

Gender Delusions and Exclusions in the Democratization of Schooling in Latin America

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One of the most common terms in today's political and educational discourse, just a little behind "free market" and "globalization," is "democratization." Most Latin American countries are considered to have restored democracy, South Africa and Namibia are "in transition to democracy," several other African states are said to be "on the path to democracy" as they move into multiparty systems, and many former Soviet bloc countries are beginning to "exercise democracy."

With the return of civilian rule to countries long controlled by military dictatorships (Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay) and the emergence of significant multiparty voices (Peru, Haiti, and Mexico), in addition to indicators that suggest a gradual economic and financial recovery, discourse about redemocratization of Latin America is becoming increasingly frequent. Participants in this discourse refer to a need to undertake serious educational reform and democratize schooling. International development agencies and research institutions are launching substantial initiatives to review and revise educational systems. It is indeed pertinent to examine how various institutional actors define democracy in society and schools, observe whether democratization of schooling considers gender dimensions, and identify reform areas, if schooling is to be transformed into a democratic institution.

The collapse of Soviet communism and centrally planned economies has encouraged capitalist countries to rally behind democracy as one of the foremost principles to govern the twenty-first century. Democracy is defended by disparate countries, ranging from those with stable governments, such as France and the United States, to nation-states with new and fragile multiparty systems, such as those dotting the African landscape. Frequently lauded as the winner in ideological wars between capitalism and communism, democracy is linked to free-market mechanisms and is seen as necessary in these times of global economy and increasing economic competitiveness. Latin America has not escaped this linkage between democracy and the free market; however, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) defines democracy

as also including social equity and justice, national self-determination, and individual freedom.¹

Formally, most governments evince acceptance of gender issues in national development plans and initiatives. Approximately 90 percent of the member states of the United Nations have created some form of office or unit to address women's issues. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in September 1995 in Beijing, the *Platform for Action*—identifying objectives and strategic actions to be conducted by governments and other actors in response to women's issues—was, despite important reservations, unanimously adopted by all participating governments. In Latin America, all countries have ratified the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women—a major agreement with international legal force. The attention given today to gender and the recognition of a comprehensive and explicit agenda for political and economic action regarding the condition and status of women represent substantial progress over the last 20 years. At the same time, there is major dissonance between what is stated in official documents and actual accomplishments in terms of discernable transformations in the social relations of gender.

This article examines how democratization of schooling is being shaped in Latin America and how dangerous delusions and exclusions affect the treatment of gender in this process. I consider definitions, agendas, practices, networks, and discourses as they reflect the existence of power asymmetries between men and women and their willingness and capacity to respond to such differentials. The feminist perspective employed in this article identifies issues stated in ways that fail in the resolution of gender problems and those that render the disadvantaged condition of women invisible. By adhering to male-dominated networks within international development agencies and research institutions, processes are set in motion that consistently ignore feminist contributions to social analysis in general and to educational reform in particular. My analysis centers on initiatives carried out in development policies of international agencies, international conferences, and research projects they funded.

Major institutions are not the only power in society, but they are certainly a force that makes alternative realities and the exercise of agency difficult and elusive goals. With high levels of financial resources, access to established political institutions, and control over the setting of research agendas, such institutions as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and

¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995–2001* (Santiago: United Nations, 1995).

ECLAC play major roles in shaping the political and economic agenda of the region. In these days of privatization, governments receive less attention; instead, international donor and lending institutions see social science research institutions as the more effective and informed interlocutors in efforts of social change. Thus, various private research institutions in Latin America and the United States have become important development partners in shaping the construction and reconstruction of democracy. Current discussions in governments and international development agencies about educational reforms to strengthen democracy in Latin America are not considering exclusions and inequalities affecting women and their limited participation.

Defining Democracy

Many influential institutions define democracy primarily in public terms: creation of responsible and fair institutions, emergence of governmental elites who are efficient and representative of the people, ability of citizens to elect political officials, and existence of rules that promote the frequent rotation and accountability of political authorities.² The public and formal nature of democracy ensures that governance is visible and subject to external pressures. However, when considering the configuration of social forces that generate this public democracy, institutions and their concomitant norms have to be based on the will of individuals who uphold and maintain them; behind any discussion of public democracy there must be an examination of its prerequisite forces.

How do individuals come to accept "fair" game rules and procedures? How do they come to acknowledge that others have equal human value and thus are worthy of equal rights and duties? The process of socialization—the ways in which messages and experiences mesh to form identities that produce the variety of political climates—in the creation (or absence) of democratic personalities must be considered. Here, socialization does not mean the unilateral communication of ideas, practices, and representations. Although, undeniably, the process is stronger from the center of emission to "others," it is also the case that "others" can and do challenge socialization practices, and sometimes their resistance succeeds in creating alternative ways of being in society or, at least, of imagining social life.³

² U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *The Democracy Initiative* (Washington, D.C.: USAID, December 1990); Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Education and Knowledge: Basic Pillars of Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity* (Santiago: ECLAC, 1992); Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), *Summary Report of the Conference on Strengthening Civil Society* (Washington, D.C.: IDB, September 12–14, 1994); Inter-American Dialogue (IAD), *Convergence and Community: The Americas in 1993* (Washington, D.C.: IAD, 1992).

