From the Other Side

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"A map of the city would show more stripes than on the skin of a zebra, and more colors than any rainbow," Jacob Riis wrote of New York’s immigrant neighborhoods in 1890. Riis would have found the other side even more colorful. Irish immigrants came to the United States as Cork- or Connaughters; Germans came as Bavarians or East Prussians; Italians came with village identities as Sambucese or Palermitani; even Jewish immigrants distinguished Galizianer from Litvak and Chasid from Maskilim. Today’s "Latina" or "Hispanic" arrives thinking of herself as Cubana, Quesqueyana, or Norteña. The local identities of the other side defied bureaucratic efforts to categorize it on Ellis Island; it defies contemporary affirmative action guidelines.

Still, regardless of their precise origin, women began their transformation from the female half of the other side to female immigrant in response to the demands of capitalist expansion and national and colonial governments, demands involving only limited variations on a very small number of themes. Manipulating traditional gender ideologies in a changing context, the people of the other side responded not with hundreds of culturally distinctive coping strategies, but rather with only a few. For this reason one need not treat the experiences of Chinese, Italian, and Scandinavian women as wholly unique (although in other respects, of course, they were): these three groups of women shared key experiences in subsistence agriculture on the other side. Their experiences can be contrasted with those of Irish, Jewish Russian, and Japanese women, whose migrations are traceable instead to the spread of female wage-earning in the nineteenth century. Moreover, despite their very different backgrounds, one can usefully note how much today’s immigrant women from Cuba, Cambodia, China, Antigua, or Mexico resemble this second group of women. On the other hand, both earlier groups of migrants included women uprooted at least partly by the disruptive effects of colonialism and state formation. For contemporary migrants, too, political conflicts emerging from state formation and the end of colonialism remain an important influence.

**IN TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM: SUBSISTENCE PRODUCTION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Scholars agree that few migrants permanently leave economies based exclusively on subsistence production, where family groups work together to provide for most or all of their own needs. International migrants instead emerge
from homelands in transition to capitalist production. Most also leave regions which are either being integrated into newly forming political units or connected with disintegrating ones. The lives of women who left the other side as migrants are thus intimately bound with the histories of economic and political development of their homelands.

In rural northern Europe, Ida Lindgren married Gustaf, a large-scale tenant farmer in Skåne, Sweden, in the late 1850s. The two initially prospered, and ate well—Ida would later miss the sweet-sour rye bread she baked and the drink she brewed of fruit from her own trees—but after a few years, poor harvests ruined prospects for a family that had grown to include five children. In 1870, the Lindgrens migrated to Kansas. Most of Ida's first reactions to life in the United States revolved around changed weather conditions, natural phenomena, crops, and food.

Lalu Nathoy, a member of one of the many ethnic minorities of the Chinese empire, also worked on the land from an early age. Laboring beside her father, Lalu planted soybeans, covered over sweet potato plantings, and picked peanuts. After her father returned from a temporary emigration to Manchuria circa 1870 with sufficient cash, he risked all his savings to become a commercial wheat-raising farmer. Perhaps trying to emulate the mores of bourgeois China, he also ordered his daughter out of the fields and bound her feet. Unfortunately, poor weather destroyed his entire wheat crop. Perhaps sensing the vulnerability of this upstart (and now impoverished) family, a bandit gang led by one of her father's disgruntled hired hands attacked the Nathoy farmstead. They kidnapped and raped Lalu, and then sold her to an international trader who did not care that she still had feet "like dragon boats." She was approximately 14 years old at the time.

About the same age as Lalu in the 1930s, Emma Ciccotosto lived in Italy's mountainous interior. Her father had made several trips to the United States, and he was in America at the time of her birth; later he migrated again to Australia. Emma’s mother, with the help of her three children, farmed a bit of land during her husband’s absences. She and the children lived in a house of baked mud brick and raised grain to bake into the pizza crust they ate with home-grown vegetables and oil. They cared for chickens and a cow and, working together with neighbors and kin, cut and threshed wheat for bread. Their farm and their labors fed and clothed them: Emma’s mother raised flax to spin and then weave into cloth for her daughters’ "treasure boxes," or dowries.

