

The Informal Sector, Women and Class

Virginia A. TEODOSIO*

There has never been before a society, so far as we know from the historical record, in which women have been approximately equal to men. This is a truly global revolution in every day life, whose consequences are being felt around the world in spheres from work to politics.

Anthony Giddens
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Introduction

Given that sexism is institutionalized in the labor market, an analysis of the informal sector must necessarily entail a holistic examination of the situation of women. Women are the principal victims of the casualization and flexibilization of labor. They are often relegated to the informal sector and represent the majority of workers who are low paid and without job security. The structure of contemporary patriarchal family continues to be defined by the sexual division of labor within it. Women as house workers and

* Professor, UP SOLAIR; board member, Social Weather Stations (SWS); and adviser, Advocacy of Women (Men) for an Alternative Industrial Relations (AWAIR). A special debt of gratitude is owed to Ms. Eileen V. Pupos for research assistance.

child bearers are torn in a dual relationship within the class structure. There is the growth of women's employment as wage workers on one hand, and class relations as mediated by family and domestic labor on the other.

The sexual division of labor and the issue of power relations not only limit the full creative development of each family member but also impose a greater burden on women and children. The family plays a determining role in the evolution of the labor process and job structures. But in the increasing 'informalization' of the formal economy, women's concrete experience of class should be understood in the context of ideology, politics and the wider economy.

This paper aims to present a gendered analysis of the informal sector to highlight the need to unite around a common struggle in the shadow economy that is very much identified with patriarchal family relations. It is suggested that an analysis of the informal sector must be recontextualized dialectically in terms of women's issues.

Women as protagonists in the informal sector

The relegation of women within conventional family roles and their subordination in the labor market vis-à-vis the needs of the informal sector are intimately linked. Women, in particular, have all reasons to assert their rights because of the crucial role they play in the informal sector. Women own less than one percent of the world's wealth and even less than a tenth of the global income and yet they perform two-thirds of the world's work (Giddens, 1994). Giddens observes that informal work is present even in developed societies.

Currently, the informal sector comprises sixty to eighty percent of urban employment in the Third World. In 2000, for every four in the 28.8 million Filipinos in the workforce, three belonged to the informal sector (Gust, 2006). Underpinning much of the local literature on the sector was the observation that it has contributed substantially to the economy despite the constraints in accessing resources and opportunities. It provides jobs as well as generates positive externalities in terms of the production and consumption of goods (Lanzona, 1998).

The informal sector broadly encompasses economic activities which in law and in practice are not covered or are not adequately covered by formal arrangements. Characterized by seasonal, part-time and on-call types of work, the informal sector is integrated into a virtual chain of global supply. It covers all aspects of the economy whose workers remain to be unprotected and unorganized by state-sponsored mechanisms.

As a feature of the economy, it consists of the unreported income from the production of goods and services from small household operations that hardly have any access to existing formal labor and capital markets. Unfortunately, with the unstable work conditions on the rise in a global economy the transformation of the formal sector into an informal one has all the more deepened. Labor market deregulation has resulted in massive outsourcing of non-core functions of corporations which shifted responsibilities for income and benefits to the individual worker.

In order to integrate the informal sector into the formal economy, a number of policy recommendations have been suggested. This includes increasing public investments in human capital and technology, reforms in social protection and legislation, and access to credit markets and basic infrastructure. However, the lack of representation and voice remains to be the most pronounced impediment to bringing women and young workers into the economic mainstream. Clearly, addressing their needs requires not just the intervention of the state but a change in the prevailing macroeconomic, social, legal and political perspectives from one that caters merely to the growth and development of formal enterprises.

Unfortunately, the masculine assumptions of unionism have not taken the realities of the informal economy on board and as the movement shrinks and suffers rapidly from massive losses in membership, cooperatives and non-government organizations (NGOS) had to break new grounds and seek wider alliances. When it comes to the informal economy, in particular, gender is a crucial organizing issue (Gallin, 2002).

Nineteenth century theorists focused on the social division of labor and ignored the domestic division of labor (Huber, 1998). Late twentieth century theory addressed the division of household labor as the primary source of gender stratification.