³ See, e.g., Robert Connell, *Gender and Power* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987). Observers of the dynamics of gender creation and maintenance prefer "gender-identity formation" to "gender socialization" because it highlights the power-laden nature of the process as well as includes

The women's movement is an instance of socialization escape. Feminist ideas foreground the asymmetrical power between women and men and document how the condition of women in many societal spheres evinces inferiority. This awareness has produced its own messages and opportunities for resistance to the conventional socialization process. However, many feminists have become dissatisfied with mere gender equality and instead imagine social arrangements that promote a better existence for individuals of all social classes and ethnicities negatively affected by mechanisms of discrimination, subordination, and exclusion. This design complicates the picture of change exponentially by expanding the struggle well beyond feminism and introducing women and men as both subjects and objects of social progress.

It is broadly accepted that democratic environments cannot develop if there is widespread social inequality and exclusion. From a feminist perspective, gender inequality and exclusion are too generalized to allow the conclusion that we have created fully democratic societies. When women won the right to vote, democracy supposedly became accessible to them. Granted the ability to select representatives and run for office, women were considered citizens with rights and duties equal to those of men. In the early feminist times of 1910–60, the easy equation of elections and democracy prevailed. Analysis of everyday practices, the policies and ideologies promoted by predominantly male public institutions, and cultural forces reveals a complex set of interlocking forces making "democracy as vote" a figment of democratic imagination.⁴ While gender is now widely recognized as a social construction, more correctly, it is a sociopolitical invention that provides advantages to those creating it. Contestation and proposals for replacing it with other social arrangements provoke resistance because of its power link.

Interpersonal relations between men and women are a fundamental aspect of democracy. Talcott Parsons, a major theoretician of contemporary social systems, recognized the interpersonal act through which roles and statuses come into play as the key element of a democratic system.⁵ Relations between and among individuals can occur freely, but most take place within institutions that have either private status—such as the fam-

the possibility of agency in the transformation of structures. I will use "gender socialization" and "gender-identity formation" as equivalent.

⁴ Ibid.; Robert Connell, "The State, Gender, and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal," in *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, ed. H. Lorraine Radtke and Henderikus Stam (London: Sage, 1994), pp. 136–73; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988); Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Elina Haavio-Mannila et al., eds., *Unfinished Democracy: Women in Nordic Politics* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1985). See also Nelly P. Stromquist, "Romancing the State: Gender and Power in Education," *Comparative Education Review*, 39, no. 4 (1995): 423–54.

⁵ Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Toronto: Collier-MacMillan, 1964).

ily—or operate in the public sphere—as in the workplace, schools, churches, and military. Public recognition notwithstanding, there have been a number of initiatives in the direction of democratization that suggest a disjuncture between what governments and international development agencies propose and what feminist thinkers and activists recognize and advocate. This article explores this disjuncture, noting the discourses being employed and avoided.

Democracy from a Gender Perspective

Postmodernism has made major contributions to feminism by the use of diverse voices, deconstruction of dominant discourses, and contestation of such arbitrary binary categories as “masculinity” and “femininity.” I place arguments about inequalities between the sexes, the subordination and exploitation of women, and the exclusion of women in the identification and solution of problems predominantly in the political economy, where material conditions merge with ideological beliefs to create subordinate “others.” A feminist perspective enables us to see that “although contemporary feminism is democratic in nature—seeking social change by confronting issues of oppression based on gender, race, class, sexuality, and economic status—the clarity of its lens comes from a focus on women and their experiences. By using a women-centered lens, contemporary feminism is able to move beyond the consideration of women as an ‘add-on’ issue and, instead, look at society, culture, and the world from the standpoint of being female.”⁶ Through their experience of disadvantage and marginalization, women develop a particular vision because they are simultaneously in two worlds: the center and the margin, a situation that makes women “outsiders within.”⁷

The discussion of democracy merely in terms of public space is limiting for women because it (1) does not recognize areas and activities in which women struggle to make politics more responsive to immediate, domestic needs; (2) bypasses social behavior in which democratic practices may not exist, such as the home and schools; and (3) assumes that such legitimate institutions as schools, welfare agencies, and hospitals are necessarily democratic in their provision of social services. For those whose socialization and time constraints do not allow them to participate in formal political institutions (i.e., low-income women who must provide domestic and family care at home), public politics represent a peripheral aspect of their lives.

⁶ Penny Gosetti and Edith Rusch, “Reexamining Educational Leadership: Challenging Assumptions,” in *Women Leading in Education*, ed. Diane Dunlap (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 11–35, esp. p. 15.

⁷ Patricia Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within,” in *Beyond Methodology*, ed. M. Fonow and J. Cook (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

Mainstream political analysts concentrate on such easily observable phenomena as elections and official party statements. However, the political life of subordinated groups is not very visible. To be studied, these processes need intense observations and in-depth interviews; qualitative research methods must be utilized. Many transactions in everyday life must be seen as part of democratic procedures. In feminist analysis, two collectivities stand as crucial: the family and the school. The women's movement has defined the notion of "individual sovereignty" or "autonomy" as never before in political thought, with its concomitant implications for work, family, and relation to one's own body.⁸ This movement has also introduced topics for public agenda such as birth control, violence against women, and women's rights. Through action at the grassroots level women have brought political attention to such issues as water, garbage, child safety, child care, schooling, and meals. While women's mobilization has occurred along practical rather than strategic needs (i.e., oriented more toward the solution of immediate survival problems than restructuring the social order), these actions have broadened political demands.

Democracy is about participation, rights, and duties. In which arenas can women have not only de jure but actual participation? What rights of citizenship are now taken for granted? What rights continue to be contested? Today in Latin America, women can vote, work outside the home, obtain a divorce, have equal access to education, and seek legal redress for sexual violence. But other forms of undemocratic behavior exist in everyday life: oppressive machista relationships with husbands, informal or de facto bigamous marital unions, intense but hidden physical violence, ridicule when seeking political and organizational leadership positions, and lower salaries than men's for jobs of comparable worth.⁹ These inequalities are supported by the economic advantage that accrues from having a "designated subordinate" and by pervasive ideologies that attribute to women a maternal nature and domestic responsibilities.