Growing up in opposite corners of the world, the lives of all three women nevertheless reflected the rhythms of agricultural life and family ties to the soil. Divisions of labor by gender varied considerably in each place, as did the family and kinship beliefs of each of the women. In the early nineteenth century, the peasants of chilly Scandinavia wrung a difficult existence from the land by combining grain cultivation with animal husbandry and small-scale crafts. A typical farm passed from father to eldest son, but most men managed to acquire at least a small amount of land. An eldest son took over from
his father when the older man retired; the son would bring his wife into a common extended "stem" household. Until their children could work, the son and his wife would hire farm hands and maids for room and board or for small payments in cash and kind. As the older generation died and growing children replaced outside workers, the household would turn into a "nuclear" one.6

Peasant women’s work included care of the animals, the children, and the house; the processing and preparation of food; and the production of cloth and clothing. Men’s responsibilities included building, grain cultivation, and provision of adequate fuel and forage. Men shared their agricultural tasks, albeit in carefully defined ways, with the women of their households. Thus at haying time, men cut while women raked. At harvest time, men reaped and threshed while women gleaned. Men less frequently took part in women’s chores.7

Education, too, began and sometimes ended at home. Lutheran and Pietist Norwegians and Swedes believed the religious education of the family lay in the father’s hands, but both boys and girls learned to read. Some continued for a few years in a local government-sponsored school, but not many enjoyed education beyond basic literacy and figuring.8

Farm households more frequently required the help of farm maids than male farm hands. Young women left their own families to work caring for animals on other farms. During the summer months, the farm maids took the animals to upland pastures; the farm wife supervised the production of butter or cheese. If the wife sold either at market, she controlled the cash she earned.9

The independent work of farm maids seems also to have given Swedish women some control over sexuality and marital choices. Farm hands often visited farm maids in their sleeping quarters, and as a boy’s expectations of inheriting a farmstead increased, courting couples often began sexual relations. Although Protestant Scandinavians scarcely sanctioned premarital sex, and the male and female gossips of their small villages cruelly stigmatized illegitimate children and their mothers, few objected—or remembered—when marriage followed quickly upon pregnancy.10

In Italy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, agricultural organization, family structure, and the division of labor by sex differed considerably by region. As in Emma’s family, subsistence production for a smallholder’s nuclear family often was women’s work, while men produced industrial goods for sale, or worked for wages in construction, or performed paid seasonal harvest work for commercial agriculture. In other areas, however, women spun or wove while men farmed. In some areas, commercial farms engaged the labor of extended family groups; in others they hired only men or only women.11

Italian fathers and mothers perceived daughters as heavy financial burdens, since daughters needed dowries before they could marry. After their marriage, however, women controlled the family purse and arranged their
children's marriages. In this way women exercised considerable family influence. Mothers became the emotional centers of their immediate families; they were idealized through comparison to the Virgin Mary. But they also created and helped sustain the kin networks upon which Italians depended for cooperative production and for social and economic security.

Strained by the new Italian state's accelerating demands for taxes after 1860, Italian peasants periodically revolted. Women figured prominently in the crowds that murdered tax collectors, threatened draft officials, sacked local grain merchants' storerooms, and burned down city halls. Nevertheless, women were excluded from many self-help organizations founded by men, notably friendly societies (fraternal orders).

On the other side of the world, Chinese women did not belong to the lineage of their fathers, yet they lived in a world organized around extended groups of patrilineal kin, and Confucian respect for patrilineal ancestors provided their spiritual grounding as well. In China, peasants hoped to prosper by farming in multi-generational patrilineal households. A father, his married sons and grandchildren, and their wives and children shared a household, a farm, an economic destiny, and a common reputation. As in Italy, the division of labor by sex varied considerably by region. Among the Chinese poor, women commonly worked in the fields and fished in flooded rice fields or rivers. In the south, ambitious or more prosperous women worked instead in and around their homes—producing cloth and clothing, processing and preparing food, and caring for and rearing children.

