

«Women: The Fifth World» by Elise Boulding⁽¹⁾

Head of the Sociology Department at Dartmouth College, member of the U.S. Commission for UNESCO, author of several works on the status of women, Elise Boulding declares in this essay her faith in international women's organizations.

According to the author, the so-called Third World includes two worlds: one containing a few countries richly endowed with oil, which are leaping forward into rapid economic development. The other, which may be called «the fourth world», is still lagging behind and suffering from extreme rural and urban poverty.

There is still a fifth world, the world of women, whose neglect by the experts who planned the Development Decade of the 1960's, is one of the main reasons why the world community failed to achieve an improvement in the economic and social well-being of the poor.

«The fifth world exists invisibly, uncounted and unassisted, on every continent, in the family farms and kitchen gardens, in the nurseries and kitchens of the planet».

«Imbued with the entrenched, universally accepted myth that woman's place is in the home, development planners failed to notice the members of the fifth world who, by the hundreds of millions, in addition to their work as mothers and housewives, continue to double as field hands on the small farms and plantations of the world».

In prehistoric times, women participated in men's agricultural and hunting activities. Slowly and gradually a division of labor took place when women tilled the fields and men went away to hunt, to find new provision resources and new trade routes. Their mobility helped them to spend less time caring for and nurturing children and more time acquiring surplus resources and means of power, while women who stayed at home had to take almost complete responsibility for the children and household activities, besides performing traditional farming tasks.

The separation, however, was never complete especially in agricultural areas where the farming way of life is a partnership. In pre-industrial societies of the 20th century, women are typically engaged not only in farming and craft work but also in trade, handling of money, credit transactions, savings and investment. They have the opportunity to accumulate and invest capital in the form of land, livestock, gold or other commodities.

With the growth of cities and manufacturing centers, the intrusion of cash cropping into the life of the farm tended to disrupt the family production partnership and lead to male dominance. Women in industrialized areas were detached from their rural means for production and obliged to live resourceless in urban tenements, with children to raise and, all too often, no means of feeding them. Especially in what we call to-day the

middle class, the role differentiation at the expense of women has been most evident. In middle class families, boys were educated and sent out into the world while girls were not.

An alternative to woman's subordinate role as wife/mother in a male-headed household, was a life of celibacy in convents and monasteries which flourished in Asia, the Middle East and Europe, particularly during the Middle Ages. Nuns and abbesses enjoyed freedom and self-realization in their chosen life. Their contributions ranged from the organization of manufacturing enterprises to the production of important intellectual works, the composition of music and poetry, service to the poor, and, occasionally, influential intervention in politics. They continued to flourish in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today there are approximately 2 million nuns in the world, coming from all the major religious traditions.

Women Turn to Internationalism

Socialists who emerged in the 19th century, decided that women should be freed from slavery to household duties and care of children and that domestic functions be taken over by the state. The limited implementation of socialist theories did not improve the status of women as long as imperialist and totalitarian systems required the subjugation of women to their plans of domination and expansion. Feminists of the 19th century thought that they should turn to internationalism as a factor in their liberation because the injustice they suffered was part of the general world injustice inflicted by traditional male domination and projected in war, world power and chauvinism. In order to reach their goals, women should cooperate on an international basis and work to change the existing economic systems which require the permanent presence of business and industrial men in office and, consequently, chain women to their housekeeping functions.

In 1852, «Sisterly Voices», the first international women's publication, was issued. The first «La Voix des Femmes» was born as a socialist paper in Paris in the 1840's. By the 1880's and 1890's, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg had made clear the vision of an international socialist community based on non-violence and the repudiation of nationalism. Austrian Bertha Von Suttner persuaded Alfred Nobel to found the Nobel Peace Prize in 1889. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was founded in 1915, focusing on the effort to create alternative institutions for war.

Frances Willard, an American who founded the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, expressed her point of view as follows: «We are a world republic of women — without distinction of race or color — who recognize no sectarianism in politics, no sex in citizenship».

Women realized that as long as they accepted their

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traditional underside nurturing roles, they would make it easier for men to perpetuate war and injustice. International women's organizations multiplied between 1880 and 1900. They sought a larger audience and more extensive support.

The Women's Movement Becomes Global

During the 19th century, the women's movement was extended beyond the Western Community and succeeded in achieving a truly global reach. Western women were able to contact women of Asia and Africa and, with the regression of colonialism, women of the Third World could speak with their own voices and their own cultural experience. The liberated class among them were at last being noticed and listened to. In 1967, a «Declaration of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women» was adopted by the General U.N. Assembly. The International Women's Year, held in 1975, gave women of the international community further opportunity for raising the issues of women's rights and status.

The World Plan of Action, elaborated in the same year, consists of guidelines for national action for work to be achieved in favor of women by national governments and international agencies during the years 1975-1985, declared as the U.N. Decade for Women.

Need for Statistics

To gain an understanding of women's status and needs, we have to have statistics collected by national governments and forwarded to U.N. statistical offices about the number of women in the labor force, what occupations they are in, what salaries they receive, how much schooling they have completed, how many are illiterate and how many elective and appointive offices they hold. Information is also needed regarding their marital status and the numbers of children born to them.