By clinging to notions of democracy that consider almost exclusively the public and formal manifestations of political engagement, social reformers fail to recover and value political intervention by women of, for example, low-income groups in neighborhood and mass movements that

⁸ Rubem Fernandes, *Privado porém público: O terceiro setor na América Latina* (Washington, D.C.: CIVICUS, 1994).

⁹ According to the UN *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women*, violence against women is defined as "physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the community, including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State."

defend basic rights (access to food, housing, education, health) and increasingly urban issues (safety, transportation, water, sewage, and electricity). Women's activity is important because many have succeeded in attaining their goals, and their participation fosters enactment of egalitarian practices at home. Beatriz Schumukler, in her study of the linkage between public activity and household environments, found that "[women] became more aware of what times were beneficial to be silent or to speak at home. They started to control their speech, to find convenient moments to speak and convenient times to be silent. In addition, women were challenging the right of husbands to assign hierarchical positions among the children, to decide who is right and who is wrong, to determine the rules of children's behavior, and to define types of reward and punishment for important aspects of children's behaviors."¹⁰ From this it is clear that democracy has to be seen as an everyday lives process and that its enactment must occur at all levels of social interaction.

Democratic Experiences in the Home

Writing about Latin America, June Nash and Helen Safa state:

It has been observed that the masculine-feminine relationship often takes the form of a subject-object dyad. To that extent, civil society is based on authoritarian homes, where male decisionmaking prevails. The family, though a much-studied phenomenon in Latin America, has seldom been analyzed as a primary agent of the ideological and structural subordination of women. At all class levels the Latin American family is marked by a patriarchal structure that maintains that woman's place is in the home and that she must defer to her husband in all matters relative to the world outside the home. At the same time, women are often forced to assume major responsibility for children born out of wedlock or from a broken marriage, so that the actual family structure of Latin America often contradicts the formal patterns of male dominance.¹¹

Anna Yeatman calls this asymmetrical relation at the household level "domestic despotism." She asserts that, in today's civil society, "Despotism is the necessary tendency of the auto-determined will which, in asserting its freedom, seeks to claim priority in regard to all other wills."¹²

The home is where children initially learn cooperation and ideas of fairness and justice. Within the household, important decisions are made

¹⁰ Beatriz Schumukler, "Mother in the Poor Communities and the Social Democratization of Argentina," in *Women, Children, and Human Rights in Latin America*, ed. Marjorie Agosin (New York: Harper Collins, in press), p. 25.

¹¹ June Nash and Helen Safa, *Sex and Class in Latin America* (Amhurst, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey, 1980), p. 25.

¹² Anna Yeatman, "Despotism and Civil Society: The Limits of Patriarchal Citizenship," in *Women's Views of the Political World of Men*, ed. Judith Stiehm (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Transnational, 1982), p. 162.

over allocation of tasks, access to and control over productive resources, food consumption, and types of technologies used. But in many families, the father dominates such decisions as the education of children, acquisition of significant goods, whether the wife and daughters work or go out, and in sexual relations. Among actions with significant consequences for women's freedom and well-being, the most important form of household control is domestic violence. The majority of women beaten also suffer emotional and psychological abuse, which can be even more damaging than physical assault. Only in the last decade has wife battering become a public matter, even though it is a widespread phenomenon that occurs across racial groups, economic and educational backgrounds, and religions. Survey data for six developed countries indicate incidence ranging from 17 percent of women in New Zealand being hit by an intimate partner to 28 percent in the United States. Studies in Mexico, Chile, Papua New Guinea, and South Korea reveal that at least two-thirds of wives have suffered marital violence.¹³ Research in 25 developed and developing countries found rates of physical abuse of wives ranging from 11 percent (Canada) to 75 percent (Indian scheduled castes).¹⁴ The data for Latin America show that even countries with stable, democratically elected regimes such as Costa Rica and Mexico evince substantial wife battering rates (54 and 58 percent, respectively).¹⁵

The use of violence has the effect of teaching individuals at the micro-level that physical force is an acceptable means of exercising one's will. Male children are more likely to become abusers when they live in homes with domestic violence. Female children more typically enter into abusive relationships as adults when they have lived in homes where their mother submitted to abusive behavior from the husband. Wife battering is often accompanied by violence against the children, not only by the husband but also by the wife, who resorts to this action to release pent up frustration. Some social workers report that in as much as 50 percent of all cases of battered women, the children are also beaten.¹⁶

High rates of family violence, unwanted pregnancies, and limited autonomy and decision making by women in the household constitute authoritarian family practices. The home tends to be a setting of undisputed father authority where domestic violence, the hard-to-avoid submis-

¹³ Charlotte Bunch, Roxanna Carrillo, and Rima Shore, "Violence against Women," in *Encyclopedia of Third World Women*, ed. Nelly P. Stromquist (New York: Garland, in press).

¹⁴ Lori Heise, with Jacqueline Pitanguy and Adrienne Germain, "Violence against Women: The Hidden Health Burden," Discussion Paper no. 225 (World Bank, Washington, D.C., 1994), pp. 6-9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶ Peggy Biaggi, "Domestic Violence," photocopy (Women for Racial and Economic Equality, Pittsburgh, 1992).

sion, and the arbitrary sexual division of labor create authoritarian norms later transferred to other social spheres.¹⁷ While the family is one of the strongest settings for socialization, it can be changed from outside. Moves to democratize the family call for a more flexible sexual division of labor, changes in gender patterns of child rearing, a more egalitarian balance of authority between father and mother, and greater participation of women and girls in the economy and community.¹⁸ The question is, to what extent will other institutions, particularly the school, challenge its functions? Should the school choose to do so, the agenda is extensive: the curriculum could include participation in family decision making; respect for parents but rejection of family violence, particularly mother (wife) battering; equality of parents within the home; and consideration of sexuality as a form of social relations rather than a manifestation of "man's nature."

