are defined by multiple social relations. While class was previously viewed as the dominant social relation under capitalism, feminism has helped to expand economic analyses to include gender as well as race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and other sets of relations that are linked to economic power and identity. These social relations, in turn, play a role in numerous economic processes such as the location of low-wage factories in developing regions, the unionization of blue-collar workers, and household income-generating strategies.

Finally, feminism contributes to economic geography through its methodological approaches which raise gender-sensitive questions and allow for more inclusive and relevant research. Questions traditionally ignored in conventional economic geography, but highlighted in feminist research include: How do the expenditure patterns of men and women vary? Why is there a prevalence of informal sector work

among women in the global South? What explains the continued segregation of women and men in certain occupations? These questions lead to different methods of collecting data to obtain more accurate information on gender relations and divisions of labor in the workforce and the household. Feminist research demonstrates that qualitative approaches such as intensive interviews, participant observation, and personal narratives can be effectively combined with quantitative methods that describe and probe the measurable aspects of women's lives, analyze spatial associations, and document spatial and temporal inequalities (*Professional Geographer*, 1995).

This chapter addresses these themes in five sections. The next section focuses on the emergence of feminist perspectives in economic geography, beginning with its roots in political economy and Marxist geography. Early empirical analyses in feminist geography that examined the spatial distribution of women's work on national and global scales will also be discussed. Section three reviews works that build on these earlier feminist approaches to economic processes and addresses the complexity of gendered labor in diverse geographic and socioeconomic contexts. In particular, I will draw upon a body of work called postcolonialism, which questions dominant notions of gender and work in order to include social categories such as race and ethnicity. Gendered livelihood strategies in the global South, such as informal activities and immigrant labor, are linked to these diverse social categories.

More recent feminist theories that analyze the embodied nature of work and socially constructed identities in the workplace are highlighted in the fourth section. Increasing emphasis on cultural dimensions of human interaction in economic geography raises issues concerning the construction of masculinity and femininity in the workplace. Through case studies of firms in the service sector, the discussion illustrates how gender is embodied in the social and cultural processes that are intrinsic to work and organizational restructuring.

The conclusion summarizes the development of economic perspectives within feminism. I argue that women, people of color, and other disempowered members of society remain marginalized in the workforce because of socially constructed norms and dominant power relations. This chapter demonstrates how various theoretical and methodological approaches in feminism identify and explore the positions and institutional contexts of these power relations at various scales of economic activity. Additionally, comparative research on gender and work illustrates the experiences of workers (especially women) in diverse cultural and political economic contexts. Analyses such as these will hopefully raise awareness about the need to emancipate workers and encourage economic institutions that are sensitive to gender as well as other social differences.

The Emergence of Feminism in Economic Geography

Some of the first topics of study by feminists in the discipline of geography included analyses of women's economic activity. These studies initially criticized conventional approaches for neglecting women's roles and divisions of labor in their analyses of economic processes. Research in this area was mostly descriptive and aimed to make women's work visible. The seemingly unexamined category of woman was soon replaced by the concept of gender which focused on the social construction of male

and female roles and behavior in society. This shift provided a more complex analysis and comparison of men's and women's economic activities. In turn, socialist feminism highlighted the role of gender and class in economic processes (Mackenzie, 1989). Geography was central to this early feminist work because it incorporated multiple scales of analysis, and recognized the importance of place-based social relations.

Counting women and work

In the mid-1970s, geography underwent a significant transition as the quantitative methods and spatial science traditions were criticized for their normative assumptions of a single universal truth and what has been cited as totalizing tendencies or "grand narratives" of rational science (Barnes, this volume). Feminists were among these critics and challenged the discipline for its male bias in constructing knowledge and theory. These constructions extended dualisms constructed around masculinity and femininity to the work sphere, where men were associated with paid labor in the public workplace and women with unpaid labor in the private household. The overall impact of this approach in the discipline of geography was to marginalize gender and neglect women's experiences in geographic inquiry (Mazey and Lee, 1983; Monk and Hanson, 1982).

