



# Global Feminization Through Flexible Labor: A Theme Revisited

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“Women taught me how to do the unskilled work.”<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s the global economy has been in an era of market regulation and growing labor market flexibility, in which new technologies, new labor control systems and reformed forms of work organization have transformed patterns of labor force participation throughout the world. In the process, the turn of the century will mark the end of the century of the laboring man in a literal and real sense, in that women will account for almost as many of the “jobs” as men.

This paper is a “revisit” to ideas and data presented in a paper written in 1988.<sup>2</sup> The main hypothesis of that paper was that the changing character of labor markets around the world had been leading to a rise in female labor force participation and a relative if not absolute fall in men’s employment, as well as a “feminization” of many jobs traditionally held by men.

The term “feminization” was intentionally ambiguous. Perhaps a better term could have been used. It was intended, however to capture the double meaning and the sense of irony that, after generations of efforts to integrate women into regular wage labor as equals, the convergence that was the essence of the original hypothesis has been toward the type of employment and labor force participation patterns associated with women. The era of flexibility is also an era of more generalized insecurity and precariousness, in which many more men as well as women have been pushed into precarious forms of labor.

Feminization arises because available employment and labor options tend increasingly to characterize activities associated, rightly or wrongly, with women and because the pattern of employment tends to result in an increasing proportion of women occupying the jobs. The term could be decomposed into its constituents. A type of job could be feminized, or men could find themselves in feminized positions. More women could find themselves in jobs traditionally taken by men, or certain jobs could be changed to have characteristics associated with women’s historical pattern of labor force participation. The characteristics include the type of contract, the form of remuneration, the extent and forms of security provided, and the access to skill.

A further difficulty arises from the connotations. Most observers think that work patterns that are intermittent, casual and partial are bad, while those that are stable, continuous and full are good. If the surrounding conditions are appropriate, however there is nothing intrinsically bad about a pattern of work involving multiple statuses, multiple activities and varying intensity of involvement in different forms of work.

Gender outcomes in labor markets do not reflect natural or objective differences between men and women, but rather reflect the outcome of discrimination and disadvantage, and the behavioural reactions by workers and employers. This means that even if the thesis of feminization were supported empirically, a reversal of trend could still be possible. That stated, the following does no more than bring the original hypothesis up to date with a decade more of data used in the original paper, bearing in mind all the difficulties of making crossnational comparisons.

To reiterate, the contextual developments that have shaped the growing feminization of the labor market include:

(a) International trade in goods and services has grown enormously as a share of national incomes, as has the share of foreign or multinational investment in total investment in most countries.

(b) Trade and investment have been directed increasingly to economies in which labor costs have been relatively low (or where they have been expected to be relatively low), putting a premium on the level of wages, nonwage labor costs and labor productivity.

(c) In the postwar era up to the 1970s, trade between countries was predominantly in complementary goods (e.g., primary for nonprimary) or between countries with similar labor rights, and therefore roughly equivalent labor costs (balanced by differences between wages and productivity). From the 1970s onward, partly as a consequence of actual and incipient industrialization of some parts of the developing world, labor rights in industrialized countries became increasingly perceived as *costs* of production to be avoided in the interest of enhancing or maintaining "national competitiveness."

(d) In the past few years, there has been a "technological revolution," based on micro-electronics, which *inter alia* has permitted a wider range of technological-managerial *options* in working arrangements, which again means that cost considerations of alternatives have become more significant determinants of allocations and divisions of labor. This has affected patterns of employment in industrialized and industrializing economies, and the international division of labor, accentuating tendencies to allocate to where labor costs are lowest (which depends on wages, nonwage labor costs, productivity and supporting infrastructure).<sup>3</sup> There is also the possibility that we have been in a phase of what some analysts have described as "technological stalemate," in which process (cost-cutting) innovations predominate over product innovations.

(e) There has been a crystallization of a global economic strategy, under the banner of "structural adjustment," "shock therapy" and other supply-side economic policies. This strategy has been associated with radical changes in labor market relations, involving erosion of protective and pro-collective labor regulations, decentralization of wage determination, erosion of employment security and a trend to market regulation rather than statutory regulation of the labor market.

(f) There has been an erosion in the legitimacy of the welfare systems of industrialized countries. In the era following WWII, for much of

the world universal social protection within a "redistributive welfare state" was regarded as a long-term development goal and as the basis of well-functioning labor markets. The erosion of that model has been due to many factors, including the rising costs of achieving social protection in the context of high unemployment, the rejection of Keynesianism and its replacement by faith in supply-side economics, by which public spending is perceived (or presented) as "crowding out" private, productive investment, and a loss of faith among welfare state defenders in its ability to be redistributive. There has been growing privatization of social protection and an individualization of social security, whereby more workers have to depend on their own contributions and entitlements.

These contextual developments have both shaped the gender division of labor and have been influenced by the labor market developments themselves. In particular, they have increased the emphasis placed on labor costs. That has led to greater use of alternative forms of employment to the conventional one of regular, full-time wage labor, which has weakened the dualistic segmentation of employment in which men have been relatively protected "insiders".

## 2. GENDER IMPLICATIONS OF LABOR MARKET FLEXIBILITY

Among the labor market implications of the supply-side, structural adjustment agenda pursued around the world in recent years, several are relevant to our general hypothesis.

*First*, in industrialized countries in particular, the increasing selectivity or "targeting" of state benefits has meant fewer people having entitlements. This has boosted "additional worker" effects — pushing more women into the labor market in recessions and inducing more women to remain in the labor market because of the growth of *income insecurity*. The trend to means tests and tighter conditionality has also encouraged the growth of the "black economy" and precarious forms of work, since those without entitlements have been obliged to do whatever income-earning work they can. This phenomenon has been strong in industrialized economies, although it has affected many industrializing countries as well.

*Second*, the erosion of neocorporatist labor relations and the promotion of market regula-

tion have eroded the strength of labor market “insiders,” notably unionized (male) workers in stable full-time jobs.<sup>4</sup> That has weakened the defence of *employment security* regulations and customary practices preserving *job security*. Governments in all types of economy have made it easier to dismiss workers and to “downsize.” In doing so they have also made it easier for firms to alter job boundaries, reducing the rights of existing workers and encouraging resort to *external* labor markets, enabling employers to substitute lower-cost labor for “core” workers.

*Third*, the *income security* of the employed has been reduced in many countries, in part by the removal or weakening of *minimum wage* legislation, or by the non-enforcement of existing laws. Among the consequences has been a growth of very low-wage employment, including jobs paying “individual” rather than “family” wages. This has encouraged a substitution of women for men and induced labor force entry by women.

*Fourth*, in low-income countries in particular, the emphasis put on trade liberalization and export-led industrialization has had implications for women’s economic activity. The *direct* effect has been documented by several analyses.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, all countries that have successfully industrialized have done so only by mobilizing large numbers of (low-paid) women workers. *Indirectly*, the industrialization strategy has meant that subsidies for domestic “non-tradables” have been cut, often including staple food items typically produced by women, and structural adjustment programmes have involved deflationary stabilization plans that, in reducing domestic consumption so as to shift resources to export industries, have also had adverse effects on the living standards of women producing basic consumer goods. But, as noted earlier, through an increasing emphasis on cost-cutting competitiveness, globalization has also meant a search for ways of lowering labor costs, meaning that firms have put a greater premium on workers prepared or forced to take low-wage jobs. In industrialized and industrializing countries, firms have turned to forms of labor offering the prospect of minimizing fixed non-wage costs. As a result, they have turned increasingly to casual labor, contract labor, outsourcing, home-working and other forms of subcontracting.