But while women remain marginalized from top management positions, men likewise do not have equal representation in the household. Inevitably, the value of women's experience must be emphasized to influence mainstream work in strategizing and organizing the informal sector. Putting women at the center of analysis should yield valuable new insights and redirections to protect workers. Aside from insights and strategies, there should be shared understanding of why something is wrong and what solutions are available. An acknowledgement that women are the leading protagonists in the informal economy should allow for new agendas for wider participation in life affirming work activities.

Both traditional and contemporary approaches to the study of the informal economy are mostly gender neutral. But the worker who occupies the abstract gender neutral job, possessing no sexuality and no emotion, obscure the primary locations of societal power (Acker, 1998). They only perpetuate the grounds for control and exclusion in the labor market. The deeply embedded gendering of the processes in the informal economy would have to be examined to redefine work and work relations in order for social change to come about realistically.

One distinctive characteristic of the informal sector is that people are trapped in the low wage casual segment of the labor market unable to integrate with the more protected sector. This means there is a need to coordinate policy responses with extensive trainings and industrial standards. Both the state and civil society, in other words, should continue to adopt sectoral services in areas such as education and health, socialized housing and non-formal education.

There is also need for government to take on board the fragmented and overlapping functions of a bureaucracy that hinders coordinated shared interests among key players. For example, there should be scope for expressions of collaboration between the local governments and NGOs in training, retraining, vocational guidance, job counseling and placement services. Significant attention should also be given to the promotion of entrepreneurship among livelihood earners through social preparation, credit, and technical assistance.

A number of NGOs have developed a body of work in policy research and mapped development strategies for collective action that deals more precisely with the different facets of gender sensitization. A gendered appreciation of the informal sector plays

a significant role in helping women develop a sense of themselves as a distinct group and network. Social identification could create the critical mass that would further enhance widespread and collectivist egalitarian principles on the issue of how gender specifically relates to particular areas of people's lives (Calingo, 1998).

The partnership notion rests on the assumption that common interests exist not just between local states and NGOs but also between different groups of workers. In other words, informal labor has to be supported by grassroots activism by regular employees. Likewise, new alliances in the supply chains covering both formal and informal workers must be supported by a state policy that recognizes such partnership.

On the issue of equity and justice, microfinance provides opportunities with important implications on the nature of the informal sector. Extensive literature points to the need to redesign microfinance activities within the context of gender analysis. A feminist perspective, for instance, is shown to be more useful in taking into account social needs such as education, skills, technology, market development and basic infrastructure. But unified women representation requires mega mergers and cooperation from many quarters within and among organizations. Women as strategic leaders will measure up to the challenge only if there is recognition of the gender divide between home and work, and between their public and private roles.

With women forming a significant portion of the temporary workforce, new consultative forums can serve as vehicles for dialogue around a labor market that addresses marginalization and injustice. Oppression, as a structural concept, can either immobilize or diminish a group (Young, 2002). Temporary workers, therefore, represent one face of oppression because they never achieve seniority, are not eligible for fringe benefits, consigned to perform menial chores, and have no recourse to independent and collective means of redress.

Structural conflict between capital and labor should recognize and mobilize around the different dimensions of the experience of women if consultation processes are to be effective. In many respects, the undercutting of the terms of employment must be analyzed in the context of a strong system of women worker organization.

The Filipino Family and Gender Roles

A study (see Table 1) shows that in 1985, the proportion of male and female heads of households who rated themselves as poor were almost equal (Guerrero, 1995). Majority of male household heads were married, working, and self-employed. Female household heads, on the other hand, were mostly in their late forties, widowed and working as self employed non-agricultural entrepreneurs (Table 2).

Table 1. Self-rated Poverty by Gender of Household Head Philippines, 1985-2002

		Male	Female
Marcos	Jun 85	74%	73%
Aquino	Nov 90	70	69
Ramos	Apr98	61	56
Estrada	Nov-Dec99	60	56
Arroyo	Mar02	59	54

Source of Survey Data: Social Weather Stations Surveys (1985-1995)

The common belief held then by both men and women was that Filipino women in general prefer to stay home and that being a housewife can be just as fulfilling as paid work. Both men and women aver the idea of mothers working, especially working full time (Table 3).