Delusions concerning Education and Women

In current discourse about democratization, there is heavy reliance on the school as a mechanism for social mobility and meritocracy. Yet, while formal education has enabled access to better jobs and more satisfying lives, it has been more strongly linked to social integration and control than to individual or collective liberation.

Women's education in Latin America is quite deceptive. By most standards, Latin America does much better than Asia and Africa. Access to primary education in gross enrollment rates (which include regular and overage students and repeaters) is very high, but net enrollment rates indicate that approximately 10 percent of primary schoolchildren are out of school and that 13–40 percent of secondary-aged children do not attend school. Indeed, primary-school completion figures show that Latin America has the lowest rate of success in the world. Completion rates are higher than 75 percent in only four Latin American countries, and only 54 percent of children who enter primary school reach grade 4.¹⁹ Student participation in secondary school (as a result of the absence of tuition fees and entrance examinations) and university is better than in other regions worldwide. Tertiary schooling registers a substantial enrollment rate compared to other regions, including Europe. Furthermore, gender

¹⁷ Nelly P. Stromquist, "The Political Experience of Women: Linking Micro- and Macro-Democracies," *La educación* 37, no. 116 (1993): 541–59; Violeta Sara-Lafosse, "Machismo in Latin America," in Stromquist, ed., *Encyclopedia of Third World Women*; see also Leonore Adler, ed., *International Handbook on Gender Roles* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1995), particularly the cases of Mexico and Peru.

¹⁸ Schmukler.

¹⁹ IDB, *Social Dimensions in the Agenda of the IDB* (Copenhagen: World Summit for Social Development, March 6–12, 1995), p. 5.

gaps at all levels are small, and in several countries women's enrollment surpasses men's by a few percentage points.²⁰

This apparent equality has created the impression that there are no gender problems. Decomposing educational access in detail by ethnicity and urban/rural criteria, however, finds substantial differences in many Latin American countries. And when analyses focus on the combined effects of gender, class, and ethnicity, the disadvantages experienced by women grow exponentially. Regardless of class and ethnicity, it is untenable to argue that there is a democratic environment for women when so many of their rights are still contested in Latin American societies. Women may attend higher education in large numbers, but they are concentrated in a few fields of study. Schools continue to reproduce gender ideologies and material inequalities between men and women with curricular content that does not challenge male advantages and knowledge determination, teachers unprepared for or insensitive to gender inequalities in the classroom or who have stereotyped expectations of gender roles, and textbooks that persist in sexual stereotypes and foster the invisibility of women in history and politics.

Several forms of structural and symbolic violence also operate in schools. While systematic research has been limited in Latin America, personal experiences and observations of classroom interactions between teacher and student, and observations of teachers and school administrators show vertical and rigidly hierarchical relations, particularly in schools in low-income neighborhoods.²¹ Classroom environments that tend to be adult oriented and suppress student initiatives in the name of order and purpose develop in children, especially girls, feelings of incapacity and resignation. The school becomes the public ground for the acceptance of such norms as unexplained control and discipline, conformity with unilateral commands, and reluctance to question excessive authority. The apolitical curriculum shaping identities in the classroom does not disclose the mechanisms by which class, race, and gender oppression and injustice are expressed and maintained and fails concomitantly to identify groups and individuals who benefit from this unequal and unjust structure.

Initiatives to Democratize Schooling: Subtle but Powerful Exclusions

With the exceptions of Costa Rica, Colombia, and possibly Uruguay, poverty in Latin America increased (depending on the definition of pov-

²⁰ Unesco, *Statistical Yearbook 1995* (Paris: Unesco, 1995).

²¹ For an excellent qualitative study of hierarchies even among women in educational settings, see Marilia Carvalho, "Between Home and the School: Tensions in the Professional Identity of Teachers," in *Gender Dimensions in the Education of Women in Latin America*, ed. Nelly P. Stromquist (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 1996).

erty and methodology) 35–43 percent in the 1980s, affecting mostly the urban poor.²² Some improvement has taken place since then, but recovery is still depicted as “fragile and excessively dependent on unstable international capital flows.”²³ Nonetheless, there is a spirit of renewal moving organizations and individuals to consider educational reforms.

Education is seen by most national governments and international development institutions as creating democratic values and an informed citizenry. It promotes greater equity, and, thus, democracies need good schools if they are to succeed. Some institutions define a democratic school as one in which parents and local authorities participate and where basic content is transformed. Yet, rarely does this curriculum counter ideologies and messages that foster the reproduction of gendered differences; in other words, there is a patent exclusion of gender concerns that is evident in the policies and activities of some institutions.