As part of this flexibilization, there has been an “informalization” of employment across the

world. Although the dichotomy of “formal” and “informal” *sectors* has always been misleading, a growing proportion of jobs possess what may be called informal characteristics, i.e., without regular wages, benefits, employment protection, and so on. Such forms of employment have been compatible with characteristics *presumed* to be associated with women workers — irregular labor force participation, willingness to work for low wages, static jobs requiring no accumulation of technical skills and status, etc. The informalization could thus be expected to be a major factor stimulating the growth of female employment across the world.

*Fifth*, in this process enterprises around the world have been introducing production techniques that have been changing skill and job structures in particular ways. Whether there has been “deskilling” or “upgrading” overall, two trends seem widespread. First, there has been a decline in the proportion of jobs requiring “craft” skills learned through apprenticeship or prolonged on-the-job learning. Such crafts have traditionally been *mainly* the domain of men, so that their decline and the changing character of “skill” are likely to have influenced the gender division of labor. Second, there has been a trend to skill “polarization,” with a minority of workers required to possess specialist skills and a majority required to possess minor training, typically imparted through “modules of employable skill,” in which docility, application, rote learning and related “capacities” figure prominently.

This polarization places greater reliance on external rather than internal labor markets, since fewer workers are in “progressive” jobs while more are in “static” jobs involving little upward mobility or returns to on-the-job continuity. This has weakened one reason for discrimination against women, that (whether true or not) women have a higher labor turnover. If there were less benefit to enterprises from workers’ on-the-job experience, that reason for discrimination would be removed. Indeed, for many monotonous jobs *high* labor turnover may have a positive value for employers, since maximum efficiency may be reached after only a few months, thereafter plateauing or declining.<sup>6</sup>

This diminishing return to on-the-job continuity has been one reason for resorting to casual or temporary labor, or for job-rotating, and has been a determinant of the tendency to collapse job classifications into more broadly

based job clusters, such that workers can be shifted from one set of tasks to another from time to time. This has been a trend in many labor markets, and has represented a growth of *job insecurity* that has accompanied the growth of income and employment insecurity marking the shift to more flexible labor markets.

So, the primary hypothesis is that the growing labor market flexibility and the diverse forms of insecurity have encouraged greater female labor force participation and employment. The evidence presented in the earlier paper seemed to support this hypothesis. The question is whether the trends continued in the succeeding decade.

### 3. GLOBAL FEMINIZATION?

Let us start by considering the changing levels of female participation in officially recognized labor force activities. There has been a long debate on the gender bias in official statistics and concepts of labor force participation. The recorded rates of participation have been seriously affected by conceptual and statistical practices that have made much of women's work "invisible" and undervalued. Besides these issues (which should always be borne in mind), female labor force participation is determined by a mix of economic, demographic, cultural and labor market factors.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1. *Trends in adult male and female activity rates during 1975-95*<sup>a</sup>

	Women rose	Women fell	Women no change
Men rose			
Developing	Chile, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Korea Rep., Thailand 20.0% <sup>b</sup>	Cameroon (-), Ecuador (0) 5.7%	
Developed	Switzerland 5.0%		
Men fell			
Developing	Argentina (+), Bolivia (-), Costa Rica (-), Peru (+), Puerto Rico (-), Netherlands Antilles (-), Trinidad and Tobago (-), Venezuela (+), Uruguay (+), Algeria (-), Egypt (+), Mauritius (+), Bahrain (+), Israel (-), Kuwait (+), Pakistan (-), Singapore (+), Sri Lanka (+) 51.4%	Barbados, Haiti, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe 11.4%	Indonesia 2.9%
Developed	Denmark (-), Germany (+), Iceland (+), Italy (-), Netherlands (0), Portugal (+), Spain (-), Sweden (0), United States (0), Canada (+), New Zealand (+), Japan (+), South Africa (0) 65.0%	Austria, Finland, France 15.0%	Australia, Greece, Norway 15.0%
Men no change			
Developing	Honduras 2.9%		Philippines, Syrian Arab Rep. 5.7%
Developed			

<sup>a</sup> Age coverage is 15-64 except as follows: 15-69: Cameroon (1985), Syrian Arab Republic (1984); 15-59: Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Seychelles (1985), Sri Lanka (1981), Thailand, Zambia; 16-59: Puerto Rico, Norway, Spain, Sweden; 18-64: Israel (1989); 20-59: Algeria; 20-64: Finland (1980), Italy, Jamaica, South Africa. Symbols in parentheses indicate net direction of change, male and female combined: (+) Net increase; (-) Net decrease; (0) Zero net change.

<sup>b</sup> Percentage of countries in the category.

Source: ILO (various years).

It might be useful to reiterate a few stylized interpretations:

(a) As initially shown by Ester Boserup, women's participation in predominantly rural economies has been linked to the *type* of agriculture, and as a result urbanization and industrialization have not always been associated with a rise or a fall in the rate of participation.<sup>8</sup>

(b) Marriage, child-bearing and child-raising have been barriers to labor force entry and to retention of employment, and these "barriers" have been linked to the availability of wage employment, the costs for women of labor force entry, the type of employment and type of social transfers available.

(c) Cultural determinants of participation have been widely cited, notably religion and patriarchal ideology, and these too have been stronger in economies in which work away from the home has predominated. As with the fertility determinant, most analysts would now be more skeptical than used to be the case of the strength of cultural barriers to women's economic activity, since modifications in working patterns seem remarkably rapid in the face of alterations in incentives, economic needs and opportunities.

(d) With industrialization based on textiles, garments, electronics and other "light" industry, female participation and employment has tended to rise very sharply.

(e) Traditionally, with growing or high unemployment, discriminatory barriers and discouragement have probably had a greater negative effect on women's labor force participation, and this has tended to dominate the "additional worker" effect of recessions.

According to most analyses, in recent years the negative determinants have been weakened and the positive factors have been strengthened. Among the changes have been rising divorce rates, declining fertility rates and the passage in many countries of anti-discrimination legislation. The main factor, however has been the changing nature of the labor market. The concept of regular, full-time wage labor as the growing type of employment has been giving way to a more diverse pattern, characterized by "informalization" of employment, through more outworking, contract labor, casual labor, part-time labor, homework and other forms of labor unprotected by labor regulations. Whereas traditionally informal economic activities were mainly the means of survival by the rural and urban poor, in recent years in both industrialized and industrializing countries there has been a trend in which even larger-scale enterprises have been informalizing their labor process.

In that context, having done so for the early 1970s and 1980s for the first article, we have

Table 2. Trends in adult activity rates, during 1975-95, by percentage of countries with each type of change, total and by gender<sup>a</sup>

Gender	Type of change	Developing countries	Developed countries
Women	Increased	74	70
	Decreased	17	15
	No change	9	15
	Total	100	100
Men	Increased	26	5
	Decreased	66	95
	No change	9	0
	Total	100	100
Total	Increased	52	35
	Decreased	40	45
	Compensated <sup>b</sup>	3	20
	No change	6	0
	Total	100	100

<sup>a</sup> For national definitions of activity rates and labor force participation, refer to the ILO *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*. For a critique of this concept in developing countries, see Standing (1981). Figures have been rounded.

<sup>b</sup> Activity rates of men and women changed in the opposite directions, involving a fall in male and a rise in female activity rates, so that they approximately offset each other.

assembled national-level official data for as many countries as possible having information from the early 1980s and from the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Often the concepts used and the measurement vary, and one should be wary about making detailed comparisons. At best, one can paint an impressionistic picture. Fortunately, the trends do seem strong enough for us to have reasonable confidence in their validity.

