

## Guide to the Book

Samuel Cohn and Rae Lesser Blumberg

Women's economic power is the strongest underpinning of women's level of equality in general—and a fundamental determinant of the dynamics of development. All too often, it is a backdrop in the study of gender and development and not the main focus. The purpose of this book, and the purpose of the leadoff chapter, is to put women's economic power back in the center of the analysis. The chapter "Power of the Purse" is Blumberg and Cohn's attempt to lay out a general theory of women's power. The chapter argues for the importance of women's strategic indispensability. It argues for the importance of women's strategic alliances. The rest of the chapter elaborates each of those two critical concepts, identifying the social correlates of both women's indispensability and women's alliances.

The causes and effects of gendered power are complex. The interrelation between gender and development is even more complex. There are far more causes and far more effects of women's economic power than can be listed in one chapter. This book is a fuller analysis of the causes and effects of women's power and its linkages to the development process. About one third of the invited chapters discuss the causes of women's economic power. The remainder cover the effects of such power. There are tie-ins to a broad variety of social changes both in the Global North and in the Global South.

The authors in this collection are some of the most prestigious and most important writing in the sociology of gender and development. Each was invited in because of his or her distinguished past contributions to gender analysis and because of her or his distinctive personalized point of view. The chapters are, by design, very different from one another. Nearly all of them extend the study of women's power, gender, and development in new and interesting directions that go beyond the already broad scope of our introductory chapter. As a result, this book is full of surprises. Surprises are good.

What does the book have above and beyond the Blumberg and Cohn general theory of women's economic power?

The *Hristov* piece is bloody. It shows how women in the Global South become disempowered during campaigns of rural proletarianization. In Colombia, there is a gigantic land grab as local capitalists and military men expel peasants from their lands and homes so the capitalists and military men can create agribusinesses and development projects for themselves. Women are pawns in this brutal game of dispossession. Rape is a standard tool for punishing women who refuse to abandon their lands. Sexual access to poor women is the reward for the men in death squads and paramilitary units who do the dirty work of forcing people off the land.

Blumberg builds on her theories of gender stratification and gender and development, introducing a new concept: "the created biology of gender stratification." Where women have economic power, the "created biology" helps them "be all that they can be" and often aids men

as well. Where they don't, consequences can extend from malnutrition to murder. She examines females' equal economic position and gender equality among hunter-gatherers (about 96% of our *Homo sapiens* history) and shows that bonobo females' economic power and peaceful leadership undercut the view that men and all our close primate kin are "nasty animals." She traces women's economic power through history to today, providing new insights into horticultural and agrarian societies and today's Global North versus South.

The *Moghadam* piece is a double lesson on the evils of petroleum and the beneficent power of women's organizations. Moghadam contrasts Iran, where women are relatively powerless, with Tunisia, where women are relatively empowered. Iran's economic development is based on oil, an industry that marginalizes women. Tunisia has a more diversified development plan that emphasizes export industries in which women play a key role. Women are strategic assets in Tunisia because the economy needs their labor. Women are also better organized in Tunisia. Women's organizations produce a more favorable legal and political environment for women, which in turn gives women further economic and social advantages.

*Jalali* describes the economic and social consequences in India of women's lack of access to basic facilities of menstrual hygiene. It is difficult to maintain feminine sanitation in environments where women have no economic power. Furthermore, in rural India, sanitation is hard to maintain due to the lack of running water and sewage systems. However, cultural taboos, women's lack of or insufficient income, and restriction of their freedom of action are crucial factors that deprive women of access to modern sanitary napkins, washing facilities, and secure places for performing bodily functions. Women are at increased risk of gynecological problems and infections. Women's participation in work and education is restricted in much of rural India, especially. Powerlessness produces sanitation problems, which further increase women's powerlessness.

The *Cohn* piece shows how men's choices affect the economic power available to women. Most employers are male. They decide what occupations will be male and what occupations will be female. When do they let in women? When they need to economize on labor. When they need to export. When they have to work with other companies with women in strategic decision-making positions. Other special cases exist as well. These decisions to offer jobs to women reflect the different economics of different types of firms. The economics shape men's willingness to hire women. Men's willingness to hire women shapes the ability of women to enter occupations with organizational power.

The *Boatcă and Roth* article is a powerful reminder that economic power is shaped by those arbitrary social constructions known as national borders. Citizenship grants massive economic opportunities to some women while denying them to others. Ability to negotiate or contravene national borders becomes an important strategy for gaining economic power. Boatcă and Roth discuss migration, as well as how gender creates narrow and idiosyncratic roads to upward mobility through changing the legal definition of one's citizenship. Obtaining the legal right to migrate is often extremely sexual; the negotiation of national status occasionally must be done on one's back.

The *Leicht and Baker* piece has a contrarian but serious alternative view of women's power. Superficially, it would seem that women would be better off if they were economically powerful and men were less powerful. Leicht and Baker argue that this is not necessarily so. When men lose status, they become resentful and dangerous. They take their frustration out in greater violence against women. Leicht and Baker review the global consequences of males' resentment of their declining economic position. Not only do women face increased personal victimization, but they also face increased political powerlessness as men work to regain their lost status by supporting ever more antifeminist political movements.

*Berry* discusses how war affects women's power by considering the aftermath of civil wars in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nepal. Losing family in warfare is always tragic. However, she points out that the loss of husbands and fathers can mean the loss of significant protection for women and daughters. In patriarchal societies, women who have lost their men are vulnerable to exploiters hoping to seize their lands and resources. Women in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nepal had to respond to postwar threats by organizing among themselves for their own protection. This led not only to the creation of significant women's organizations but also to the greater inclusion of women in national politics.

*Rothchild and Shrestha* show that despite the progress documented for Nepali women in *Berry's* piece, life for females continues to be difficult in this poor country. Patriarchal norms are deeply ingrained. The authors interview Nepali women of various castes and ethnic groups to learn how this affects individual women's lives. Women have limited access to education and credit. Limited opportunities for women's employment lead to poverty and hunger. Nongovernmental organizations have been less than successful in providing meaningful alternatives. Migrating from Nepal is often one of the few good options. However, men who migrate limit women's access to foreign money. Women face legal barriers to migrating themselves. Women become trapped in lives of powerless drudgery with few meaningful economic prospects.

The *Fish and Sprague* piece covers an organizational attempt to improve the situation of one of the world's largest economically vulnerable populations of working women—domestic workers—by gaining them the support of the International Labor Organization. Women who work in homes as cleaners, cooks, or nursemaids are absolutely subject to low pay, long hours, arbitrary bad treatment, and too often, sexual assault at the hands of employers. Strange but true, there are now international conventions and accords to protect the union and legal rights of these workers. Fish and Sprague tell the story of how these implausible protections came about. Strategic allies and supportive organizations play a big role here.

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Some of the chapters are theoretical. Some are graphic and violent. Some chapters discuss great victories. Others cover appalling defeats. Some chapters show women cleverly working the system. Others show the system utterly crushing women. All the chapters show something new and unexpected about gender, development, and women's economic power.