Because patrilineal clans needed sons to survive, Chinese attitudes toward female children, and their marriage customs, differed from Western ones, though misogyny was common to both areas. Hard-pressed mothers neglected unwanted girl children. To avoid the payment of expensive dowries and bride prices, poor women gave up their own small daughters for adoption into the families of the little girls' future husbands. Such adopted daughters-in-law bore surprisingly small numbers of children, perhaps because marital ties between men and women raised as siblings were sexually weak. Adopted daughters-in-law, however, enjoyed better relations with their mothers-in-law than older brides, who found it difficult to transfer obedience and emotional loyalty from their own mothers. Within the patrilineal descent group and household, Chinese women created mother-centered, "uterine" families in which mothers determined the emotional climate of family life for their subordinates. Women cultivated strong ties above all to their sons, but also to favored daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

Families without sons faced grave economic problems. Since children were expected to support their parents in old age, unmarried and only daughters in poorer families frequently worked as prostitutes; being regarded as fulfilling their filial obligations, they enjoyed community and cultural support in doing so. Most prostitutes eventually married, although usually as minor wives or concubines in large households.

Similarities between women of the other side and those of the racial minorities of the United States seem particularly obvious among groups en-
gaged in subsistence agriculture. In the Southwest, for example, Hispanic men became increasingly involved as hired hands in commercial agriculture and as seasonal labor in mining and construction, while Hispanics took over the responsibility for feeding their families back in the home village. By continuing to cultivate land collectively with their female neighbors and maintaining longstanding exchange networks in labor and food, they also sustained communal traditions in the face of capitalist demands for individual wage-earners.21

In subsistence areas around the world, family and kin groups worked together to feed, shelter, and clothe their members with no more than limited recourse to wage-earning and the market. Strongly held ideals of a collective family economy dictated the lives of all. In each case, a family economy required all family members to contribute to the family's needs; in return, the family functioned to meet the needs of its members.22 Protestant, Catholic, and Confucian beliefs all sanctioned the sacrifice of individual needs for the good of the kin group, though patterns of kin relations varied considerably in the three regions.

Productive and reproductive work were indistinguishable in subsistence agriculture; peasant lives were not divided between a female private and a male public world, between female reproducers and male producers, or between "work" and "life."23 Still, it is clear in all the three cases we have examined that gender determined the nature of a person's obligations and rights—and often to women's disadvantage. In all three cases, however, women contributed crucially and materially to group well-being; many gained influence through motherhood, though they worked longer hours than men.24 Typically, too, women of limited resources could build kin networks to support their emotional and material well-being. Finally, among all the peasants described here, men shared with women a joint subordination to government power-wielders that was just coming under challenge in the nineteenth century.

Clues to women's status in subsistence economies are contradictory and inconclusive.25 Generally, subsistence producers valued men more than women, and they welcomed the births of boys more than girls. In Latin societies, furthermore, men believed they had to control women's sexuality (their potential for incurring "shame") or all in the family lost honor and social status.26

Thus subsistence production in family economies encouraged male-female cooperation but also left room for gender conflict. The dynamics of this "cooperative conflict" or "interdependence" can scarcely be teased out of historical documents.27 Evidence of virulent misogyny in European and Asian folklore and religious teaching is easy to find but very hard to interpret: we cannot know if it principally reflected social reality, functioned as an ideological sop to politically powerless men, or bolstered male esteem in the face of women skilled as manipulators of kin resources.28

Throughout the world, subsistence producers responded to the increasing pressures of capitalism and political centralization by adjusting gendered
divisions of labor within family work groups, assigning women and the old more to subsistence production and food-raising, and men and the young more to wage-earning. We do not know how decisions like these were made, nor just how to interpret them in terms of their effects on women’s situations. Viewed from one perspective, peasant men are seen as having begun to modernize and innovate while subsistence-oriented peasant women lagged behind, preserving older tasks. When the change is considered, however, in combination with national and colonial initiatives to empower men through military training, political rights, and land reform, it is easy to understand why anthropologist Barbara Rogers relates the beginning of women’s “domestication”—their relegation to a distinctive, home-centered world apart from men’s—to the decline of subsistence production.29

INDUSTRIALIZING HOMELANDS: WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In parts of Europe and Asia in the nineteenth century, early capitalist incursions into subsistence-production economies generated further economic development, culminating in industrial production, wage-earning, and the rapid proletarianization of peasants. Industry developed in extremely localized fashion, and regional economic development spurred migrations to areas with jobs, making industrial metropolises out of cities like Tokyo, Shanghai, Berlin, Stockholm, Liverpool, Milan, Budapest, Moscow, or Lvov almost overnight. In response, women increasingly dedicated themselves to wage-earning and the search for a cash income.