For the past 30 years or so, the trend across the world has been for female labor force participation to rise, while the male participation rate has been falling.<sup>10</sup> Tables 1 and 2 show that in 51% of so-called developing countries with available data female labor force participation rose while the male participation rate fell, and in no less than 74% of those countries the female rate rose, while in 66% of countries the male rate fell. In industrialized countries the divergence was even greater, with male participation falling in 95% of all cases. Within countries, differences between male and female labor force participation rates have shrunk considerably. But at least between industrialized countries, there has been no convergence between activity rates for women. Within the European Union, for example, the substantial differences between countries have been virtually unchanged over recent years.<sup>11</sup> In countries of Central and Eastern Europe, despite the upheavals and economic decline, the levels of female participation have remained high, although they have dropped as if converging to the (rising) levels of Western Europe. Most significantly, in much of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union male labor force participation rates have dropped to a greater extent so that the female share of the labor force has risen.

A trend brought out by Tables 1 and 2 is that in a majority of countries in which male participation fell, *total* labor force participation rose, suggesting a strong change in the gender division of labor and suggesting that female labor force entry was more than substituting for men.<sup>12</sup> With many more women continuously in the labor force or finding it easier to move in and out of it, or combining labor force and other work, more women are remaining in the labor force until a later age. Another interesting point is that the net increase in overall participation seemed to be greater than over the previous decade *even though the drop in male participation was much stronger in the later period*.<sup>13</sup>

Among other points emanating from Tables 1 and 2 is that, as observed in the earlier

data summarized in the 1989 article, in those countries that have pursued an export-led industrialization strategy as part of a structural adjustment program, the female labor force participation has been high and has risen. This leads to a second series of considerations.

Table 3 shows that in all three regions of developing countries there has been a tendency for the female share of non-agricultural employment to rise, even though women still comprise a minority of such employment. Table 4 gives the patchy time-series data that exist on the female shares of manufacturing wage employment in industrializing countries. Although there are relatively few countries with such data, they do suggest that the trend has been upward, even though the slight slippage in the Republic of Korea and Hong Kong may have something to do with the changing character of industrial growth in such countries.

In Western Europe and in other industrialized countries the female share of non-agricultural employment has risen everywhere (except in Denmark, where the level has long been high). In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, despite claims to the contrary, women's share of industrial employment has remained very high and at least in the largest two (the Russian Federation and Ukraine), as well as in Slovakia and Slovenia, women's *relative* employment position actually improved after 1990, largely because the sectors and jobs held by men shrunk even more than other sectors.<sup>14</sup>

Table 5 shows a rather more mixed picture of trends in women's share of production workers in industry, although definitional differences become even greater with data on what is a smaller category of workers, making such comparisons hazardous, as exemplified by the case of Botswana. There is also doubt about whether all countries include unpaid and own-account workers in this category. With these caveats, the main finding is that the female share of such jobs remains low. It seems that in low-income countries barriers to *formal* forms of wage labor have remained strong, even though it is *possible* that women have not been seeking such jobs. In rapidly industrializing countries their share has been higher, as in Thailand and Malaysia.

Table 5 is consistent with the hypothesis that it is the spread of more flexible and informal employment that accounts for much of the upward trend in the female share of the labor force. One possible reason for the implied substitution of women for men is the lower

Table 3. *Percentage share of women in non-agricultural employment*<sup>a</sup>

Country	<sup>b</sup>	1975	1980	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
<b>Africa</b>															
Botswana	(3)	19	24	18	17	30	31	29	31	31	33	34	36	n.	n.
Egypt	(1)	10	11	17	16	16	n.	n.	n.	18	19	19	17	n.	n.
Gambia	(3)	10	12	15	15	15	15	18	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Kenya	(3)	n.	17	19	19	20	21	21	21	21	21	22	n.	n.	n.
Malawi	(3)	7	9	12	14	16	14	n.	10	10	11	11	n.	n.	n.
Mauritius	(3)	20	26	28	31	35	36	36	37	37	37	38	38	37	37
Niger	(2)	4	4	14	8	7	7	8	8	9	11	9	n.	n.	n.
Swaziland	(3)	22	26	28	29	31	31	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Tanzania	(3)	12	17	15	15	17	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Zimbabwe	(3)	13	13	14	15	16	15	16	15	15	15	16	14	16	17
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>															
Barbados	(1)	42	43	43	43	44	45	45	46	45	46	45	48	47	47
Bermuda	(3)	n.	43	46	46	46	47	47	48	48	49	49	50	50	50
Brazil	(1)	33	35	37	38	38	39	39	39	39	40	n.	n.	n.	n.
Colombia	(1)	37	39	n.	n.	38	39	40	40	40	40	41	42	n.	n.
Costa Rica	(1)	n.	30	33	35	34	34	35	36	36	36	37	37	36	36
Cuba	(3)	n.	36	39	40	41	41	42	42	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Chile	(1)	n.	34	36	34	36	36	35	35	35	36	35	36	36	37
Haiti	(4)	66	71	59	n.	n.	n.	n.	56	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Jamaica	(1)	46	48	46	48	48	48	n.	49	48	49	49	50	n.	n.
Mexico	(1)	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	37	n.	37	n.
Netherlands Antilles	(4)	35	n.	37	37	37	37	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Panama	(1)	38	39	39	42	40	40	40	44	46	n.	45	39	n.	n.
Paraguay	(4)	39	35	42	44	44	46	46	44	45	42	41	44	43	43
Peru	(1)	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	40	n.	n.	n.	39	38	38	39
Puerto Rico	(1)	35	38	39	39	39	40	40	41	41	40	40	41	42	42
Trinidad and Tobago	(1)	28	31	32	33	34	34	34	35	35	34	36	38	39	n.
Venezuela	(1)	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	34	35	36	36	35	n.
<b>Asia and the Pacific</b>															
Bahrain	(4)	n.	10	n.	n.	11	n.	7	7	7	8	9	9	10	10
Cyprus	(4)	30	33	34	35	35	35	36	37	38	38	38	36	39	n.
Hong Kong	(3)	40	39	37	37	40	40	41	37	36	38	38	37	42	42
India	(3)	10	11	11	11	12	12	12	12	13	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Indonesia	(1)	37	34	n.	n.	37	39	39	39	39	38	38	38	n.	n.
Israel	(1)	33	37	38	39	39	39	40	40	41	41	40	41	42	42
Jordan	(3)	14	17	21	23	23	23	22	22	23	23	24	23	23	n.
Korea Rep.	(1)	33	35	38	37	38	38	39	39	40	40	40	39	38	n.
Malaysia	(1)	n.	30	32	32	33	34	35	35	35	36	n.	36	35	n.
Philippines	(1)	47	46	48	47	48	48	47	46	46	46	46	46	46	46
Singapore	(1)	30	35	36	36	36	38	38	42	40	39	40	40	40	40
Sri Lanka	(3)	18	18	22	23	25	28	n.	35	45	39	39	n.	29	29
Syrian Arab Rep.	(1)	8	9	10	9	9	n.	n.	n.	11	n.	11	n.	n.	n.
Thailand	(1)	42	42	43	42	44	44	46	45	45	45	45	n.	n.	n.

<sup>a</sup> Coverage refers to total employed except as follows: Employees — Botswana, Gambia, Kenya, Mauritius, Niger, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Cuba, India, Jordan, Sri Lanka; All persons engaged — Malawi, Bermuda, Hong Kong. Figures have been rounded.