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Profile of Household Heads SWS December 1994 National Survey (Column percentages)

	RP	Male Household Heads		Female Household Heads	
		Dec 94	Mar 02	Dec 94	Mar 02
		86 %	80 %	14 %	20 %
Age					
18-24	3	3	4	1	2
25-34	22	25	21	9	10
35-44	24	25	26	21	23
45+	50	47	49	69	65
Civil Status					
Single	4	3	4	6	5
Married	81	92	90	18	42
Widow/widower	12	3	4	68	43
Separated	2	0.4	0.4	8	9
Living-in as married	2	2	2	0.3	1
Education					
None	2	2	3	4	5
Some elementary	22	21	17	30	19
Completed elementary/some high school	32	32	33	30	35
Completed high school/some college	29	29	29	24	23
Completed college	10	10	10	9	14
Some/completed post college	1	1	1	1	1
Vocational/some vocational	5	5	7	2	3
Work Status					
Working	83	88	NA	54	NA
Government	8	8	NA	3	NA
Private	26	28	NA	11	NA
Self-employed	50	51	NA	40	NA
Not working	16	12	NA	37	NA
Never worked before	1	0	NA	8	NA

Table 2. continuation

	RP	Male Household Heads		Female Household Heads	
		Dec 94	Mar 02	Dec 94	Mar 02
		86 %	80 %	14 %	20 %
Occupation					
Hired workers	34	37	43	14	20
Professional	2	2	3	4	1
Managers	0.4	0.5	0.4	0	1
Clerical/Adm/Sales	3	4	5	1	5
Non-agri, skilled non-office	10	12	13	2	1
Non-agri, unskilled laborers	12	13	9	6	6
Agricultural	6	7	13	2	6
Employers/self-employed	49	51	43	38	42
Agri operators	18	20	18	5	11
Non-agri entrepreneurs	32	31	25	33	31
Property owners	0.4	0.2	0.2	2	0.4

Source of Survey Data: Social Weather Stations Surveys (1994-2002)

In 1999, it was found that women still preferred to spend more time with the family—an observation shown to be true regardless of socioeconomic status, age group, educational attainment, civil status and career level (Table 4). Similarly, the labor force participation rates for women and men stood at 50.1% and 82.9% respectively.

A survey taken seven years later (2004) showed that there had been no significant difference in the figures; 51.2% for women and 83.8 percent for men (see Table 5).

In terms of employment by class of worker, an almost equal number of women (51%) and men (53%) had been found to belong to the wage and salary type of employment. However, as shown in Table 6, there were more women (16.1%) working as unpaid family workers compared to their male counterparts (8.1%).

Table 3. Views About Traditional Gender Roles
SWS September 1988, July 1991, December 1994,
and December 2002 National Surveys (Column percentages)

	<u>RP</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>ABC</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>
<i>Test Statement: A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family</i>								
<u>Nov.- December 2002</u>								
Agree	74	74	74	63	75	76	72	78
Undecided	12	13	12	12	11	15	12	13
Disagree	13	13	13	25	13	8	16	8
Margin of Agreement	+61	+61	+61	+38	+62	+68	+56	+69
<u>December 1994</u>								
Agree	80	82	78	68	80	84	76	84
Undecided	11	9	13	18	11	9	13	8
Disagree	9	9	10	14	9	7	10	8
Margin of Agreement	+71	+73	+68	+54	+71	+77	+66	+76
<i>Test Statement: It is not good if the man stays at home and cares for the children and the woman goes out to work.</i>								
<u>December 1994</u>								
Agree	59	60	59	59	60	58	59	60
Undecided	9	9	10	10	8	11	10	8
Disagree	32	32	31	31	32	30	31	32
Margin of Agreement	+27	+28	+28	+28	+28	+28	+28	+28
<i>Test Statement: Family life often suffers because men concentrate too much on their work.</i>								
<u>December 1994</u>								
Agree	50	50	51	52	49	55	50	51
Undecided	23	22	24	18	24	20	22	24
Disagree	27	28	25	30	26	26	28	25
Margin of Agreement	+23	+22	+26	+22	+23	+29	+22	+26
Margin of Agreement = % Agree minus % Disagree								