During the 1970s, gender and work were important themes in feminist geography for reasons that coincided with societal concerns about women's inequality in the home, at work, and in society as a whole (Bowlby et al., 1989; Monk and Hanson, 1982). Much of this concern stemmed from the feminist movement which claimed women were materially disadvantaged and marginalized because of their position in lower status jobs and their relative absence from positions of power. Efforts to empower women during this period included pay equity, expanded childcare, and equal opportunities in the workforce (Mackenzie, 1989). Empiricist approaches that focused on case studies and empirical analyses dominated the research during this period.

Not surprisingly, early geographic literature on gender and work also emphasized the spatial dimensions of gender divisions of labor and occupational segregation. This research attempted to explain how individuals reproduce social phenomena in space through everyday activities. According to this approach, the "paths" taken by individuals in their daily lives are subject to certain constraints that include physical limits to movements, the need to gather in schools, workplaces or the like, and social rules that control where people can or cannot go (Rose, 1993). Accordingly, journey-to-work studies document how gender roles influenced unequal access to transportation and constraints stemming from domestic responsibilities (Hanson and Hanson, 1981). Results from these studies indicated that women commute shorter distances to work, travel less frequently, and use different means of transport than men (Hanson and Johnston, 1985), which, in turn, contributes to, and stems from, unequal material conditions of men and women. Hanson and Pratt (1995), for example, argue that women's tendency to travel shorter distances to work is linked to their lower wages.

Early research in feminist geography, however, tended to homogenize women and overlook differences in their economic activity and commuting patterns. Recent

studies include social categories other than gender, such as race, ethnicity, and class, to reveal the diversity of social and economic factors that impact the journey to work. For example, extensive research in the Buffalo and New York metropolitan areas demonstrates that the commuting experiences of African American and Latina women are often different from those of white women (Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995; Preston et al., 1993). The claim that women work closer to home than men because of their dual roles as mother and waged worker does not hold for Black and Hispanic women. These women commute as far as Black and Hispanic men, and spend more time commuting than white males and females (McLafferty and Preston, 1991).

Accompanying this focus on the spatial dimensions of individuals' daily activities was a growing literature within feminist geography on suburbanization, and household social relations and divisions of labor. Suburbanization contributed to the social construction of domesticity and its physical as well as psychological separation from paid labor. Miller (1982), for example, examined how suburban women's roles were constructed through advertising and the media in the early twentieth century. Through this and the spatial constraints that structured women's lives, he draws conclusions about the impact of patriarchy on women's domestic roles. Other studies note how the economic sphere of the workplace was socially and spatially separated from the household and, by extension, the private realm of women (Mackenzie and Rose, 1983; Dyck, 1989). This separation of women into the private sphere and care-taking activities is related to the dominant perception of women's roles, and therefore their mobility.

The social relations and spatial dynamics of the domestic sphere and workplace are closely associated with occupational segregation of the labor market. Numerous studies have focused on the way in which labor supply and demand processes play out differently in various locations, but reveal the connections between the supposedly separate spheres of private domesticity and public labor (Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Massey, 1984; Rose, 1993). Figure 5.1 depicts the number of women employed in the top ten occupations of women in the USA. It illustrates how women's segregation in the workforce is related to the perception of women's roles in our society. In the USA, jobs associated with care-taking, nurturing, and other so-called feminine traits are among the most common forms of female employment. Secretaries are the most numerous with nearly 3 million women in 1997, followed by cashiers with 2.3 million women (US Dept. of Labor, 1998). Additionally, most of these occupations are highly segregated: females represent over two-thirds of the workforce in nearly all of the occupations listed. Secretaries as an occupation have the highest proportion of females at 98 percent (US Dept. of Labor, 1998).

Finally, the wages of people in these occupations indicate the relatively low value placed on this type of work. Earnings range from $705 per week among registered nurses to $248 among cashiers. In 1997, the average weekly earning of all full-time women workers was $431 compared to $579 for men. These data demonstrate that occupational segregation is linked to socially embedded divisions of labor and contributes to economic inequalities between men and women. As outlined above, feminist geographers approach this phenomenon from a geographical perspective by drawing connections between relations within the home and the workplace in both social and spatial terms (Hanson and Pratt, 1995).