<sup>b</sup> Source: (1) Labour Force Survey; (2) Social insurance statistics; (3) Establishment surveys; (4) Official estimates. Figures were not available for the years specified, and those of the closest years were given as follows: Botswana, Niger, Barbados, Cyprus: 1975 = 1976; Egypt, Tanzania, Syrian Arab Rep. 1985 = 1984; Gambia, Panama Bahrain: 1980 = 1979; Barbados 1980 = 1981; Brazil 1975 = 1977; Bahrain, Indonesia 1985 = 1982.

Source: ILO, Yearbook of Labour Statistics, Table 4 (various years).

Table 4. *Percentage of women among manufacturing workers, developing countries, 1975-94*<sup>a</sup>

Country	<sup>b</sup>	1975	1980	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
<b>Africa</b>															
Botswana	(3)	n.a.	17	22	20	27	24	27	29	n.a.	32	37	37	n.a.	n.a.
Kenya	(3)	n.a.	9	9	10	10	10	10	11	11	11	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Mauritius	(3)	49	56	59	63	62	59	57	58	58	58	60	60	61	60
Swaziland	(3)	16	26	25	24	27	31	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Tanzania	(3)	10	9	11	10	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Zimbabwe	(3)	8	7	7	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	71	10	7	9
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>															
Bermuda	(3)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	35	35	36	36	37	36	36	36	36	34
Costa Rica	(1)	n.a.	27	33	31	30	30	31 <sup>c</sup>	39	39	37	40	37	35	35
Cuba	(3)	n.a.	26	30	30	31	31 <sup>d</sup>	32	34	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Ecuador	(3)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	32	35	38	35	35
El Salvador	(1)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	42	44	n.a.	39	43	44	46	46	n.a.	n.a.
Mexico	(2)	n.a.	21	24	24	25	26	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	35	n.a.	34	n.a.
Panama	(1)	25	n.a.	26	29	28	30	30	28	29	n.a.	31	28	n.a.	n.a.
Puerto Rico	(3)	48	48	47	46	49	48	48	48	46	45	43	43	44	43
Venezuela	(3)	21	24	25	26	26	26	27	26	27	26	28	28	27	n.a.
<b>Asia and the Pacific</b>															
China	(4)	n.a.	40	n.a.	n.a.	40	41	41	41	41	44	45	44	n.a.	45
Hong Kong	(3)	52	50	50	50	50	50	50	49	48	47	47	45	45	44
India	(3)	9	10	10	9	10	9	9	9	9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Jordan	(3)	12	10	10	11	11	11	10	10	12	11	11	11	11	n.a.
Korea, Rep.	(3)	n.a.	45	43	43	42	42	42	41	39	38	42	41	39	38
Singapore	(1)	41	47	50	52	51	53	55	55	54	53	44	44	44	n.a.
Sri Lanka	(3)	32	31	35	38	39	45	n.a.	47	n.a.	53	58	61	n.a.	n.a.
Thailand	(1)	41	42	45	49	45	45	48	50	48	50	50	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

<sup>a</sup> Figures have been rounded.

<sup>b</sup> Source: (1) Labour force survey; (2) Social insurance statistics; (3) Establishment surveys; (4) Official estimates.

<sup>c</sup> Prior to 1987: including mining

<sup>d</sup> Prior to 1986: including water

Source: ILO *Year Book of Labour Statistics* Table 3B (various years).

wage earnings received by women. International comparisons of wage data are probably even more problematical than for other aspects of labor force participation. But a basic hypothesis here is that the increasing globalization and the more systematic pursuit of international competitiveness have made wage and labor costs more important in determining the geographical changes in production and employment and thus in determining which groups are employed.

In this regard, one should be wary about interpretations of the available data on wage differentials. Women's wages may be lower than men's because of job or training discrimination, because of occupational segregation, because of direct wage discrimination or because women are prepared to labor for less, having lower "aspiration wages." The erosion of minimum wage legislation — and the institutional ma-

chinery needed to make it meaningful — coupled with the sanctioning under structural adjustment programs of real wage cuts, are likely to induce substitution of women for men, partly because men are less willing to work for sub-family wage rates and partly because they would be expected to respond to lower wages by a lower "effort bargain." So, employers would be inclined to hire women more readily. While the promotion of female employment is desirable, this is surely not the way to achieve it.

The national statistical evidence on *wage differentials* in developing countries is again deplorably patchy, and one would be foolhardy to state from what is available that there has been an international trend one way or the other.<sup>15</sup> As shown in Table 6, however, in most countries where there are time-series data the gender wage earnings' differential has remained substantial.



Table 5. *Proportion of women among production workers (all statuses, percentage, from early 1970s to mid-1990s)*<sup>a</sup>

Africa					
Botswana	C	1981	1984	1986	n.a.
	LFSS	7	23	9	
Cameroon	C	1976	1982	n.a.	n.a.
	OE	12	8		
Egypt	LFSS	1975	1984	1989	1992
	LFSS	2	6	9	8
Ghana	C	1970	1984	n.a.	n.a.
	C	35	45		
Morocco	C 10%	1971	1982	n.a.	1992
	C 5%	16	23		22
Mauritius	C	1972	1983	n.a.	n.a.
	C	6	21		
Seychelles	C	1971	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	OE	10	15		
South Africa	Cs	1970	1985	n.a.	n.a.
	C	7	13		
Tunisia	C	1975	1980	n.a.	n.a.
	LFSS	24	22		
Latin America and the Caribbean					
Bahamas	HS	1970	1980	n.a.	n.a.
	C	11	12		
Barbados	HS	1977	1987	n.a.	1993
	LFSS	22	26		19
Belize	C	1970	1980	n.a.	1994
	C	10	13		13
Bermuda	HS		1985	n.a.	1994
	C		8		10
Costa Rica	C	1973	1987	1992	1994
	HS	12	20	22	19
Chile	C	1970	1986	1991	1994
	LFSS	12	15	12	13
Dominican Republic	C	1970	1981	n.a.	n.a.
Ecuador	C	22	14		
	C 10%	1974	1982	1990	1994
	C	15	12	16	15
El Salvador	C	1971	1986	n.a.	1992
	HS	19	26		30
Honduras	LFSS		1986	n.a.	1992
	C		22		31
Guatemala	C	1973	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	C	14	12		
Guyana	LFSS	1977	1980	n.a.	n.a.
	C	15	9		
Haiti	C	1971	1982	n.a.	n.a.
	Cs	43	32		
Jamaica	LFSS	1976	1986	1990	n.a.
	LFSS	26	23	21	
Mexico	C	1970	1980	1991	1993
	C	24	17	18	21
Panama	C	1970	1986	1992	1994
	LFSS	11	12	14	10
Paraguay	C 10%	1972	1985	1989	1993
	C	28	22	23	15
Peru	C	1972	1981	1987	1994
	C	14	11	19	14
Puerto Rico	LFSS	1975	1988	1992	1994
	LFSS	20	24	20	19
St. Pierre and Miquelon	C	1974	1982	n.a.	n.a.