In a small town near Warsaw in Poland early in the twentieth century, Beatrice Pollock’s parents operated a tiny store in the Jewish ghetto of 200 families. Beatrice’s father traveled, purchasing groceries, while her mother managed the store. Beatrice received home schooling because Jewish children had been barred from the public schools. By age five, Beatrice began helping out in her parent’s store. The job consumed ever more of her time as she grew older, and she chafed under the harsh supervision of a stepmother after her mother died.30

More prosperous, Pollock’s contemporary Michiko Sato was the third daughter, and one of eight children, of a sugar merchant family in Hiroshima City, Japan. Both of her parents managed the family business, which employed twelve people. Her mother—the “real boss,” according to Michiko—insisted that the children go to school, but she did not otherwise supervise their lives; she was too busy at work. Servants cooked meals and cleaned their house. Michiko worked in the family store until an emigrant asked to marry her.31

Norah Joyce grew up in a family of seven children, five of them girls, on the Aran islands off the Irish coast. Like most island families, the Joyces supported themselves by combining farming, fishing, herding, and handcrafts.
At twelve, when Norah had finished parish school, she began doing housework for summer vacationers on the island; at fifteen she went off to Dublin to work as a servant in one of their homes. A native speaker of Gaelic, Norah learned English in Dublin. Then in 1928 she emigrated to the United States.32

The choices of Irish women like Norah Joyce reflected Ireland’s colonial status, within easy reach of Great Britain’s expanding cities and industries. In the 1840s Ireland had suffered one of the most severe crises of subsistence agriculture in all of Europe, as over a million died during an extended potato blight. In the aftermath of the famine, Irish life changed in all essential details. Partible inheritance, youthful and universal marriage, and high fertility disappeared; primogeniture, late marriage, high rates of celibacy, and sharp declines in marital fertility replaced them. Without land, no one could marry in the countryside, and regardless of sex, they had to seek their fortunes elsewhere.33 While Ireland itself offered few jobs for women, domestic service and textile jobs beckoned in England (or in colonial administrative centers such as Dublin).

Irish Catholicism and traditions of sex segregation made domestic service particularly attractive to Irish women, who saw work in middle-class homes as a protection against undesired contacts with men.34 Moreover, like women in Scandinavia and Germany, Irish girls saw work in a middle-class urban kitchen as a step up from farm labor. It introduced women to bourgeois domestic practices and to the rudiments of genteel womanhood.

Unlike other Catholics, furthermore, the Irish did not disparage life-long celibacy. Indeed, Ireland stands out as one of the few European countries where late marriage and high celibacy rates did not result in climbing rates of illegitimacy. Burgeoning Irish Catholic sisterhoods offered unmarried women a world apart, where they could support themselves as religious workers.35 Given a high degree of gender hostility in Irish culture, Irish women weighed wage-earning spinsterhood and convent life against marriage and sometimes found the latter too risky.36

After the famine, Irish women defined themselves in strikingly economic terms.37 Whether married or single, they assumed they ought to earn money whenever possible. Women viewed waged work as a necessary form of social security, since the outlook for marriage was limited, and the prospects of widowhood for wives (who married late) quite high.

Jewish women of eastern Europe also defined themselves in economic as well as familial terms.38 In Russia, Poland, and Austria, Jews had always been excluded from agriculture. Russian economic development and the growth of industry further reinforced Jewish concentration in commercial and industrial pursuits, as petty peddlers, as small-scale or marginal artisans, and, eventually, as early factory wage-earners.39

A religious faith based on adherence to and interpretation of written laws covenanted with God, Judaism exalted the learned man and scholar. All Jewish boys received the rudiments of training for religious scholarship. By contrast, few girls received much religious education beyond the domestic
rituals that were women's responsibility. Most learned to read and write. Because marriage to a young scholar might require women to become bread-winners, girls more often trained for a life of work.40

Settled in small market towns throughout the Russian Pale, Jewish women figured prominently in local commerce and exchange.41 Jewish market traders bought and sold from the Gentile peasants among whom they lived and worked. Unlike Beatrice Pollock's mother (who was sickly), many traveled the countryside, maintaining contacts with peasant suppliers and purchasers. Wives who did not peddle or trade worked beside their shoe-maker or tailor husbands.