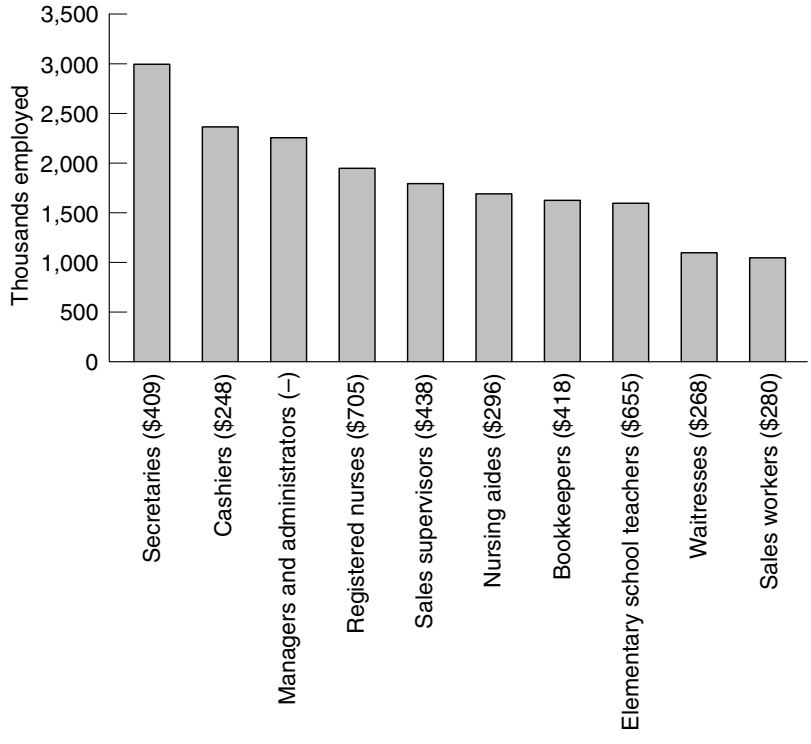

Figure 5.1 The top ten occupations of employed women in the USA, 1997
Figures in parentheses are women's median weekly earnings for that occupation.
Source: US Department of Labor (1998)

In sum, the early phase of feminist economic geography offered empirical analyses of spatial patterns in women's (and men's) everyday experiences, especially work-related activities such as travel to work, employment patterns, and the relation between the domestic sphere and the workplace. The subsequent phase extended the analysis of gender inequality to include broader historical and material structures in society.

Geographies of socialist feminism

Research on gender, women, and work during the emergence of feminist geography was also influenced by scholarship in socialist feminism and Marxism. Marxist geographers analyzed the economy from an historical materialist approach (Swyngedouw, this volume) which emphasized the contradictions of capitalist accumulation (Peet and Thrift, 1989). Some of the earliest pieces on women and geography appeared during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and were couched solidly within this political economy framework (Hayford, 1974; Mackenzie and Rose, 1983; Tivers, 1978). This critical approach to conventional geography resonated with feminists because they were concerned with addressing issues of social justice and individual equality.

Additionally, many socialist feminists felt that answers to questions about women's lower-than-average incomes, unequal travel patterns, and segregation in lower status jobs were not completely addressed by the kind of empirical analyses discussed above. Instead, they tended to emphasize broader structures in society such as patriarchy, where gender relations are characterized by the domination of men over women, and capitalism, to explain social and economic inequality (Mackenzie, 1989; Bowlby et al., 1989). Socialist feminists, however, were skeptical of the somewhat rigid categories and universal laws that were central to orthodox Marxism, because they tended to ignore gender divisions of labor and regard class as the dominant social relationship under capitalism.

An important aspect of socialist feminism was its analysis of the spatial and social dimensions of the domestic sphere, and its link to capitalist production. Socialist feminists drew from Marxist geography in their argument that the domestic work carried out by women was essential for the maintenance and reproduction of the labor force and hence for capitalism more generally (Mackenzie and Rose, 1983; Walby and Bagguley, 1989). They also maintained that capitalist patriarchy created a gender division of labor in which men primarily engaged in waged, productive labor, and women in unwaged, reproductive labor. Massey (1997, p. 113) critically examined these dualistic approaches to work and home in her discussion of the way in which men and women negotiate the boundary between productive and reproductive labor:

> Dualistic thinking leads to the closing-off of options, and to the structuring of the world in terms of either/or... Moreover, even when at first sight they may seem to have little to do with gender, a wide range of such dualisms are in fact thoroughly imbued with gender connotations, one side being socially characterized as masculine, the other as feminine, and the former being accordingly socially valorized.