Table 4. Socio-demographic Characteristics

	Total	Male	Female
Gender			
Male	50%	100%	0%
Female	50	0%	100
Socio-economic class			
ABC	12	13	12
D	71	71	72
E	16	16	16
Self-rated poverty			
Poor	53	54	52
Not poor	47	46	48
Age			
18-24	15	13	18
25-35	25	21	29
35-44	23	23	24
45 +	36	42	30
Civil status			
Single	16	17	15
Ever-married	84	83	85
Educational attainment			
Up to elementary	34	34	33
High school to vocational	39	37	41
College and higher	28	29	26
Work status			
Working	51%	70%	32%
Not working	49	30	68
Employee vs. Self-employed (Base: Working)			
Self-employed	54	52	58
Employed	46	48	42
Work sector (Base: Working)			
Government	12	10	16
Private	34	38	25
Self-employed	54	52	59
Number of hours worked weekly (Base: Working)			
40 +	65	67	61
10-30	28	29	28
< 10	7	4	11

Source: Philippines, SWS September 1997 National Survey

Table 5. Labor Force and Labor Force Participation Rates by Sex, Philippines, 2002-2004.
In thousands, except rates

Year	Labor Force			LFPR		
	Both Sexes	Men	Women	Both Sexes	Men	Women
2002 Average	33,936	20,601	13,335	67.4	82.0	52.8
2004 Average	35,862	22,204	13,659	67.5	83.8	51.2

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor and Employment, 2004

Table 6. Employed Persons by Class of Worker and Sex, Philippines, 2002-2004. In thousands, except rates

	2002	In Percent	2004	In Percent
Men	18,305	100.0	19,646	100.0
Wage and Salary Workers	9,022	49.3	10,368	52.8
Own Account Workers	7,429	40.6	7,682	39.1
Unpaid Family Workers	1,854	10.1	1,597	8.1
Women	11,756	100.0	11,968	100.0
Wage and Salary Workers	5,631	47.9	6,105	51.0
Own Account Workers	3,970	33.8	3,933	32.9
Unpaid Family Workers	2,155	18.3	1,931	16.1

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor and Employment, 2002-2004

There were more widowed (8.5%) women than there were men (1.9%). Separated women (2.6%) also outnumbered their male counterparts (0.9%), as shown in Table 7. However, there appears to be an even number of employed single men (28.4%) and women (27.6%). Also, the proportion is almost similar with regards to those working for 40 hours or more (with women registering 60.1% and men 61.5%).

Table 7. Employed Persons by Marital Status, Hours Worked During the Past Week and Sex, Philippines 2002-2004, in thousands, except percent

	2002		2004	
Men	18,306	100 .0	19,646	100.0
Single	5,573	30.4	5,573	28.4
Married	12,164	66.5	13,508	68.8
Widowed	400	2.2	374	1.9
Divorced/Separated	167	.9	188	.9
Women	11,756	100.0	11,762	100.0
Single	3,247	27.6	3,247	27.6
Married	7,157	61.0	7,414	63.0
Widowed	1,088	9.2	997	8.5
Divorced/Separated	260	2.2	305	2.6
Men	18,306	100 .0	19,646	100.0
20 hours	2,125	11.6	2,369	12.0
20-29	2,233	12.2	2,338	11.9
30-39	2,449	13.4	2,484	12.6
40 and over	11,133	60.8	12,080	61.5
Did not work	366	2.0	375	2.0
Women	11,756	100.0	11,968	100.0
20 hours	1,948	16.6	2,005	16.7
20-29	1,414	12.0	1,371	11.5
30-39	1,115	9.5	1,045	8.3
40 and over	7,022	59.8	7,287	60.1
Did not work	257	2.2	259	2.1

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor and Employment, 2004

Table 8 shows the division of the manufacturing sector by gender where men represent 50% of total employment while women make up 49.9%.

The Meaning of Class Structure

The concept of class structure, according to Erik Olin Wright (1997), is only one element in a broad theoretical perspective called class analysis and its dimensions of class formation (the formation of classes into actors organized collectively), class struggle (the practices for the realization of class interests), and class consciousness (the understanding by actors of their class interests). So what do they have in common that define them as classes?