*Continued overleaf*

Table 5 — *Continued*

Trinidad and Tobago	C	7	5		
	LFSS	1978	1986	1989	1990
Uruguay	LFSS	13	12	11	12
	C 12%	1975	1985	1989	1993
Venezuela	C	20	18	21	19
	C 25%	197 1	1987	1990	1993
	HS	10	10	10	10
Virgin Islands (UK)	Cs	1970	1980	n.a.	n.a.
	C	2	5		
Asia and the Pacific					
Bahrain	C	1971	1981	1989	1994
	C	0	1	1	5
Bangladesh	C	1974	1984	n.a.	n.a.
	C	5	17		
Brunei	C	1971	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	C	3	4		
Hong Kong	C	1976	n.a.	1986	1993
	C	37		31	16
India	C	1971	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	C	12	13		
Indonesia	C	1971	1985	n.a.	n.a.
	HS	27	26		
Israel	Cs	1972	1987	1990	1994
	LFSS	12	13	13	13
Jordan	OE	1976	1979	n.a.	n.a.
	C	3	1		
Korea, Rep.	C	1975	1985	1989	1993
	LFSS	28	27	31	26
Malaysia	C	1970	1980	1988	1993
	C	17	22	25	27
Pakistan	C		1985	1992	1994
	LFSS		5	9	9
Philippines	C	1970	1985	1990	1994
	HS	33	24	20	20
Singapore	C	1970	1985	1989	1992
	LFSS	19	25	30	37
Sri Lanka	C	1971	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	C	15	13		
Syrian Arab Republic	LFSS	1970	1984	1989	1991
	LFSS	5	4	5	3
Thailand	LFSS	1970	1985	1988	1991
	LFSS	29	30	32	34
Oceania					
Cook Islands	C	1976	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	C	22	15		
Fiji	C	1976	1985	1988	1990
	C	4	8	14	22
French	C	1977	1983	n.a.	n.a.
Polynesia	C	8	17		
Samoa	C	1976	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	C	6	9		
Tonga	C	1976	1986	n.a.	n.a.
	C	5	13		

<sup>a</sup> Includes conventional categories: own-account workers, employees, employers, and unpaid family workers. Figures have been rounded. C=Census; C...%=Census: sample tabulation, size specified; Cs=Census: sample tabulation, size not specified; HS=Household survey; LFSS=Labor force sample survey; OE=Official estimates. Source: ILO, *Year Book of Labour Statistics* Table 3C (various years).

Table 6. Female earnings as a percentage of male earnings in manufacturing, selected developing countries, 1975-94<sup>a</sup>

Country	1975	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Africa																
Egypt	68	n.	n.	66	n.	n.	73	74	72	72	71	68	72	75	n.	n.
Kenya	66	63	59	76	80	77	76	73	65	68	69	73	73	n.	n.	n.
Tanzania	71	79	78	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Swaziland	n.a.	81	82	81	61	55	72	73	82	78	81	88	90	82	n.	n.
Latin America																
Costa Rica	n.a.	n.	n.	n.	n.	73	74	75	78	67	73	74	72	72	72	72
El Salvador	90	81	86	89	77	84	82	85	90	90	91	94	n.	n.	n.	n.
Netherlands Antilles	n.a.	n.	51	66	65	67	68	64	n.	65	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Paraguay	n.a.	n.	n.	n.	79	79	87	91	n.	89	72	66	67	52	73	77
Asia																
Burma	89	86	89	91	92	94	99	86	n.	59	58	58	60	61	n.	n.
Cyprus	47	50	54	56	55	56	56	56	58	59	58	58	60	60	57	n.
Hong Kong	n.a.	n.	n.	78	79	81	79	78	76	74	73	69	69	69	66	68
Jordan	n.a.	58	64	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.
Korea Rep.	47	45	45	45	46	47	47	49	50	51	50	50	51	52	52	n.
Malaysia	n.a.	n.	n.	n.	n.	n.	49	47	48	46	49	50	52	54	n.	n.
Singapore	n.a.	62	62	63	64	65	63	56	58	n.	54	55	56	56	57	57
Sri Lanka	n.a.	81	87	82	71	69	72	78	71	71	69	66	75	85	88	86

<sup>a</sup> n.a. indicates no available data. Figures have been rounded

Source: ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, Table 17A (various years).

Intriguingly, it is in rapidly industrializing countries in which the female share of employment has risen most that show *greater* wage differentials, although recently it may have narrowed marginally in the Republic of Korea. Although data differences and deficiencies might explain some of the observed pattern, one hypothesis is that if women's relative wages are typically lower in Southeast Asia than in other developing regions of the world the differential may have been both a primary factor in the rapid industrialization of that region and have been perpetuated in part by the character of that industrialization.<sup>16</sup>

Although this is not the place to try to document such interpretations, one hypothesis to explain the combination of wide gender differentials, low wages and rapid industrial growth in the region is that the average *social wage* is lower in much of Southeast Asia than elsewhere. By this is meant that the individual money wage needed to meet a socially acceptable subsistence is lower, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of any person's social income. If one conceives the wage as one part (perhaps none, perhaps all) of a person's income, with other parts coming from family or community transfers, state transfers and enterprise benefits, the contribution of the various

components is likely to vary according to the type of economy and society. In Southeast Asian economies, a woman wage worker has been typically young, single and highly exploitable in part because to a certain extent her wage labor income has been supplemented by transfers from her (village) community, both at the time of her wage labor and subsequently when returns to their village.<sup>17</sup> Although this practice exists everywhere, it may be much more systematic in these countries.<sup>18</sup> One should also recall that women in Southeast Asian factories (as in many other parts of the world) have typically worked very long work weeks, little or no different from those worked by men.

As for industrialized and Eastern European countries, in the latter gender-based wage differentials may have been growing, while in Western Europe they have probably shrunk in recent years, although in some countries they may have widened after many years of improvement.<sup>19</sup> There and elsewhere, a research issue is whether the feminization of employment and the lower wages received by women have contributed to the growth of income inequality that has occurred in many parts of the world.

Another facet of the flexibilization of labor markets has been the rolling back of the *public*

Table 7. Female share of public service employment, selected developing countries, 1975-94 (percentages) <sup>a</sup>

Country	1975	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Africa																
Benin			15													
Botswana		20		35	37		36	36	36	36	39	39				
Burkina Faso	16					20		21	22							
Burundi			41					38				42				
Ethiopia				20		22		23								
Kenya	18	18	19													
Malawi			12	12	11	12	12	13	12							
Morocco					29	28	28	29		29	29	30	31			
Nigeria		13														
Rwanda					32		33									
Swaziland			25	31	30	32	33	34								
Latin America and the Caribbean																
Barbados			43	45	42											
Bolivia		24	24	24												
Brazil		21	23			24										
Cuba	30	33	33	37	38	39	39	37	38	38						
Jamaica		50	48	48												
Mexico													30		33	
Panama				41	43	43	43	45	45	45	45	46	47			
Trinidad and Tobago				32		37	37	37								
Venezuela		41	42	43		43	44	45	45			49	49	52	52	
Asia and the Pacific																
Bahrain						32	31	31	32							
Cyprus		31	32	32	32	32	33	33	33	34	35	35	36	36		
Hong Kong	20	23	25	28	28	28	28	29	29	30	31	31	32	31	31	31
India			10			11										
Indonesia		23	24		27	27	29	29	30	31	32	31	33	34		
Kuwait					31		34		35		33	33	33		38	39
Qatar		11	12		16			9	9		9					
Syrian Arab Rep.			20				24			26	27	24	25	26		

<sup>a</sup> Public service employment in the total public sector except: Central government- Burundi, Ethiopia, Mali, Rwanda, Kuwait, Bahrain; Government- Botswana, Morocco, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago; Federal government- Nigeria; Public administration- Brazil. Blank spaces indicate no available data. Figures have been rounded.