Thus, in this complex and historically dynamic capitalist system, women's reproductive labor was rendered invisible, but was fundamentally connected to productive labor by providing support for capital such as clothing, feeding, and ensuring the reproduction of labor.

During the 1980s, feminist perspectives in economic geography began to explore the intersection of uneven development and the gendering of work. It was argued that unequal social relations are largely derived from capitalism, and are manifest through uneven regional development (Lewis, 1983; Massey, 1984; McDowell and Massey, 1984). For example, capital was invested in particular types of industry in regions where female labor was available and non-unionized. Feminist analyses of social and spatial inequality, however, were not limited to the scale of region, but also incorporated multiple scales such as the household, local, and international levels.

Overall, socialist feminism introduced new theoretical and methodological analyses to economic geography while borrowing from some of the social and economic categories of Marxism. It challenged the binary division of spaces and roles in the domestic sphere and workplace, particularly as they related to livelihood strategies and the material conditions of everyday life. While the voices in this literature were not always in unison, they nonetheless advanced the discipline in its appreciation of

the critical role of gender relations in understanding social, economic, and spatial inequality.

Economic restructuring and shifting employment patterns

Feminist analyses of economic processes contributed significantly to our understanding of the economic restructuring that developed during the late 1970s. These analyses focused on the dramatic shift in employment from manufacturing to the service sector. For example, Hanson and Pratt's widely cited study of Worcester, MA (1995) examines the importance of gender and economic restructuring in an industrialized area that has experienced a shift from relatively high-paid, unionized, and male-dominated jobs to lower paying, less secure, and female-dominated jobs. Studies such as this demonstrate that economic restructuring formed the basis for analyses in feminist geography that sought to explain social and spatial divisions of labor under capitalism.

One of the implications of this shift was the steady increase in many Western countries of economically active women, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the female population. In the United States, the number of working women doubled between 1970 and 1997, from 30 million to 60 million (US Department of Labor, 1998). In addition, during the post-WWII period, labor force participation – the percentage of working age persons actually employed or looking for work – rose significantly for women, while men's rates slowly declined (table 5.1). In 1950, 29.0 percent of all women in the USA were economically active compared to 78.9 percent of men. By 1995, female participation rates had more than doubled while male participation rates had declined nearly 4 percent. These figures have significant implications for gender roles and identity in our society as women have become more active in the paid labor force.

Aggregate analyses of employment, however, often neglect the diversity that appears in the workforce when consideration is given to race and ethnicity, as well as gender. Research on the impacts of economic restructuring on labor force participation has increasingly addressed differences among ethnic and racial groups. Table 5.1 compares the participation rates of men and women in European American, African American, and Hispanic populations in the USA during the post-war period.

Table 5.1 Labor force participation rates by gender and race, 1950–1995

	Total (%)		European American		African American		Hispanic	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1950	78.9	29.0	85.6	33.3	–	–	–	–
1960	82.4	37.1	83.4	36.5	–	–	–	–
1970	79.2	42.8	80.0	42.6	73.6	48.7	–	–
1980	–	–	–	–	–	–	81.4	47.4
1985	76.3	54.5	77.0	54.1	70.8	56.5	80.3	49.3
1990	76.1	57.5	77.1	57.4	71.0	58.3	81.4	53.1
1995	75.0	58.8	75.1	59.0	69.0	59.5	79.1	52.6

Source: Jacobs (1997)

Although accurate employment data disaggregated by race was not available until relatively recently, studies indicate that in the early part of the century, African American women were more than five times more likely to be economically active than white women and are more likely to be employed than women of any other racial group (US Dept. of Labor, 1998). Women of European descent, however, have the fastest growth rates and are expected to have a higher participation rate than Black women at the turn of the century. Overall, women's economic activity rates have risen since 1950 except for a minor decline among Hispanic women from 1990 to 1995. (See Amott and Mathaei, 1991, for in-depth analyses of work patterns of women from diverse racial-ethnic groups.) In contrast, male participation rates of European Americans and Hispanics are higher than those of African Americans, but have slowly declined since the 1960s. These statistics reveal the important intersection of gender and race in empirical analyses of how work has changed over time. Feminist theory's engagement with gender, race, and ethnicity underlines the significance of social differentiation in economic practices.