USAID and Its Democratic Intent

USAID has underway a major initiative to “support the evolution of enduring democratic societies.” This *Democracy Initiative* aims at strengthening democratic institutions so there will be effective electoral bodies, informed legislatures, independent judiciaries, and broader civic associations.²⁴ It addresses the fostering of democratic values linked to “putting a premium on political participation, tolerating diverse opinions and social customs, abiding by the rules of the electoral process, accepting the results of political competition, and relinquishing power gracefully.”²⁵ USAID sees democracy as complementary to and supportive of the transition to market-oriented economies, and to create democracy it is necessary to “build democratic and pluralistic institutions” within society. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are to be upheld, but the only ones identified are national bar associations—formal and male-dominated institutions. *The Democracy Initiative* states that, in the past, international assistance was two-dimensional, with the market or private sector recognized along with the state as leading agents of change and reform. USAID now contends that there has been a lack of civic participation; today, therefore, it supports the enhancement of civil action, envisaging a three-dimensional society in which citizens can associate and organize to further their own interests. To foster development of democratic society, USAID intends to promote competitive news media and political parties, fund indigenous think tanks for public policy-making, provide support for national and provincial representative bodies, assist in research and training of staff

²² IDB, *Social Dimensions*.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁴ USAID, *The Democracy Initiative* (n. 2 above).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

in both majority and minority parties, and support civilian control of the military. USAID does identify the need to incorporate democratic values into school curricula, but, since it has chosen to work with a "public" definition of democracy, these tenets are narrowly defined.

The initiative is starkly silent about how gender disparities affect democracy. In fact, it is weak in its recognition of all currently disadvantaged societal groups, although it offers a brief comment about the need to fund meetings of tribal/ethnic leaders. The document asserts that "democratic systems must be consistent with their own traditions and customs."²⁶ This statement operates as a major loophole in the creation of democratic society, as it leaves unspecified what resolution might take place where tradition and democracy conflict. For instance, how democratic could a country be if its traditions and customs call for constraining women to domestic roles or using violence to extract obedience?

A parallel USAID initiative, *Family and Development*, acknowledges that "development interventions that do not recognize the interplay of intra-family dynamics are less likely to succeed" and "development projects themselves can alter intrahousehold dynamics."²⁷ The document states that "one's position in the family, gender, and age are among the more important factors that determine task allocation decisions, a household member's access to and control over productive resources, food consumption levels, and the types of technologies adopted by families."²⁸ Yet here the family—its features and constraints—is not linked to democracy, nor are its limitations associated with power. In fact, the only identified connections between family and schooling are the need to encourage the family to educate female children, to promote the development of parent-teacher associations to increase family investment in local schools, and to encourage the use of schools as the focus of local community and family development. The family is examined neither as a site of conflict and reproduction of gender ideologies and inequalities nor as an institution that must be questioned and transformed. Rather, it is seen as an institution that must be brought in as a key actor to the development process: family and democracy are seen as existing side by side, not in intimate interconnection.

ECLAC and Democracy

ECLAC has produced two pertinent documents. One focuses on development and calls for growth with equity; the other presents a medium-term gender plan. Neither document considers the intersection between gender and democracy.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁷ USAID, *Family and Development* (Washington, D.C.: USAID, December 1990), p. 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

The first document, *Education and Knowledge: Basic Pillars of Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity*, asserts that a new development model based on competitiveness and technological change dominates the world. It acknowledges that this new paradigm challenges social equity but fails to identify the groups likely to be affected—beyond passing references to the growth of rural/urban imbalance, and the few opportunities open to women in certain fields and high-level academic and administrative positions.²⁹ The report dangerously dismisses the existence of social class problems by arguing that

during the 1980s in Latin America and the Caribbean, geographical differences seem to have become even more decisive than social differences. Thus, for example, in Brazil and Venezuela the school attendance rates of children from the poorest 20 percent of the population in urban centers were similar to or even higher than those of children from the second richest 20 percent of the population in rural zones. In both countries, access to pre-school education was twice as great in cities and the absentee rates in primary school three times less, in comparison with rural sectors.³⁰

To question the importance of social class merely on the basis of basic education attendance (enrollment) represents incomplete evidence, resulting in a misleading conclusion. Also, the assertion of independence between residence and social class is unjustified, since many in rural environments, are low-income men and women. For instance, 77 percent of extremely poor Mexicans live in rural areas; in Chile, 84 percent of the poorest communities are rural.³¹

Education and Knowledge reports that

in general, more years of education are demanded of women than of men of the same age for the same occupation. In fact, secondary or higher education seems more and more to be the only means for women to obtain more productive jobs. This does not, however, necessarily lead to higher wages. Indeed, although wage differences between men and women lessened slightly during the 1980s, they increased for young men and women with similar educational backgrounds. On the average, wage discrimination is the equivalent of around four years of formal education, although the gap tends to diminish as the educational level rises.³²

But after having identified a major source of inequality (i.e., women must have 4 more years of education than men to earn the same salary), the document's section on "Actions and Measures" talks about decentralization, autonomy, privatization, better coordination with firms, and greater

²⁹ ECLAC, *Education and Knowledge* (n. 2 above), pp. 52–53, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³¹ World Bank, "Mexico: The Initial Education Strategy" (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, October 1992); and Government of Chile, *Un gobierno para los nuevos tiempos: Bases programáticas del segundo gobierno de la concertación* (Santiago: Government of Chile, ca. 1996).

³² ECLAC, *Education and Knowledge*, pp. 56–57.

professionalism of teachers—without a single word on how these moves will translate into benefits for the subordinate groups of society.