Sources: Bahrain: "Statistical Abstract," 1985-87; Barbados: "Labour Force Report," 1975-83 Benin "Revue de Statistique et de Legislation du Travail," July 1984; Bolivia: "Anuario de Estadísticas del Trabajo," 1982; Botswana: "Labour Statistics Bulletin," 1977, 1987-90 regular publication; Employment Survey 1982; Brazil: "Anuario Estadístico do Brasil," regular publication. 1986: Government reply; Burkina Faso: "Annuaire Statistique du Burkina Faso," 1984, 1987; Burundi: "Revue de Statistiques du Travail," 1986-90. Government reply to ILO General Report, JCPS, 3rd Session, 1983; Cuba: "Anuario Estadístico de Cuba," 1986-89; Cyprus: 1977-82: "Statistical Abstract," 1985, 1986, 1991, 1992; 1983-86: "Labour Statistics Bulletin," Dec. 1986; Ethiopia: Government reply; Hong Kong: "Monthly Digest of Statistics," 1987-94 regular publication; India: "Pocket book of labour statistics," regular publication. Data supplied to ILO; Government reply; Indonesia: "Statistical Yearbook of Indonesia" 1987, 1992 regular publication; Jamaica: "The Labour Force," regular publication; Kenya: "Statistical Abstract," regular publication; Kuwait: "Monthly Digest of Statistics," 1989-94 regular publication; Malawi: "Employment and Earnings Annual Report," 1985-87 regular publication; Mexico: "Encuesta Nacional de Empleo," 1991-93; Morocco: "Annuaire Statistique du Maroc," 1987-92 regular publication; Nigeria: "Digest of Statistics," regular publication; Panama: "Situación Social; Estadísticas del Trabajo," 1987-91 regular publication; Qatar: "Annual Statistical Abstract," 1987-90 regular publication; Rwanda: Government reply; Swaziland: "Annual Statistical Bulletin," 1987, "Employment and Wages," regular publication; Syrian Arab Rep.: "Statistical Abstract," 1987-93 regular publication; Trinidad and Tobago: "Quarterly Economic Report," 1986 regular publication; Venezuela: "Indicadores de la Fuerza de Trabajo," 1987-93, "Encuesta de Hogares por Muestreo," regular publication.

Table 8. *Share of women in non-agricultural self-employment, selected developing countries, early 1970s to the mid-1990s (percentages of total)*

Africa					
Egypt	C	n.a.	1986	1990	1992
	LFSS		3	8	8
Ghana	C	1970	1984	n.a.	n.a.
		73	77		
Mauritius	C	n.a.	1987	1990	n.a.
	C		34	11	
Seychelles	C	1971	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	OE	23	19		
Latin America and the Caribbean					
Costa Rica	C	1973	1987	1992	1994
	HS	13	27	30	32
Chile	C	1970	1986	1992	1994
	LFSS	28	28	29	30
Dominican Republic	C	1970	1981	n.a.	n.a.
Ecuador					
	C	23	27		
	C	1974	1982	1990	n.a.
	C	25	22	28	
El Salvador	C	1971	1980	1991	n.a.
	HS	48	65	62	
Guatemala	C	1973	1981	1989	1991
	C	29	25	52	44
Mexico	C	1970	1980	1990	1993
	C	28	33	31	37
Panama	C	n.a.	n.a.	1990	1993
	LFSS			26	24
Paraguay	C	n.a.	1989	1991	1994
	LFSS		43	44	44
Peru	C	1972	1981	1991	1994
	C	31	29	40	42
Puerto Rico	C	1975	1988	1992	1995
	LFSS	16	15	16	19
Trinidad and Tobago	C	n.a.	1987	1991	1993
	LFSS		29	30	29
Venezuela	C	1971	1987	1991	1993
	HS	17	23	30	27
Asia and the Pacific					
Bangladesh	C	1974	1984	1991	n.a.
	C	3	8	15	
Hong Kong	C	1976	1986	1993	1994
	C	16	20	12	13
India	C	1971	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	C	9	8		
Indonesia <sup>b</sup>	C	1971	1985	1992	n.a.
	HS	24	41	38	
Iran	C	1976	1986	n.a.	n.a.
	C	9	5		
Korea, Rep.	C	1975	1987	1992	1993
	LFSS	29	35	30	29
Kuwait	C	1975	1985	n.a.	n.a.
	C	1	1		
Malaysia	C	n.a.	1987	1990	1993
	LFSS		31	29	26
Pakistan	C	n.a.	1989	n.a.	1993
	OE		5		5
Philippines	C	n.a.	1987	1992	1994

*Continued overleaf*

Table 8 — *Continued*

	HS		56	53	55
Singapore	C	1970	1987	1992	1993
	LFSS	13	19	18	17
Sri Lanka	C	1971	1981	1992	1994
	C	12	9	16	21
Thailand	LFSS	1970	1985	1990	1994
	LFSS	40	44	45	44
United Arab Emirates	C	1975	1980	n.a.	n.a.
	C	1	1		
Oceania					
Fiji	C	1976	1986	n.a.	n.a.
	C	15	23		
French	C	1977	1983	1988	n.a.
Polynesia	C	31	33	41	
Samoa	C	1976	1981	n.a.	n.a.
	C	30	27		

<sup>a</sup> Figures have been rounded. C=Census; Cs=Census: sample tabulation, size not specified; HS=Household survey; LFSS=Labour Force sample survey; OE=Official estimates.

<sup>b</sup> Includes agriculture.

Source: ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics* Table 2A (various years).

sector, most notably as part of structural adjustment programmes, as part of “privatization” initiatives and as a result of the growing practice of outsourcing public service functions. In many parts of the world, the public sector had been a leading source of employment growth in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, and in many countries (particularly industrialized and Eastern European countries) women have comprised a higher share of total public sector employment than private sector employment.

The reversal or slow-down of public sector growth in the late 1980s and 1990s would in itself have been expected to lower the female share of total employment, if the average ratios had remained the same as in the earlier era. As far as developing countries are concerned, however, although our data base is not very

representative, Table 7 suggests that the female share of public sector employment has tended to rise. This continued the trend observed for the 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

Almost definitionally, a key feature of labor market flexibilization has been a relative and absolute growth of *non-regular* and non-wage forms of employment. There is considerable national, anecdotal and sub-national data to testify to this trend.<sup>21</sup> Most statistical offices, however have either not collected information on casual and other forms of non-regular wage labor or have started only recently. As far as so-called ‘self-employment’ is concerned (which might be taken as a proxy indicator), it is not surprising that internationally comparative data for developing countries are poor.<sup>22</sup> The available statistics mostly suggest an upward trend, notably in Latin America and the Caribbean, as indicated in Table 8.

In industrialized economies, numerous statistics show that the relative and absolute growth of temporary, casual, contract and part-time labor have been widespread, substantial and sustained over the past two decades, so that in some countries, such as Spain, a majority of all jobs are non-regular.<sup>23</sup>

Some of the most rapidly growing forms of flexible labor are increasing feminization in both senses of the term — they are absorbing more women than men and involve less secure working conditions. An example is *teleworking*. Many women have been employed in this way,

Table 9. *Change in ratio of adult female to male unemployment rates, from mid-1970s to mid-1990s (percentage of countries with each type of change)*

Type of change	Country type	
	Developing	Developed
Increase	13.7	26.8
No change	3.4	0.0
Decrease	82.5	72.8

Source: ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, Table 9A (various years).