Looking back on the initial phase of feminist geography, analyses of women's work and gender relations dominated much of the research within this subfield. These analyses took place in the context of widespread industrial restructuring, uneven regional development, and the rapid increase of women in the labor force. While some research was based on empiricist approaches, political economy, and particularly socialist feminism, was the dominant framework for much of this work (Christopherson, 1989; Mackenzie, 1989). During this period, feminist geography examined increasing economic activity rates among women and the changing gender composition of the labor force in the context of economic restructuring (Massey, 1984; McDowell, 1991). The following section shifts focus from analyses of gender and work in the context of developed regions to developing regions where Third-World feminism has focused on diversity among women and critical theorization of global capitalist domination.

Globalization of Gender and Work: Incorporating Voices from the South

This section examines analyses of gender and work in diverse geographical and socioeconomic contexts. Globalization and the increasing incorporation of women into the economies of developing regions highlight the fluid boundaries and overlapping spheres of work and home, formal and informal work. The theoretically and empirically rich literature that has developed in feminist geography since the late 1970s offers critical perspectives on the contested role of gender as it is mediated by race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, history, and geographical context. This discussion draws primarily on recent work in postcolonial feminism that addresses social diversity and promotes strategies of resistance and struggle to overcome forces of oppression.

Regional and global approaches to women and gender in the South[1]

During the 1970s and early 1980s, analyses of Third World women in feminist geography mirrored the descriptive and empiricist trends discussed above. These

analyses focused on the material aspects of women's lives in developing countries, and attempted to map social and economic indicators that revealed the overall status of women in the global South (Brydon and Chant, 1989; Momsen and Townsend, 1987). An important contribution to these geographical analyses of women's status is Joni Seager's *The State of Women in the World Atlas* (1997), mapping a variety of social and economic conditions such as women in the labor force, literacy rates, birth and death rates, and poverty. This innovative atlas compares international data on the status of women and unmasks the commonalities and differences that exist among women in diverse cultures.

This graphic representation of women's status remains incomplete, however, because their activities are largely invisible and undervalued in many national statistics. Moreover, descriptive analyses of women's status can reinforce somewhat negative stereotypes of women in the South as impoverished and uneducated, and with high rates of fertility. According to Mohanty (1991), the depiction of women in developing countries as a homogenous population, measured against a Western norm, is misleading and Eurocentric.

In general, gender studies have made important contributions to globalization and have changed the way feminist geographers think about gender and work. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, analyses of the new international division of labor examined how the reorganization of production contributed to global shifts in production from First to Third World locations (Fernandez-Kelly, 1983). This period witnessed significant increases in women's employment in the textile, electronic, garment, and other labor-intensive industries in these regions. Research demonstrated how women have been incorporated into multinational factory work largely because they were low paid, unskilled, and non-unionized (Beneria and Feldman, 1992; Fernandez-Kelly, 1983, 1990; Tinker, 1990). Several projects exposed the highly exploitative nature of this phenomenon. According to Elson and Pearson (1989), the contradictions between the globalization of capital and community values are highlighted in the poor working conditions of women in multinational companies. They argue that women form a significant proportion of those employed in multinational corporations due to their perceived subordination and ability to perform highly repetitive, menial labor. Fernandez-Kelly (1983) also provides an insightful analysis of the oppressive conditions experienced by women in the Mexican *maquiladora* sector who are living in substandard conditions with low-paying jobs.

Finally, the link between women's income-generating strategies and state policies has been a focus of Third World research in feminist geography. Many studies have shown that state industrialization policies and economic reform are closely connected to the globalization of capital. For example, Cravey's (1997) analysis of household dynamics in the context of Mexican industrial transition demonstrates that the shift in industrialization strategies from import substitution to export-based production has affected household gender dynamics. Her research concludes that different production regimes and household relations result in diverse coping strategies. In addition, numerous authors cite the negative impact of structural adjustment policies on women and households in many developing countries and regions, as state spending on education, welfare, and other social services has been cut (Beneria and Feldman, 1992; Elson, 1992). This literature suggests that Western-led economic policies put severe strains on households and women in developing regions.