The second ECLAC document, *Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995–2001*, envisages the “achievement of gender equity, and the complete integration of women into the development process, together with the full exercise of citizenship in the framework of sustainable development with social justice and democracy.”³³ What is “full citizenship” for women? ECLAC defines it as the “development of the capacity for self-determination, the expression and representation of interests and demands, and the full exercise of individual and collective rights.”³⁴

The *Regional Programme of Action* identifies 28 strategic objectives, of which one most related to education appears in “Area II: Economic and Social Development with a Gender Perspective” and sets out “to ensure that the population in general, and especially girls and women, have access to formal and informal education that prepares them for the full exercise of their rights and of full citizenship, equitable participation in decision-making and the egalitarian sharing of family and household responsibilities, and to ensure that girls remain in the educational system.”³⁵ It offers the following 14 strategic actions, not ranked in order of importance: (1) promoting reforms in formal and nonformal education, reorienting research, and adapting school curricula; (2) promoting increases in budgetary allocations for education; (3) ensuring that all countries comply with the agreements adopted on promoting the education of women and girls; (4) eliminating sexism and other forms of discrimination from educational processes and the messages conveyed by education and the mass media; (5) conducting research and taking action to eradicate female illiteracy and to reduce women’s dropout and repetition rates; (6) reducing disparities in access to tertiary education, where they exist; (7) promoting women’s access to nontraditional scientific and technical careers; (8) establishing and promoting communication policies and strategies to combat stereotyped images of women and men in the media; (9) conducting multidisciplinary research on the different roles played by women throughout history; (10) ensuring the creation of a policy environment that facilitates the access of dropouts and teenage mothers to continued education; (11) promoting the access of women to physical education and sports; (12) incorporating the issues of environment and sustainable development, sexual and reproductive health, and gender equity into programs

³³ ECLAC and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Regional Programme of Action* (n. 1 above), p. 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Strategic Objective II. 4, p. 29.

of study and improving their content, to promote greater responsibility and awareness in those areas; (13) developing educational actions to take advantage of the talents and skills inherent in women's cultural identities; and (14) fostering collaboration between organizations of women's movements and government institutions in the formulation of proposals on education policies.³⁶

While this strategic objective goes well beyond school access to contemplate content and completion of the educational cycle, it is contradicted by another statement that proposes "actions that guarantee respect for cultural identities."³⁷ The need for curricular change is made explicit in this section, but curriculum itself is muddled. There is, for example, the strategic action that locates in a single consideration such issues of differential importance as gender equity and the environment, and identifies sexual and reproductive health as independent problems. Further, recommendations for teacher training are buried within communication policies to combat stereotyping in the media.

Another objective calls for action "to provide women and men with education from an early age to promote sensitivity to and knowledge of human sexuality, gender equity, and cultural diversity."³⁸ Unfortunately, this objective is listed in "Area VII: Recognition of Cultural Plurality in the Region" which also calls for women's need for gender equity and "respecting cultural diversity and identities."³⁹

While other ECLAC documents address the provision of educational and training programs on the political rights of women so that "more women may occupy political posts at the grassroots, state, national, regional, and international levels,"⁴⁰ important mediators between women and power are not recognized. Thus, violence is not linked to conditions that affect "shared family responsibilities" nor to women's power and participation (or lack thereof) in decision making. The *Regional Programme of Action* makes only a passing reference to the need to retrain teachers in order to modify their instructional practices and alter their occupational expectations of boys and girls. The unranked order and lack of discussion about the issues in the 1995 document suggest the need for greater understanding of gender issues in education. Nonetheless, the *Programme* offers potential for change, if duly implemented.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 29–30.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁸ Ibid., Strategic Objective VII. 2, p. 57.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Paulina van der Aa, "Women in the Decision-Making Process in Latin America and the Caribbean," photocopy (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mar de la Plata, September 1994).

The Inter-American Development Bank and Its View of Democratic Societies

The IDB has become interested in "strengthening civil society," which it sees as "an essential part of a comprehensive, sustainable and equitable process" and as a means to "consolidate democratic societies."⁴¹ The proceedings of the IDB-organized Conference on Strengthening Civil Society held on September 12–14, 1994, at its headquarters in Washington, D.C., state that "the most novel and essential elements of contemporary civil society are the exercise of citizenship, representation, and participation." Education, information, and public debate play a crucial role, for "the greater the separation between public and private discussion, the greater the erosion of civic participation and responsibility among the various partnership groups."⁴²

While the IDB sees the democratic process as involving multiple agencies, "governments, business, trade unions, political parties, NGOs, foundations, intermediary and grassroots organizations, and individual citizens,"⁴³ the conference was attended almost exclusively by major international figures. For example, speakers at the inaugural ceremony were the USAID administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean, the director-generals of the Institute of Ibero-American Cooperation and the Pan American Health Organization, the United Nations Development Program regional director, and the president of the IDB, and the audience consisted of representatives of governments, parliaments, international organizations, bilateral cooperation agencies, and civil-society organizations.⁴⁴ In light of the circuits in which feminist women operate, it can be inferred that women and feminists were substantially underrepresented.

The conference proceedings acknowledge the role of civil society in "building channels of participation and empowering citizens to take full advantage of them." Yet, only slight attention is paid to women, who are discussed only in a passing reference offering "firm support for processes of political and administrative decentralization, the creation of intermediary organizations, and the training of leaders, particularly among young people, women, indigenous peoples, the poorest, and among local or municipal officials."⁴⁵ The discourse about supporting intermediary organizations and at the same time training individuals to be leaders, as if they existed independent of their institutions, sounds shallow. Further, the conflation of women, indigenous peoples, the poorest, and young people

⁴¹ IDB, *Summary Report of the Conference on Strengthening Civil Society* (n. 2 above), p. 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

without concern for how they might merge or conflict with one another highlights the unreflective nature of the statement.