Table 10. *Ratio of adult female/male unemployment rates (from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s)*<sup>a</sup>

Initial level	Overall change					
	Increase		No change	Decrease		
				Became < 1	Became = 1	Remained > 1
>1						
Developing	Seychelles			Costa Rica, Chile, Egypt, Guyana Fr., Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago	Panama, Bahamas	Barbados, China, Cyprus, Israel, Jamaica, Uruguay
		3.4%		20.6%	6.9%	20.6%
Developed	Saint Marin			Austria, Australia, Canada, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, United States	Italy, Spain	Belgium, France, Greece, Iceland, Portugal
		3.8%		38.4%	7.7%	19.0%
= 1 or < 1	Became > 1	Remained < 1		Became < 1		Remained < 1
Developing	Thailand, Mauritius	Singapore	Korea	Syrian Arab Rep.		Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Hong Kong, Mexico, Netherlands Antilles, Puerto Rico, Senegal, Venezuela
	6.9%	3.4%	3.4%	3.4%		31.0%
Developed	Denmark	Finland, Isle of Man, Japan, Malta, Switzerland				Ireland, United Kingdom
	3.8%	19.2%				7.7%

<sup>a</sup> 15 years and older.

Source: ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, Table 9A (various years).

and have been doing so far more systematically than men. Several empirical studies have shown that men who have done this sort of work have been working at home only for part of the time, whereas women have usually been working full-time at home and in an informal way, leaving them with only "second-class citizenship."<sup>24</sup>

Relocation of flexible forms of labor have also been linked not just to feminization but to a certain form of subordinated flexibility. For instance, a study of suburbanization of employment in the United States reported that the

decision to relocate was linked to the employers' preference for married, white women as clerical workers.<sup>25</sup> Teleworking promises to be one of the fastest growing forms of employment and a major source of female employment in the next decade.

Finally, in both the 1980s and 1990s women's rate of *unemployment* relative to men's fell in a considerable majority of industrialized and developing countries. Table 9 shows that in 83% of the developing countries covered women's relative unemployment fell, and that this was

the case in 73% of industrialized countries. The table also shows that in a substantial majority of industrialized countries the female unemployment rate was less than the male equivalent. Although comparable statistics were not given in the earlier article, a longer version of that paper did present this information. A comparison those figures with Table 10 indicates that in the 1970s female unemployment relative to male rose in a majority of industrialized countries (78%) and in the same number of developing countries as it fell (45%), whereas in the 1980s it fell in 63% of industrialized countries and 59% of developing countries. In other words, the drop in women's relative unemployment has been a fairly recent phenomenon but the deterioration of men's position has been accelerating.

Given that women's labor force participation rates and employment have been rising and

women's unemployment rates have fallen, this change cannot be explained by reference to withdrawal from the labor force in times of high overall unemployment. It seems to reflect a considerable erosion in the position of men in labor markets throughout the world (see Tables 11 and 12). For an example, consider the case of the United Kingdom. Between the early 1960s and the mid-1990s, UK male employment dropped by about four million (excluding a rise in self-employment), so that by the mid-1990s about 4.2 million men aged 16-64 were either unemployed or inactive. Meanwhile, female employment rose by nearly three million. These developments could not be explained by demographic factors. The developments in other countries might not have been so dramatic, but throughout the industrialized world the trend seems to have continued. For instance, in Belgium in 1990 the female-male

Table 11. *Ratio of female/male unemployment rates, developing countries, from mid-1970s to mid-1990s*

Latin America and the Caribbean				
Bahamas	1979: 2.5	1986: 1.5	1991: 0.9	1994: 1.0
Barbados	1976: 1.7	1987: 1.7	1990: 1.8	1994: 1.3
Chile	1976: 1.4	1986: 1.2	1990: 0.5	1994: 0.6
Costa Rica	1976: 2.0	1987: 1.7	1990: 0.6	1994: 0.7
Guyana Fr.	1977: 2.4	1987: 1.8	1990: 0.9	1994: 0.7
Jamaica	1976: 2.5	1986: 2.3	1990: 2.2	1992: 2.1
Mexico		1988: 0.8	1991: 0.9	1993: 0.7
Netherlands Antilles	1983: 1.9	1985: 2.0	1990: 1.0	1991: 1.2
Panama	1979: 2.0	1987: 1.8	1991: 0.9	1994: 1.0
Puerto Rico	1975: 0.9	1985: 0.4	1990: 0.4	1994: 0.4
Trinidad and Tobago	1978: 1.8	1985: 0.6	1990: 0.7	1993: 0.8
Uruguay	1979: 2.4	1984: 2.0	1990: 1.1	1993: 1.2
Venezuela	1975: 1.0	1984: 0.7	1990: 0.4	1993: 0.3
Africa				
Burkina Faso		1985: 0.1	1990: 0.1	1994: 0.1
Ethiopia		1985: 0.7	1990: 0.7	1993: 0.6
Egypt	1979: 4.9	1984: 4.8	1989: 0.8	1992: 0.8
Ghana	1975: 0.3	1986: 0.1	1990: 0.1	1992: 0.1
Mauritius		1985: 0.3	1990: 0.4	1994: 1.6
Senegal		1985: 0.2	1990: 0.2	1993: 0.1
Seychelles	1980: 1.1	1985: 2.0		
Asia				
China	1983: 1.6	1985: 1.5	1990: 1.4	1994: 1.4
Cyprus	1974: 1.6	1987: 0.9	1990: 1.1	1994: 1.2
Hong Kong	1976: 1.0	1985: 0.4	1990: 0.6	1994: 0.5
Israel	1974: 1.7	1985: 0.7	1990: 0.9	1994: 1.2
Korea, Rep.	1974: 0.5	1985: 0.3	1990: 0.4	1994: 0.5
Philippines	1975: 1.6	1985: 1.0	1990: 0.8	1994: 0.7
Singapore	1976: 0.7	1985: 0.6	1990: 0.5	1994: 0.8
Syrian Arab Rep.	1979: 1.0	1984: 2.0	1989: 0.4	1991: 0.6
Thailand	1976: 0.8	1985: 1.3	1990: 1.0	1991: 1.5

Source: ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics* Table 9A (various years).



Table 12. *Ratio of female/male unemployment rates, developed countries, from mid-1970s to mid-1990s*

Europe				
Austria	1979: 1.4	1985: 0.6	1990: 0.8	1993: 0.8
Belgium	1976: 2.4	1985: 1.5	1990: 1.6	1994: 1.2
Denmark	1976: 0.9	1985: 1.3	1990: 1.0	1994: 1.1
Finland	1975: 0.5	1985: 0.8	1990: 0.6	1994: 0.8
France	1980: 2.3	1985: 1.1	1990: 1.3	1994: 1.1
Germany	1978: 1.6	1985: 0.8	1990: 0.9	1994: 0.7
Greece	1981: 1.7	1985: 1.1	1990: 1.6	1993: 1.4
Iceland	1975: 1.5	1985: 1.4	1990: 1.1	1993: 1.1
Ireland	1981: 0.8	1985: 0.4	1990: 0.5	1993: 0.5
Italy	1980: 2.7	1985: 1.3	1990: 1.4	1994: 1.0
Luxembourg	1980: 2.4	1985: 0.9	1990: 0.7	1993: 0.8
Netherlands	1980: 1.2	1985: 0.7	1990: 1.3	1994: 0.9
Norway	1979: 1.8	1985: 1.1	1990: 0.7	1994: 0.7
Portugal	1978: 1.8	1985: 1.3	1990: 1.2	1993: 1.1
Saint Marin	1980: 1.2	1985: 2.9	1990: 3.1	1993: 2.5
Spain	1980: 1.2	1985: 0.5	1990: 1.1	1994: 1.0
Sweden	1980: 1.5	1985: 0.9	1990: 0.9	1994: 0.7
Switzerland	1975: 0.5	1985: 0.8	1990: 0.8	1994: 0.7
United Kingdom	1980: 0.6	1985: 0.5	1990: 0.4	1993: 0.3
Oceania				
Australia	1980: 1.5	1985: 0.7	1990: 0.8	1994: 0.7
New Zealand	1980: 1.3	1985: 0.6	1990: 2.2	1993: 0.5
Isle of Man	1977: 0.6	1987: 0.8		
Malta	1980: 0.1	1987: 0.6		
America				
Canada	1979: 1.2	1985: 0.8	1990: 0.8	1994: 0.7
United States	1980: 1.1	1985: 0.8	1990: 0.8	1994: 0.8
Asia				
Japan	1975: 0.8	1985: 0.7	1990: 0.7	1993: 0.7

Source: ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, Table 9A (various years).

unemployment ratio was 2.5; by 1993, it was 1.8; in Germany in the same period, the ratio fell from 1.5 to 1.1; in Canada, it fell from 1.0 to 0.9. Women can no longer be regarded as the primary "labor reserve," since their labor force participation rates have risen, their share of employment has risen and their relative unemployment rates have fallen. The rising relative and absolute levels of male unemployment are creating a crisis for social and labor market policy, since the welfare state was based on the presumption of the full employment of men in regular full-time jobs.