Overlapping spaces and places of work

Feminist analyses of globalization also examine how the overlapping spheres of production and reproduction, formal and informal sector linkages, and household and workplace highlighted above relate to international economic processes. These analyses link women's economic strategies in an era of global restructuring with the social construction of gender identity. Feminist research on corporate labor practices and the recruitment of women for their "nimble fingers" and nonmilitant characteristics reveal how social roles and norms have been constructed in ways that support certain economic strategies (Elson and Pearson, 1989). For example, Wright (1997) addresses the importance of gender identity in her compelling analysis of Mexican women working in the *maquiladoras*. The representation of the Mexican "Woman" as a docile, submissive, and tradition-bound worker stems from the dominant Western discourse of women in the context of development. This discourse is challenged by the story of Gloria, a worker who subverts this ideological representation of Woman, and resists the *maquiladora* division of labor to become a social agent of change (Wright, 1997). Her experiences as a manager in a firm involved strategies of resistance and compliance that impacted her role as an active participant in the labor process rather than a passive victim of exploitation.

The overlapping spheres of production and reproduction, and household and workplace, are especially relevant when women's labor in the domestic sphere generates income or becomes part of household economic strategies. Often this labor takes place in the household or is intertwined with domestic responsibilities such as childcare, food processing and preparation, or any of the multitude of domestic tasks for which women are primarily responsible (Hays-Mitchell, 1993; Oberhauser, 1995). According to Gibson-Graham (1996), feminist attempts to retheorize and displace "the economy" have far-reaching implications that emphasize the diversity of household forms of economy and exploitation, while opening up the possibility of theorizing class diversity in the non-household sector. Their work draws upon feminist literature that:

> . . . portrays the household as a site of production and distribution as well as consumption, in order to problematize the singular representation of "the economy" as a preeminently capitalist formation located in the non-domestic sphere and unified by "the market." . . . [W]e are specifically (re)incorporating the feminized sphere of the household into the masculinized modern economy, acknowledging the household as an economic site rather than simply as a condition of existence of "the economy" more commonly understood (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p. 207).

Feminist research thus challenges the hegemony of capitalism in analyses of the global economy and instead focuses on the heterogeneity and plurality of economic forms.

Much of the research exploring economic activities that occur outside formal workplaces focuses on informal sector labor. Feminist analyses of this form of work have attempted to explain how gender and family ideologies underpin informal labor (Beneria and Feldman, 1992; Brydon and Chant, 1989; Wilson, 1993). What is increasingly evident from this research is the crucial role of women's economic activities, both formal and informal, to households in developing

countries, especially with economic reforms being implemented to reduce government spending on basic services and infrastructure that benefit low-income households (Hays-Mitchell, 1993; Faulkner and Lawson, 1991).

The final theme in this discussion of feminism in the global South addresses strategies of resistance and struggle among women, to empower themselves in the face of tremendous hardship and marginalization. Postcolonial feminism criticizes Western feminism for its ethnocentric biases and representation of women in the South as impoverished victims of oppression. This approach forwards a more political and geographically diverse conceptualization of women who oppose sexist, racist, and imperialist structures (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997; McClintock et al., 1997). Alexander and Mohanty (1997) emphasize the importance of different strategies of resistance in their call for a "feminist democracy," in which global processes clearly require global alliances. In this model, the common context of struggle among women of color leads to alliances against specific exploitative structures and systems. These are powerful images that defy modernist and conventional stereotypes and are pervasive themes in the gender and development literature.

Specific examples of both individual and collective struggles are evident in Third World feminist research. Ong's (1987) *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline* outlines the struggles of rural Malaysian Muslim women who migrate to urban areas to work in the electronics industry. Struggles and resistance to neo-imperialist and Western structures also occur in rural, agricultural settings. Fieldwork by Carney and Watts (1991) in Senegambia revealed that intensification of agriculture during the last 50 years negatively impacted women's work and the internal structure of households. Consequently, gender-based struggles over property, labor, and conditions of work have become a critical part of agrarian change. Strategies by women in the South to resist oppression and to gain power also include informal income-generating activities that occur at the individual and household level.

Methodologies used in this research often entail the investigation of issues that are related to specific political objectives and are sensitive to uneven power relations among the subjects of research. Studies in the global South are often informed by goals and techniques that engender critical forms of engagement that directly involve the researcher. Consequently, intensive fieldwork and qualitative methods are common means of gathering information. For example, in an excellent study of female-headed households in remote Bolivian villages, Sage (1993) engages in intensive fieldwork to better understand women's involvement in multiple economic activities. Studies such as these reinforce the need to examine critically the internal structure and social relations of the domestic sphere in analyzing the gendered nature of economic strategies.