Democracy and the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD)

A positive measure in favor of democratization in Latin America is the establishment of the IAD, a nonprofit think tank conducting research on such matters as the labor market, governance, and education. Created in 1982 as a nonpartisan institution, the IAD promotes sustained exchange among opinion leaders of the western hemisphere, and policy analysis of economic and political relations in the Americas. Members comprise more than 100 "dirigentes" (leaders), with funding from private foundations, international organizations, corporations, Latin American and European governments, and individuals—including the Organization of American States, the IDB, the International Development Research Center, USAID, and the Swedish Agency for International Cooperation.⁴⁶ In other words, it is an organization of mostly men with substantial authority in governments or research centers.

While such a distinguished membership should not disable the IAD from pursuing gender issues and questions of race and class, it has not yet promoted much attention toward them. The IAD has organized several conferences and produced various position papers; its most complete product on education is a two-volume book edited by Jeffrey Puryear and José Joaquín Brunner, American and Chilean social scientists, respectively.⁴⁷ Volume I—written entirely by men—considers educational effectiveness, finance, technological change, and international cooperation. Equity is mentioned, with the traditional reluctance to identify any specifics: equity for whom and how. The only exception is the contribution by Joseph Farrell, in which he advises that attention must be given to local knowledge, warns against "top-down, centrally driven and command-oriented forms of implementation" and calls for the participation of "people representing all of the groups which have a stake in the way in which their society manages the provision of opportunities for its citizens (young and old) to learn."⁴⁸ Volume II presents seven country case studies of education written by 14 well-known scholars in the social sciences, half of whom are women, and focuses on equity and economic competitiveness fostered by schools. The accounts of Mexico, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Uruguay, and Colombia make no reference to gender issues, except

⁴⁶ Program for the Promotion of Educational Reform in Latin America "PREAL." Brochure (Santiago: PREAL, ca. 1994).

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Puryear and José Joaquín Brunner, eds., *Educación, equidad y competitividad económica en las Américas: An Inter-American Dialogue Project*, 2 vols., vol. 1, *Key Issues* (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 1995).

⁴⁸ Joseph Farrell, "Education Cooperation in the Americas: A Review," in Puryear and Brunner, eds., vol. 1, *Key Issues*, pp. 67–97, see pp. 88 and 97, respectively.

for a sentence in the Venezuelan case study acknowledging that women constitute the majority of illiterates in that country.⁴⁹

In the meek discussion of educational equity in these studies, the topic is examined primarily in terms of access and completion levels, but these rates are not systematically disaggregated according to social class, occupation, ethnicity, or gender. The one social marker the book recognizes is social class, not as class per se, but rather as "low-income groups." Thus, acknowledged inequities are defused by not explaining who suffers and who benefits. Equity is also examined in terms of ability to perform well in reading and mathematics, but the authors do not consider content that could produce social transformations and they avoid other social markers such as ethnicity. The subtext is composed of only "mainstream" men's perspectives of education and its purpose. The absence of gender issues in these case studies is not to be taken lightly, since the IAD is perhaps the best-endowed and most-likely institution to influence the definition of democracy in the Americas. Coordinated by the IAD and CINDE (Corporación de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo, based in Santiago, Chile) and with \$1.6 million support from the IDB, a Program for the Promotion of Educational Reform in Latin America (PREAL) has emerged. The program will establish teams headed by persons with solid reputations in the social sciences and education who will "carry out studies and initiate high level national policy debates that will lead to the development of recommendations for reform"⁵⁰ in the following highly esteemed institutions: Instituto SER de Investigación (Colombia), Fundação Getulio Vargas (Brazil), Foro Educativo (Peru), Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales (Guatemala), Universidad Centroamericana (Nicaragua), and FLACSO/Dominican Republic. Yet, with the exception of the Vargas Foundation, they do not include people known for an understanding of gender issues. The teams will work with "business, political, labor, professional, and religious leaders to identify educational problems and develop innovative solutions."⁵¹ PREAL intends to "promote an informed regional dialogue over educational policy" and seeks to incorporate in this dialogue "social actors who, although interested in the modernization of the educational system, do not participate in the formulation or implementation of politics in this sector."⁵² The program is also interested in developing capabilities and competencies for participation in the globalized world and deploying national efforts to construct "solid and stable

⁴⁹ Puryear and Brunner, eds., vol. 2, *Country Case Studies*, pp. 346–47.

⁵⁰ IDB, *Social Dimensions* (n. 19 above), p. 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵² PREAL, *PREAL Informa*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Santiago: Programa de Promoción de la Reforma Educativa en América Latina, 1995), unpaginated.

democracies."⁵³ These proposed networks might continue to exclude feminist groups from both academia and nongovernmental organizations. On the basis of the first set of case studies (coordinated by the IAD and CINDE) and the participation of individuals and organizations in conferences organized by these institutions, it can be forecast with some degree of confidence that future activities and policies will have a minimum representation of feminist thought and experience.

School Democracy and the Women's Movement

Feminists have made efforts to democratize schooling through, for instance, influencing international understandings regarding the role of education in peace, equality, and development. The most recent document from such forums has been the *Platform for Action*, publicly discussed and officially approved at Beijing in September 1995, which identifies measures to improve women's education in terms of access, content, retention, and participation at all school levels. It recognizes the role of education in the processes of democratization and offers a substantial number of possible actions—from teacher training and retraining to the production of transformative school curricula.