As a religious minority in a Russian Orthodox empire, shtetl Jews often bore the brunt of violent peasant attacks, or pogroms. The Russian state provided Jews little or no protection, and in some cases even encouraged ethnic violence.42 Peasants' hatred of Jews focused mainly on men, whom they falsely charged with murdering Christian children for religious rituals. But the Christians' violence did not stop with males, and both Jewish men and women especially feared for women during peasant attacks, since women might be raped as well as killed.43

Fleeing pogroms and poverty, poor, single Jewish women gravitated toward cities offering factory work.44 There, urban life and separation from their natal families sparked further change. They learned of the Jewish enlightenment and of the secular pursuit of justice for oppressed peoples. Inspired by such ideas, girls began to demand secular education for themselves.45 In the early factories of eastern Europe, Jewish girls also encountered the first rumblings of the Jewish labor movement.46

Industrialization had also begun in Michiko Sato's homeland. In rural Japan, as in post-famine Ireland, peasants maintained family farms (called ie) big enough to sustain family life only by strict adherence to impartible inheritance. Most children had to leave their home community.47 New taxes demanded by the Japanese state in the 1870s plunged farm households into debt and crisis; as in Italy, China, and eastern Europe, violent peasant revolts followed, as did the search for new sources of cash.48 While Michiko Sato worked in a prosperous family business, a much larger population of newly proletarianized Japanese female wage-earners were attracted by humbler jobs in Japanese cities.

As in China, the place for girls in rural Japanese villages was tenuous.49 Not only were poor girls subject, like their brothers, to being abandoned or being "sold" (indentured) into service, but they were much more likely than boys to be killed in infancy.50 And, as in China, it was girls who were "to be sold"—that is, turned over to the kin group of their grooms-to-be. (Commercial language was employed in both societies because marriages required the groom's family to pay a "bride price," while the bride brought a dowry with her into her marriage). In strong contrast to China and much of southern Europe, however, Japanese women received as much education as sons, aver-...
As Japan's rulers encouraged industrial development in order to protect the country from Western exploitation, new jobs drew Japanese girls beyond their rural homes and family circles. Unmarried women found work in inns and in traditional industries (tea processing, paper-making). Farmers' daughters also made up the vast majority of workers in Japan's new and rapidly growing textile industry. Other girls worked in construction and mining. Overall, in 1900, women were 60 percent of Japan's industrial labor force. Parents received the wages of their indentured daughters who worked in mills far from their northern, mountainous homes. Living in dormitories, mill workers suffered constant surveillance and discipline, even in their free time.52

Factory girls fared better, however, than daughters contracted into lives as entertainers or prostitutes in official urban brothels. While some daughters dedicated themselves to paying off their family's debts in this fashion, others rebelled and sought to escape. But few who began work as prostitutes could return to rural life or to other jobs.53

Japanese daughters did not escape rural traditions of courtship and marriage. Mill workers continued to depend on their parents to arrange their marriages into the twentieth century. These arranged marriages eventually facilitated the migration of Japanese women like Michiko Sato to the United States.54

With further capitalist development and urbanization, the lives of the women of the other side increasingly revolved around the search for wages as the best means to "a living." Polish women migrated to Germany;55 northern Italian women migrated to Swiss textile towns.56 Swedish women went to Stockholm to work in middle-class kitchens, while Czechs and Slovaks headed for Vienna or Budapest in search of similar jobs.57 In Europe, young girls moved cityward in larger numbers than their brothers as demand for domestic servants in middle-class households skyrocketed.58 Thus women's migration began with wage-earning on the other side.