In sum, international perspectives have been integral to feminist analyses of the economy because they highlight cultural differences and geographical context. This discussion reinforces feminist thinking about redefining social and spatial categories, and exploring qualitative methodologies to research the social and spatial construction of gender and work. While the simultaneous tasks of reproductive and productive labor have been addressed in advanced industrial contexts, research on women in the South advances our understanding of the overlapping spheres of household and workplace. Finally, recent feminism has broadened the scope of understanding to recognize that women's work is a form of political action and struggle. Whether it is

in the factory, the fields, or the urban market, women engage in collective and individual struggles for more control over their own and their households' well-being.

Gender and Identity in the Social and Cultural Practice of Work

In the early 1990s, feminist analyses in economic geography shifted from approaches emphasizing economic restructuring and gender divisions of labor to more detailed and nuanced examinations of the practices and cultural attributes that take place in economic interactions (McDowell, 1997a). Increased attention to social and cultural aspects of economic activities has coincided with expansion of the service-based economy and with the "cultural turn" in economic geography that emphasizes how institutions are influenced by societal cultural attributes and values. Research on the relationship between economic behavior and culturally constructed contexts is having a significant impact on contemporary economic geography (Lee and Wills, 1997). An important contributor to this recent body of literature is Linda McDowell (1997a) who explains this approach as a rejection of the concept of economic rationality, and a recognition that economic action is embedded in the social context and specific institutions within which it takes place.

The literature that examines culturally created economic processes is interdisciplinary, borrowing from economic sociology, cultural anthropology, geography, and the sociology of organizations. Geography brings an understanding of the ways in which spatial processes influence these practices, as well as linking culturally embedded economic practices to multiple scales – from individual bodies through to the workplace, the city, the region, and the globe. Consequently, it is not just firms or individuals that are involved in these cultural practices, but a myriad of local, regional, and international players and institutions. Several differentiated levels of embeddedness can, in turn, be mapped onto a hierarchy of places, spatial scales, or levels of analysis.

Embodied gender identities and economic practices

Contemporary feminist geography also analyzes how culturally embedded economic practices, workers, and organizations are embodied in dominant notions of masculinity and femininity (Halford and Savage, 1997; Leidner, 1993; McDowell, 1997a; McDowell and Court, 1994). This research highlights how workers and occupations are mutually constituted and extend to the physical appearance and makeup of the body. In other words, one cannot separate the cultural dimensions of economic behavior from the socially inscribed attitudes and behavior of men and women. Perceptions about workers' respective roles in society affect nearly all facets of their working lives, including the way they are recruited, the occupations they fill, and the promotions they are given. The concept of "performance" is often used in this literature to analyze how gender and sexuality are acted out in the workplace. McDowell, for example, links institutional interests and power relations to micro-scale social practices in her analysis of capital culture. She argues that:

> socially sanctioned gendered identities and ways of behaving are reinforced and policed through a set of structures that keep in place dominant and subordinate social relations.

These structures or mechanisms include not only institutional force and sanctions from above but also self-surveillance (1997a, p. 31).

Thus economic behavior is influenced by dominant norms and culturally embedded social practices in society.

Conceptual arguments such as those outlined above are illustrated by several empirical studies on the socially embedded and embodied nature of economic behavior. Robin Leidner (1993) examines the importance of gender identity in what she calls routinized interactive work in the service sector. Here, employees' tasks are controlled and regulated to not only maximize efficiency, but also please clients. This routinization of work in interactive services challenges the cultural autonomy of the workers. Leidner's study, of the fast food chain McDonalds and an insurance company, addresses the somewhat contradictory position of workers who are expected to be amiable yet coercive with their customers. The gender identity of the employees in these companies is critical to how they approach the customers, their language, appearance, and attitude. For example, working at the take-out window at McDonalds is usually assigned to women because that job often requires accepting abuse calmly, whereas men are assigned to the grill because they are less afraid of getting burned (Leidner, 1993). This research illustrates the role of gender identity in workplace interactions and tasks that reflect and maintain dominant cultural norms of masculinity and femininity.