Table 8. Total Employment in Establishments Employing 20 and Over by Major Industry Group and Sex, 2001

Major Industry Group and Sex	2001	
Both Sexes	2,418,936	100.0 %
Men	1,413,520	58 %
Agriculture and Forestry	79,369	3%
Fishing	16,778	.70%
Mining and Quarrying	10,475	.43%
Manufacturing	469,117	19.40%
Electricity, Gas & Water Supply	48,607	2%
Construction	123,057	5%
Wholesale and Retail Trade, Repair of Motor Vehicles Motorcycles & Personal & Household Goods	161,954	6.7%
Hotels and Restaurants	71,235	2.94%
Transport, Storage and Communications	121,347	5%
Financial Intermediation	42,313	1.75%
Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities	156,773	6.48%
Private Education	64,594	2.67%
Health and Social Work	16,654	.69%
Other Community, Social and Personal Service Activities	31,247	1.35%
Women	1,005,417	41.56%
Agriculture and Forestry	17,061	.70%
Fishing	1,152	.05%
Mining and Quarrying	962	.045%
Manufacturing	468,202	19.35%
Electricity, Gas & Water Supply	11,062	.46%
Construction	8,178	.39%
Wholesale and Retail Trade, Repair of Motor Vehicles Motorcycles & Personal & Household Goods	125,638	5.19%
Hotels and Restaurants	49,195	2%
Transport, Storage and Communications	35,016	1.48%
Financial Intermediation	59,096	2.44%
Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities	57,602	2.38%

Vol. XXVII Nos. 1 & 2 2007

Marxism articulates class structure in terms of its effects—material interests, lived experience and capacities for collective action (Wright, 1997).

Who gets what and how do they get it? This question raises the material conditions people encounter through a set of mechanisms in accessing resources and the social relations that result from such conditions. This is manifested in two types of material interests: the interests with respect to economic welfare, and those relative to economic power.

Economic welfare identifies people's objective interests in maximizing tradeoffs between work, leisure and consumption. But class interests with respect to economic welfare are determined by the means of social production and not by the outcome itself. Economic power means control over the surplus product and advances the thesis that its centrality affects the general structure of a society and not simply the condition of the individual who exercises that power.

In Marx's dialectic, interests driving the conditions of material welfare are linked with economic power through the concept of exploitation. Exploitation constantly generates both deprivation and powerlessness; while material interests are structured around them. By appropriating the surplus, exploiters are able to obtain higher levels of economic welfare and, in turn, higher levels of economic power. For the exploited, the polarized relations only guarantee that those already possessed with both economic power and welfare would be able to deprive more and more women and men of the essentials of human life.

Some Marxists have questioned the condition of class in material interests. For them, what should be brought to light is the underlying structural logic of common experience. Instead of seeing class as an answer to the question of who gets what and how, it is seen as a response to who does what and why. A class in itself grows into a class for itself with a practical perception of just how common practices systematically generate experiences which in turn become the basis for a common set of understanding. Feminists have pointed out that the shared experience women working class have lived is something distinctively different from that of men. For one, they maintain, women's laboring activities are designed to protect life.

Anthony Giddens' analysis of class structure (1973) puts considerable emphasis on lived experience and that classes are the outcome of a process of economic categories. The essential commonality of a class can also be regarded as derived from its potential capacity for collective action. With this central property, the working class has the collective capacity to transform the social relations of production into socialism. As a result, the social relations of production do not merely distribute material interests or the contours of lived experiences across classes, but also distribute various resources for the public good.

Marx regarded the working class as having the capacity for collective struggle for two main reasons: workers are the direct producers of society's wealth and, as such, collectively possess the necessary knowledge to organize social production; and second, the concentration and centralization of capital generated by capitalism bring masses of workers into contact and interdependency with one another which generate the kind of solidarity and organizational capacity needed to challenge capitalist power.

The Family and Class Structure

The reproduction of capitalism's class structure is dependent on the family in three ways (Gardiner, 1977). The first relates to the economic unit for the reproduction of classes from generation to generation. Women bearing and rearing children, as well as their children, are economically supported via the family unit, usually by the male breadwinner. Second, the family reproduces the class structure both socially and culturally because the family is one of the major areas for socialization of children and because marriage takes place largely within class. Finally, the family plays a key role which has distinct implications for both men and women in the daily maintenance of the working class through the redistribution of wages and domestic labor.