In some ways, wage-earning supported female autonomy. Young women earned individual wages, far from the immediate supervision of parents or brothers. Factory operatives shared the company of other girls much like themselves—an experience which could encourage both labor militancy and the creation of urban youth cultures.59 But in other respects, old loyalties to family economies survived mobility and wage-earning. Many young urban workers, male and female, returned their wages to mothers or fathers remaining behind in the countryside.60 In still other ways, new job options obviously created new forms of female subjugation. The farm maid in Scandinavia's summer pastures with her cows did not eat as well as the urban domestic servant in Stockholm, and her environment offered few new or exciting entertainments. But she undoubtedly enjoyed more independence.61

As women's work lives changed, so too did their options for marriage and family life. The age at marriage increased for both men and women; with the delay of marriage rates of illegitimacy often rose as well.62 Concerns about
the sexuality and morality of domestic servants and factory girls, and more
generally about any unmarried women living apart from their families,
strongly colored discussions of female autonomy and the formation of the ur-
ban working classes on the other side.

For the men of the other side, capitalist development, proletarianization,
and their insistence on acquiring political power went hand in hand. New na-
tional or imperial governments called upon men to serve in their armies; for-
mer peasants and serfs demanded that their voices be heard, too—as male
citizens. As this "nationalization" of common men proceeded, the status of
ordinary women seemed to decline relative to men's. But the most daring
women also began claiming the rights of full citizenship for themselves.63

Industrialization required new coping strategies of rural peoples no
longer able to grow their own food or return to the land that had fed, housed,
and clothed them. Young female wage-earners' move beyond the immediate
supervision of parents, kin, and home community brought dangers as well as
new opportunities. Even among daughters like Beatrice Pollock or Michiko
Tanaki—who still worked at home in family groups—contact with the mar-
ketplace and the city introduced women to a wider world and to new ways
of thinking about it. These were important preconditions for the migrations
that extended outward from the developing areas of the other side to the
United States.

**WOMEN AND THE OTHER SIDE IN RECENT DECADES**

Today's migrants to the United States also typically begin their lives in the
developing parts of the third world.64 For example, Thann Meng ("Celia")
Vann Noup was born into an educated middle-class family in Cambodia,
where her father was principal of a primary school. After finishing college in
Phnom Penh, Vann studied for six months in Michigan, then returned to
Cambodia in 1955 to marry and teach. Her husband, a soldier, became com-
mander of anti-Communist forces opposing North Vietnamese incursions
into Cambodia. Together, the couple had four daughters. After the United
States left nearby Vietnam, Vann knew the Khmer Rouge would triumph, so
she sent two daughters to her sister in Paris. With her other children, Vann at-
tempted to flee, leaving her husband in a city under siege; she never saw him
again. A number of harrowing years of starvation in Khmer Rouge camps fol-
lowed, then escape to refugee camps and the United States.65

Mrs. Rosalyn Morris was born in Jamaica in the 1930s. Her mother had
died young, and her father had gone away, so a grandmother raised her. At
thirteen Rosalyn left school to begin work caring for young boys in a board-
ing school for thirty cents a week, plus her room and board. Later she moved
on to a better job in the capital, Kingston, where she lived in as servant for a
white family. By 1958 she had five children and worked as a cleaner in a Chi-
nese store. With many of her children growing up, however, Mrs. Morris decided to go to New York, leaving her youngest child with an aunt.  

Maniya "Honey" Barredo was a child star on Philippine television by the time she was eight. The daughter of a former ballerina, she began dancing as soon as she could walk. Raised in a comfortable but troubled large family in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, Honey came to the United States at eighteen in order to audition for the American Ballet Center, the school for the Joffrey Ballet.

Some immigrant women still leave lives in subsistence agriculture. Asylum-seekers Isabela Ramírez and her husband Francisco, Kanojobal Indians, grew up in the mountains of Guatemala. After a number of years of courtship, they began a common-law marriage. Together the two managed a herd of seventy sheep, but could raise little other food for their children, who rarely ate more than three tortillas a day. When government troops annihilated nearby Indian villages in 1981–1982, Isabela and Francisco, with many fellow villagers, decided to follow cassette-tape messages sent by emigrated kin to the United States.