In another study, McDowell and Court (1994) examine merchant banking in London where the Big Bang of 1987 has shaped and impacted the gender and cultural characteristics of the workforce and workplace. Part of their argument is that the attitudes and behavior of workers are gendered in ways that are influenced by performance in the workplace. According to McDowell (1997a, p. 208),

> . . . gendered identities and interactions in the working environment are, within bounds, fluid and negotiable. Men, as well as women, are able to construct differential performances in the workplace, while continuing to interpret them in ways congruent with hegemonic notions of masculinity.

Her analysis reinforces the notion that these behaviors are neither essentialized nor considered "natural," but are culturally embedded in particular social and economic contexts.

Another dimension of gender identity in the culture of firms and dynamics within the workplace is reflected in geographical research on sexuality. In a series of in-depth studies, Gill Valentine (1993, 1995) notes the predominance of heterosexuality in workplaces and public places in general. Consequently, many gays and lesbians are hesitant to reveal their sexual identities in workplaces for fear of retribution or harassment (Valentine, 1993). What might be considered benign practices and topics of conversation, such as displaying personal pictures, talking about weekend activities, and participating in social gatherings with work colleagues, tend to marginalize gays and lesbians within a dominantly heterosexual workplace. Thus, culturally embedded practices are constructed according to dominant sexual norms and behaviors in society.

In sum, analyses of gender identity in the workplace contribute to, and maintain, the cultural turn in economic geography by focusing on the embedded and embodied

nature of economic processes in cultural contexts and institutions. These analyses coincide with economic restructuring and the transition in contemporary capitalism to service-based economies where the workplace environment and attitudes interact with social norms. Gender identity is an integral aspect of this cultural order of the economy, and enhances our understanding of economic restructuring in general.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how feminism contributes to, and draws from, geographical analyses of the spatial dimensions of economic behavior. The discussion outlined feminist approaches to geography that emphasize the complexity of women's economic activities and the gendered nature of work. The socio-spatial dimensions of gender and economic strategies are important aspects of feminist research, and have affected economic geography in a variety of ways. Initially, discussions of gender relations and women's roles in society emphasized the position of women in the labor force and their experiences in the workplace. In addition, feminist perspectives on economic processes have moved beyond industrialized regions and now also include livelihood strategies from the South. Finally, more recent research on gender and work examines how economic behavior is embedded in the social construction of gender identity and dominant discourses of culture and place.

In general, feminism challenges conventional economic geography for neglecting women's experiences and gender roles in the economy. This is especially relevant to empiricist approaches to gender and work, in which careful attention to gender differences and comparison of work experiences yields important insights about ways in which relations of production and divisions of labor are gendered. In addition, feminism emphasizes the need to incorporate a variety of social constructs such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class in economic geographical processes. Postcolonialism contributes to our understanding of the diverse experiences of women by emphasizing the historical relations of power in Third-World contexts. This approach also provides a critical view of Western hegemonic discourses pertaining to work, capitalism, and the economy in general.

Finally, the chapter discussed important aspects of feminist methodology for formulating relevant questions and techniques in analyzing often discounted, undervalued, or informal aspects of economic activity. Analyses of household gender relations, heterosexual norms in the workplace, and collective economic strategies among women in the South require critical and innovative approaches that expose the social construction of gender and work. As McDowell (1997b, p. 119) states, "a new set of questions" is needed to "conceptualize both organizations and employees as actors with sets of cultural attributes which are constituted in, affected by and affect the huge range of (economic) interactions." This new conceptualization of the economic landscape requires a reconsideration of methodology used in conventional economic research. In sum, the tasks laid out by feminist economic geography are numerous and far-reaching. Although feminist geography did not emerge as a viable body of literature until the 1970s, it has contributed significantly to our understanding of the geography of economic processes.

Endnote

1. Many scholars and activists question the terminology used in analyses of women, gender, and feminism in developing regions. The terms "Third World" and "lesser developed" imply a hierarchy that is embedded in structures of Western thought and have certainly been adopted in conventional geography. In Mohanty's (1991) discussion about language and power, she uses women of color and Third World women interchangeably as a political constituency versus a geographical or biological common group. In this chapter I use several terms, but favor the South as a geographical reference to developing regions.

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