While capitalism has required a growing pool of wage laborers, it is unable to offer secure employment prospects to all women and men in this pool and persistently recreates a reserve of unemployed. The family has facilitated the recreation of this reserve not just among women, as has often been noted, but also among men. The continuing unequal treatment of men and women by the labor market, therefore, is a matter of concern in

its own right, but it also has direct bearing on the larger problem of poverty.

Women have been drawn into jobs that are low paid as a result of their poor bargaining position. This is an example of the way in which the sexual division of labor within the working class is maintained against the weakest groups drawn into jobs that provide the least potential to organize. Married women who work in the informal sector actually hold two jobs. In addition to her job in the labor market a woman is also expected to perform the functions of a housewife. It is unusual to find families in which both the husband and the wife share both the household and child rearing chores equally.

While the material conditions for equality with working men have continued to elude the majority of women workers, a new consciousness driven by sexual and class oppression has begun to develop. Of late, women's relationship to the organized class struggle has become more direct and less defined by male intervention. Recent struggles over equal pay, equal job opportunity, union recognition, are just some of its lucid manifestations.

But just as gender inequality in the labor market cannot be understood without recognizing the differing roles women and men assume in the home, neither will remedies be of value without complementary changes in the wider sphere of the market. As such, any proposal to upgrade women's place in the labor market must be considered jointly with proposals that remove the obstacles, say, to fathers employed in either private or public sectors from sharing those responsibilities that are traditionally devolved or unnecessarily restricted to mothers. Genuine equal opportunity for women ought to mean freedom of choice to combine parenthood and employment in the same manner as men do.

In the end, this will be mutually beneficial because it would also entitle men who prefer a more hands-on role in their children's upbringing to exercise parental nurturing. Action in the labor market to improve women's chances to make better use of their potential, and men's chances to spend a little more of their time with their children, is already embodied in codes of good employment practices some unions have persuaded their employers to adopt recently. However, such innovative approaches may need more publicity and attention from the media.

A more adequate approach would give due weight to the role of class and vested interests in politics but would also recognize that institutions and social forces play an equally substantive part. From the perspective of human relationships, the system of male supremacy can be viewed as a structure of expected gender roles that distorts and warps all interpersonal relationships and create barriers—not just between men and women but also among men and women—thus, preventing the full and free development of all human beings.

Men in many ways are the actual agents of women's oppression. Male supremacy may have probably been the first form of oppression by one group against another; as shown by how men exercised their dominance over women in most pre-capitalist societies. By the time the capitalist mode of production emerged, therefore, male supremacy had already become a deeply rooted and fully developed social phenomenon.

It is not surprising how male supremacy influenced the lines along which capitalism developed. In particular, as wage and labor markets were created, it became necessary for men to discriminate against women to preserve the fiction of male supremacy in the family. As a result, women remained a vulnerable segment of the labor force; weak and easily manipulated by various sociopolitical and market pressures. The precarious employment in the informal economy has reduced the capacity of poor households to survive in their everyday struggle. Female labor continues to be a resource that has been made available for the survival of families. And yet, unpaid family work remains to be a characteristic feature of many households.

Conclusion

This paper draws together a number of central ideas. Sovereignty remains compelling especially with regard to the state's capacity to wield power. Whatever the penalty the labor market imposes on women just for being female, it is greatly magnified by the earnings they forego as a result of assuming domestic responsibilities, particularly for childbearing. It is worth examining precisely how women's family roles conflict with their roles as wage earners.

An in-depth study could be undertaken to explore on the survival strategies of the poor. The state, however, should examine more

closely how gendered poverty relates to the broad political process that cuts across households and communities.

Women should be included in decision making, leadership, and in efforts that advance civil rights issues such as those espoused by the state and the media. To enhance women's solidarity, there should be transformation of public institutions in the interests of gender and social equity.

Finally, a social network of support must be established to focus on relationships in terms of control over labor, resources, products and decisions.

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