In many cases woman's work is invisible and fails to be recognized in statistics. The home maker is considered «not economically active». The same consideration applies to the unpaid family worker, the self-employed, the unpaid woman farmer and other women who share in their husbands' jobs and activities.

Systematic counting is wanting, accurate interpretation of data is often questionable. It is of great importance to work for the development of new statistical measures that will tell us more about the quality of life for both women and men, in relation to equality, development and peace.

Recent Statistics

In 1978, one-third of the world's labor force — as counted by the ILO — were women. The official figure today would be about the same. Women hold half of the world's service jobs, three eighths of the professional and technical jobs, substantial percentages of clerical, sales, farming and production jobs. Women are doing a very substantial share of the labor publicly labeled as «work», in addition to their domestic labor which is not counted.

Only 10 percent of the world's administration and managers are women. Women, in fact, are concentrated in the bottom rungs of each occupational ladder. For example, in teaching, they are half the world's primary school teachers but only one-third of the world's secondary school teachers and less than 1 percent of college professors and educational administrators.

Since women are in the lower occupational ranks, they earn less than men, even when they do identical work. Not all working women have husbands who share their financial responsibilities. According to 1976 statistics, 38 percent of them are unpartnered, (never married, widowed, divorced or separated). Many of them are teenage mothers who have to take care of their offspring. Their low earnings mean that their children are reared in poverty.

In the political field, women have remained largely absent. In socialist countries, women have a relatively more rapid political success than in capitalist countries. Of the six countries with 10 percent or over of women in parliament, five are socialist. Although parliaments in one party states may not wield the same influence as in multiparty states, women's participation in them can be taken as one index of their political activism.

Women of the First World

Owing to the higher population growth in most developing countries, women in developed countries are shrinking in number and their share of the world's female work is consequently declining.

North America has led the way in conquering illiteracy among both sexes but, so far, it has not succeeded in applying the principle of equal pay for equal work. In 1976, the median money-income of U.S. female income-recipients over 14 years of age was 36 percent. Among public school teachers, women get as much as 25 percent of men's earnings, women professionals about 60 percent. In spite of efforts made by ILO and the Council of the European Economic Community, wage reports for 1976 and 1977 show the old disparities continuing.

Women of the First World in spite of their frustration regarding equal remuneration, are privileged when compared to Third World women who suffer from hunger and overwork.

These women are receiving some help from their more fortunate sisters through the Percy Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973. But both groups need further knowledge on the meaning of development and women's integration in it. Available data on earlier times in specific Third World regions suggest that the standard of living and opportunities for women were higher a century or more ago than they are now. Perdita Huston in her book *Message from the Village*, writes: «For most of the women I encountered, change — whether seen in their lifetime, or as compared to the lives of their mothers — seems to hold a negative connotation.» Both women and men suffer from «Bureaucratization», or struggle between central control and local autonomy. They complain that only an exclusive minority, continuing the authoritarian palace

temple regimes of the earliest city-state, has benefited from the fruits of technology. The benefits of electric gadgets, television and frozen foods represent a too heavy cost to millions of women with highly limited wages.

What Should Be Done?

«It is time to learn from third-world women what they want... it is also time for women in the U.S. to reflect on what they want.» Building on existing skills and the tiny surpluses at the bottom rather than on imported resources decided upon from above... will bring women into development as partners with independent bargaining power and autonomous social goals. Third-world women should develop the capability to produce their own appropriate technology.

In the United States and Europe, women's skills are going into the establishment of all-women's workshops of all kinds. Every week, journals announce new all-women enterprises (printing presses, factories, consultant firms), new communes, new networks, new newsletters for women only; women's banks, women's cooperatives and credit associations, child care communities, etc. These movements are not «anti-male» but have a strong task orientation to helping women. They belong to the century old Western tradition of women's self-help organizations initiated by the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Young Women's Christian Association.

The Third World, too, boasts organizations of women for self-help purposes: the All African Women Conference, the Association of African Women for Re-

search and Development, the Pacific and Asian Women's Forum, The Latin American Association of Women Social Scientists and, in 1979, the Arab Social Science Women's Association.

What About the Future?

For the future «we need dialogues between rural and urban women, between working and middle class women, between craftworkers and headworkers, about what «development» might mean for human beings. We need the knowledge and ideas of third world women about their own situation and needs.

The author concludes by declaring her faith that «the new international information order» now being debated at the United Nations, might make things different. She thinks that the large number of women engaged in journalism and various communication media forms the «beginning of a journal — newsletter — radio — TV network of women, which can be used to create a multiplier effect for every experiment that is worth sharing.» She enumerates the 52 significant women's international non-governmental organizations whose cooperation with parallel structures existing in the bureaucratic world (32 UN agencies and the regional and international UN Research and Training Centers for Women), might help to solve world problems which techno-bureaucracy has created and so far has failed to solve.

«Women over and over again through the centuries have done the invisible work of reconstruction and repair for warring male societies.» Their future service will be public and their ingenuity may be the most precious resource the human race has left.