There have been efforts in Latin America to democratize education from outside the formal school system. One significant project is conducted by the Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres (REPEM) and affiliated with the Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL). REPEM, composed of activists and academics, is implementing a project on nonsexist education and has suggested the following actions to make education gender transformative: (1) promote the creation of opportunities for boys and girls to discuss in critical and creative ways the sex-gender system and its consequences on social and work life; (2) make gender issues more visible in educational environments; (3) support processes by which teachers discuss sexual discrimination and fragmentation and identify social opportunities for both genders; (4) eliminate the sexist features of curricula and educational materials; (5) incorporate into the curriculum the contribution of women to the development of culture and society; (6) promote the analysis and revision of programs that train women for the labor force to eliminate all forms of discrimination and segmentation; (7) sensitize and train teachers to eliminate sexist practices and to improve their performance to attain an effective equality between women and men in the educational process; and (8) incorporate in teacher training curricula the themes of gender and equal opportunity for men and women.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Programa Interdisciplinares de Investigaciones de Educación, cited in Red de Educación popular entre Mujeres, "Primer informe de actividades del proyecto, 'Educación humana no sexista: Por una sociedad igualitaria que respete las diferencias,'" photocopy (Red de Educación popular entre Mujeres, Montevideo, September 1995).

These ideas reflect many of the feminist contributions made in North and South America in the last 20 years, and could be further strengthened by recent feminist research in the North—including democratization of the curriculum by incorporating women's experience in history, literature, and the arts; "restructuring our conceptions of worthwhile knowledge for all students"; and introducing a feminist pedagogy that challenges bureaucracy, hierarchy, and competition in educational institutions.⁵⁵

REPEM's work, with direct relevance to the democratization of schooling, is funded at a fraction of PREAL's initiative. Although it has conducted workshops in several Latin American countries and disseminated an educational video entitled "Pandora's Box," conference proceedings and position papers remain in mimeo form and are accessible only on request. Moreover, linkages between REPEM affiliates and government education officials vary widely by country.

What is currently happening in Latin American schools is still far from the identified gender-transformative objectives. Some textbook revisions to eliminate gender stereotypes have reportedly occurred in Mexico, Colombia, and Guatemala. Effective revisions were initiated in Argentina, but, just as they were going to become institutionalized, the Catholic Church truncated them. Teacher retraining on gender-sensitive content and instructional methodologies has taken place in several countries, but it has been sporadic and has reached only a small number of teachers. Structural adjustment programs, which have reduced investment in educational materials, are likely to retard curriculum changes along gender lines.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the large-scale initiatives to reform education (e.g., PREAL) focus on quality, competitiveness, decentralization, and linkages between education and the labor force—leaving out issues of gender equity and transformation.

Expanding the Greatest Cultural Revolution

Transformations brought about by the realization of the need to bring the relations of women and men to a new order are inexorable and qualify as the most important cultural revolution of the twentieth century. An updated notion of democracy must consider concepts, procedures, and attitudes that relate to everyday practices and acknowledge the connection between micro- and macrodemocracies. Stable democracies are characterized by dense social networks in which people develop rules of exchange and compromise. Democratic nation-states supported by diffuse demo-

⁵⁵ Jane Gaskell, "A Feminist Agenda for Canadian Education," *Our Schools, Ourselves* 1, no. 1 (1988): 8–21, esp. 17.

⁵⁶ Fernando Reimers, "The Role of Organization and Politics in Government Financing of Education: The Effects of 'Structural Adjustment,'" *Comparative Education* 27, no. 2 (1991): 35–51.

cratic norms at lower levels of society—such as the home, school, and workplace—will find it difficult to revert to authoritarian modes.

While there are strong initiatives to prepare civil society and governmental institutions for massive and enduring democratic environments, we are at the same time witnessing a gradual but certain process of social reproduction that will leave the gender order undisturbed. Through avoidance of specific references to problems affecting women and by pursuing a definition of democracy that ignores the private sphere, actions to ensure “democratization” in Latin America will exclude women and maintain their subordinate condition. Democracy cannot occur until women are equal citizens; yet, a democratic citizenship calls for more than voting at elections and having political representation. Democracy requires open discourse on power. At present, those who hold power in Latin America use it to declare gender inequities, particularly in education, a nonissue.

Democratization will call for a greater role by the school in questioning its own practices as well as students’ experience at home. The school will have to expose conditions and causes of gendered and other forms of subordination. Some may respond that the school cannot teach “nonacademic” issues. For example, one common argument raised about sex education is that it is a private issue best treated in the home. But, since the home is not addressing these social topics—nor can it, given internalized ideologies—the school will have to take over.

That the state will be willing or able to do all this remains a tenuous proposition, since it is staffed by persons whose socialization and interests promote the gender status quo. Further, the state is facing the onslaught of conservative forces who are questioning the legitimacy of its politics, revaluing the nuclear family, and, through the reduction in state welfare services, giving women responsibilities for social caring.⁵⁷

Why do so many men and some women with good minds and intentions remain oblivious to gender concerns? Part of the answer may be traced to the spatial location that these individuals and feminists occupy—where their institutions maintain a minimum of contact with each other, and they seldom have access to each other’s literature.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, men in international organizations and social science research institutions do not see it necessary to learn feminist concerns and analysis.

⁵⁷ Anna Yeatman, “Contemporary Issues for Feminism: The Politics of the State,” in *Gender Matters in Educational Administration and Policy: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Jill Blackmore and Jane Kenway (London: Falmer, 1993).

⁵⁸ There may also be reasons of a risk-averse behavior that shies away from political constructions. One example is the recent document by the World Bank on gender-based violence. The report “Violence against Women: The Hidden Health Burden,” by Heise with Pitanguy and Germain (n. 14 above), explicitly ties wife battering and other forms of social control not to the existence/absence of democracy (i.e., equality in the home) but to their impact on women’s health.

Hence, it becomes easy for gendered delusions and exclusions to remain. But, since human beings can change their views as they gain consciousness, it is hoped that exposure to new knowledge and to critiques of existing work may bring about a desire to correct actions.