Like Beatrice Pollock from Jewish Russia and "Celia" Vann Noup from Phnom Penh, refugee women entering the United States since the 1930s have often enjoyed middle-class lives in their homelands. Typical are the many urban and middle-class women of Cuba who fled political repression after the Communist revolution in 1960. The earliest Cuban exile women were solidly middle- to upper-class, often well educated by the standards of their home country. Nevertheless, a sharp cultural divide between the "street" and "the house" had defined their lives; in Cuba "respectable" women led domestic lives. To enter the street or public sphere as a wage-earner reflected negatively both on a woman's sexual morality and on the masculinity and bread-winning capabilities of her husband; it also carried with it the stigma of a fall in class status, since only poor Cuban women worked outside the home. Thus, though daughters raised in wealthy Cuban families received education as a mark of their class, they understood that their futures would revolve around marriage, family, and the complex social world of the Cuban elite. Families celebrated a daughter's coming of age with elaborate ritual, but carefully protected her virginity.

Refugees from rural Laos—predominantly Buddhists—were, like Isabel Ramírez, among the poorer refugees. Until the 1970s subsistence agriculture organized by large extended households persisted in Laos, and material standards of living were extremely low. Families raised rice and vegetables to eat; fish from flooded rice fields supplemented their simple diets. Women's education was even more limited than men's. Lao kinship principles encouraged Lao daughters to bring their husbands to live with or near their parents' households. Typically the youngest daughter then inherited parental property. As a result, women lived and raised their children semicommunally among groups of women kin they had known since infancy. Men (who, if
wealthy, might take more than one wife) seemed peripheral to life in an extended Lao household.\textsuperscript{71}

In the third world today, as in rural Europe and China in the nineteenth century, domestic division of labor by gender has changed as capitalist production, foreign trade, and colonial bureaucrats have expanded their influence.\textsuperscript{72} Initially women limited wage-earning in order to continue subsistence production and childrearing.\textsuperscript{73} Substantial numbers of Latin American peasant women found themselves labeled “unemployed” as a result.\textsuperscript{74} Yet state-supported agrarian reform transferred land titles only to men, and trained only them in new agricultural techniques.\textsuperscript{75}

For most third world immigrants, however, work for wages and in small business ventures replaced subsistence production long before they left for the United States. Among the intelligentsia of the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe, in South America, and even in the Moslem Middle East, for example, education and training for professional employment are elite privileges shared by men and women, rather than male prerogatives. Many women of elite third world families pursued advanced study and professional training in Europe, the U.S.S.R., or the United States. Although some entered “women’s professions” (defined differently in the Communist world, the Middle East, and Latin America), their education prepared them for a life of wage-earning.\textsuperscript{76}

The same is true of humbler third world women, for whom wage-earning and money have become essential considerations. The search for wages, as in the past, first spurs their migration to developing cities.\textsuperscript{77} But the exact nature of poor women’s urban work differs by region and culture. In large parts of South and Central America and the Caribbean, urban demand for domestic servants draws huge numbers of rural women toward the slums of rapidly expanding new cities, from Medellin to Santo Domingo or Port-au-Prince.\textsuperscript{78} (In Lima, 90 percent of women migrants become domestics.)\textsuperscript{79} Women migrants to Latin American cities outnumber men. But migrants with children often find that market work as buyers, sellers, and traders allows them to continue familial responsibilities more easily than domestic service. (Female trading in the Caribbean and Latin America also builds on long-standing cultural traditions with roots in American Indian and African practices.)\textsuperscript{80}

Although their work is similar, the family patterns of servants and market traders in Latin America and the Caribbean differ significantly from those of their Asian and European counterparts of the nineteenth century. It is true that in Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean, the middle classes remain influenced by Spanish traditions: the family ideal is monogamous, lifelong, and religiously sanctioned marriage, with child-rearing carried out within nuclear family households.\textsuperscript{81} Many Afro-Caribbeans and poorer women throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America, however, prefer informal, short-term common-law marriages. Women form households with their mothers, young children, grown daughters, and grandchildren; they may or may not invite their current male partners to join them. Female rela-
tives help care for and house the children of women working in domestic service or marketing.82 These women believe that casual liaisons limit their exposure to male violence and allow them greater economic flexibility in providing for their children, whom they regard as their main source of emotional support.83 A rapid rise in the number and proportion of female-headed households has accompanied economic development throughout the Caribbean and the mushrooming cities of South America.84