This long-term trend should not be interpreted as implying that women's position is "good." The reality is that men's position has become more like that of women, and this is especially the case with respect to entitlement to a modicum of income security once unemployed. Even in the European Union, known to

have the most developed of state transfer mechanisms, by the mid-1990s only about one-third of all unemployed were receiving unemployment benefits, and in this regard (as in so many others) women's position remains worse than men's.<sup>26</sup> But men's position has deteriorated. What should be most worrying is that the income security for the unemployed has been declining, due in part to the chronic character of mass unemployment and in part to the explicit and implicit disentanglement to benefits.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are some who take exception to the notion of "feminization" of the labor market. The three trends identified in the earlier article have however remained powerful and have

possibly accelerated over the past decade or so. The types of employment and labor force involvement traditionally associated with women — insecure, low-paid, irregular, etc. — have been spreading relative to the type of employment traditionally associated with men — regular, unionized, stable, manual or craft-based, etc. In addition, women have been entering, re-entering and remaining in the labor force to a growing extent. A third trend is that more men have been forced into the margins of the labor market, if not out of it altogether. In effect, there has been a convergence of male and female patterns of labor force participation. While there has been an overall trend toward more flexible, informal forms of labor, women's situation has probably become *less* informal, while men's has become more so.

A welcome development is that, according to a recent exhaustive assessment, there has been some decline in the extent of sex-based occupational segregation in most parts of the world.<sup>27</sup> However, this too may largely reflect the weakening position of men rather than any dramatic improvement in the occupational opportunities of women.

The trends of flexibility and feminization combine to pose an historical challenge to so-

cial and labor market policy. It is not possible to presume (as too often has been the case) that the "family wage," "breadwinner" model of labor force behavior is anything like the norm, either currently or likely to arise in the near future. Social insurance predicated on regular, stable full-time wage labor with "temporary interruptions in earning power" does not provide women, or increasingly men, with social protection. Means-tested "social safety nets" do not do so either.

So, among the challenges are the need to reform systems of social protection. There is a corresponding need to promote alternative forms of collective institution to protect and enhance the status of vulnerable groups in labor markets, and a need to combine flexibility with steadily improving economic security. Women's growing involvement in labor force activities is to be welcomed as facilitating a trend toward gender equality, and should be strengthened. But the conditions in which women and men are typically in the labor market do not seem to have been improving. The trend is toward greater insecurity and inequality. Reversing that trend, which is associated with labor flexibility, is the most important labor market and social policy challenge of all.

## NOTES

1. Construction laborer in India. van der Loop (1996), p. 390. There was no suggestion that either the laborer or the author appreciated the irony of the statement.
2. Standing (1989), pp. 1077–1095.
3. Some claim that globalization has not had much effect on labor markets (IMF April). But, not only is there evidence of export-oriented industrialization in many developing countries as well as "de-industrialization" in industrialized countries, but there is evidence of "whipsaw bargaining" by managements, along the lines that unless workers accept lower wages and less employment security, etc., the firm would relocate or channel new investment elsewhere.
4. For a perspective on issues raised in this paragraph, see Standing (1997).
5. See, for instance, Wood (1991). Wood concluded that "developing countries which exported a rising proportion of their manufacturing output to the north (sic) tended to employ a rising proportion of females in their manufacturing sectors" (p. 171).
6. In visits to electronics factories in Malaysia in the 1980s, it was interesting to find that many managers expected and even wanted the young women workers to remain in their jobs for only two or three years. They knew that after a short time their physical productivity declined, often as a result of illness or spinal or optical injuries.
7. The determinants of female work patterns around the world were synthesized some time ago (Standing, 1978, 1981). There are strong grounds for radically overhauling conventional labor force statistics.
8. Boserup (1970).
9. Of course, there has been a vast amount of other data and analysis in recent years. This is an attempt to see what one can tell from official national data.
10. For trends in the post-1945 era, see Standing (1981), chapter 1. For more recent years, for industrialized countries, see, for example, Meulders *et al.* (1993).
11. Rubery *et al.* (1995), p. 5.

12. One cannot say anything conclusive from such data about the overall rate of labor absorption, let alone the elasticity of employment with respect to growth, etc., simply because the quantity of labor and rate of employment relative to unemployment are not captured by participation rate data.
13. Standing (1989), Tables 1 and 2, pp. 1081–1082.
14. This has been documented through the Russian Labor Flexibility Survey and the Ukrainian equivalent, which have been the biggest surveys of industrial enterprises conducted in those countries, covering hundreds of thousands of workers. See, for instance, Standing (1996a, b); Standing and Zsoldos (1995).
15. Case studies have suggested that in the 1970s and 1980s gender-based wage differentials did decline. Anker and Hein (1986).
16. Some analysts have asked why, in the light of the large wage differentials, did the workforces not become entirely female. Feminist (and Marxist) interpretations would postulate that disciplinary and other divide-and-rule tactics would induce a mixed-gender strategy in the workplace. See, for instance, Elson and Pearson (1981); Joekes (1993), p. 17.
17. This does not rule out cash remittances from workers in urban areas, but the *two-way* process has long characterized labor circulation in the region. Too often studies of remittances only consider the flow from urban to rural areas.
18. One could argue that families are exploited through the superexploitation of young women workers, meaning that they could scarcely survive on their wage earnings alone. Another way of putting the argument of the text is that the wage is less than the cost of reproducing their labor power in part because the young woman's family has a rural production base or is working in periurban informal economic activities. In southern Africa, by contrast, the urban wage has been higher in part because that has been needed to secure a stable and productive supply of wage labor because urban-industrial workers have rarely received much in the form of community transfers and have been expected to support rural households through remittances.
19. Gonzalez (1995).
20. Standing (1989), p. 1087. The trend suggests a teasing question: Since in some countries the female share of the public sector has been lower than in the private economy, would a cut in the public sector have boosted the female share of total employment? Would the reverse have applied in countries where the female public sector share has been higher than in the private economy?
21. See, for instance, Bettio *et al.* (1996).
22. There is good reason to believe that commonly and indefensibly women working for an income other than a wage are classified as "unpaid family worker" whereas a man in similar work would be classified as "self-employed" or "own account." This is one of the many reasons for not collecting labor force participation data on the basis of *a priori* categories if possible.
23. Standing (1997), Table 3.
24. Lie (1985).
25. Moss (1984).
26. Meulders (1996), p. 24. This remarkable fact is documented in more detail in Standing (forthcoming).
27. Anker (1998).

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