In parts of Southeast Asia and Mexico, new “global factories” have become the primary employers of city-bound rural women. Often built by Western investors, factories locate where labor is inexpensive and unorganized; most produce for highly competitive consumer markets in the United States and Europe.85 Young unmarried women work for very low wages in these electronics, plastics, clothing, and food-processing factories.86 In Southeast Asia, women make up forty percent of the industrial workforce.87 Their parents see factory employment as a new and better way for girls to contribute to family economies,88 and many working girls return substantial portions of their wages to their parents. Mexican girls working in factories gain slightly more control over their wages in time, but they too usually begin work to contribute to family economies.89

How much autonomy Asian or Mexican girls gain through their work remains controversial. Asian parents fear that girls living in dormitories and working in factories will reject traditional courtship and marriage rituals. Dating has increased among factory workers, as has the average age of marriage among the young women workers in Taiwanese global factories. Arranged marriages, however, have not disappeared, and most girls leave factory life to become daughters-in-law in complex extended patrilineal family households, which depend on wage-earning by several members.90

The homeland experiences of today’s third world women do reveal some striking similarities to those of the developing parts of the other side in Europe and Asia in the late nineteenth century. In both these “other sides,” we find wage-earning work, migration to nearby cities, and experiments with life beyond parental families becoming important female experiences—and ones that facilitate further migration.91 Still, the similarities between nineteenth- and twentieth-century other sides should not be overstated. Third world women, especially in the Caribbean and in Central and South America, are accustomed to a degree of economic self-reliance that few Asian and European women enjoyed in the late nineteenth century.92

**CONCLUSION**

Every culture on the other side used gender to assign differing tasks and responsibilities, but precise notions of appropriate female behavior nevertheless varied significantly around the world, especially in regard to women’s place in family systems. For the last two centuries, differing traditional notions of proper womanly behavior within families have confronted broadly
similar economic transformations introduced by capitalism, along with political changes sparked by the demands of nations and empires for taxes and loyalty. Subsistence producers responded to these challenges at first by seeking to limit the penetration of the state and of wage-labor into their homes, mainly by having women carry on subsistence activities while men moved beyond subsistence. By contrast, in some areas of Asia and Europe in the nineteenth century and in an ever-growing portion of the third world today, capitalist development, cash-based commerce, and wage-earning dominated (and dominate) the lives of rural and city dwellers, of rich and poor, and of men and women alike.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, and increasingly in the twentieth, the women and men who have immigrated to the United States have left behind the economically developing areas of the other side of the capitalist world economy, rather than the poorest and most subsistence-oriented areas. Migration to the United States has always extended migrants’ involvement with capitalism, even when it was intended to protect subsistence families from capitalism, as in the case of lone men temporarily migrating in order to earn extra cash for their families. Today’s immigrant women enjoy better educations and greater familiarity with wage-earning work, with urban life, and with industrial workplaces than did the European and Asian women of the early to mid-nineteenth century. As will be discussed below, substantial numbers have benefited from solidly middle-class or elite privileges in their homelands.

Whether the confrontation with capitalism in the homeland introduced women there to greater autonomy is a complex matter. What many women in the United States accept as female autonomy—individual wage-earning outside a family economy and full participation in a “public world”—was also an index of female proletarianization on the other side. It seems a troublesome oversimplification to label these changes emancipatory when women lost resources they valued—notably kin ties and familial self-sufficiency—in the process.

As the next chapter follows the women of the other side to the United States, the importance of their starting places will be apparent. Not only did it matter whether a woman was Irish or Chinese, Italian or Japanese, Cuban or Kanjobal—with all their attendant culturally distinctive gender assumptions—in her own homeland; it also mattered whether she had lived as an isolated peasant for whom the challenges of wage-earning were brand new, or had been a domestic servant, factory worker, or market woman already accustomed to an urban and commercial life and a national identity. Where a woman started from culturally, economically, and politically heavily influenced where in the United States she landed—both as an immigrant worker and as a woman confronting the United States’ new and different gender assumptions.