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**GENDER BIAS IN NEOCLASSICAL ECONOMICS:
A CASE STUDY OF VIỆT NAM'S ECONOMIC TRANSITION**

JANICE L. MOORE

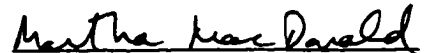
**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in
International Development Studies at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia,
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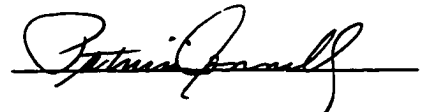
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Signatures of the Examining Committee:

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Supervisor**



**Dr. Patricia Connelly
First reader**



**Dr. Andrea Doucet
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Abstract

“Gender Bias in Neoclassical Economics: A Case Study of Việt Nam’s Economic Transition”

by Janice L. Moore
Submitted July 24, 1998

The mode of development thinking which has emerged as the pre-eminent model over the past two decades is essentially based on the underlying beliefs and goals of the neoclassical economic model. The neoclassical economic model is a reflection of the experiences of the white, northern men who developed it. Despite adjustments for the modern day, the underlying assumptions on which the model is based have been preserved. These assumptions do not reflect reality and, as a result, have an adverse affect on those on whose realities the model was not based. Too much evidence now exists of restructuring’s disproportionate burden on women to dismiss these effects as coincidental. Both theoretical debates and empirical evidence have gone a long way to prove that there is an inherent gender bias in this model and the policies which result. The gender bias in neoclassical economics and its policies all but guarantees that women will bear the brunt of the negative effects of economic restructuring.

This thesis applies the analysis of gender bias in the neoclassical economic model and its derived policies to the case of Việt Nam's economic transition, in order to demonstrate the inevitability of restructuring’s negative effects on women’s position in gender relations. Việt Nam presents a particularly pertinent case for inquiry into this matter for several reasons. The socialist model prior to transition left a smaller gender gap than in many developing countries, making an assessment of change since transition less complicated. The government’s public promise to maintain social equity while adopting a market economy suggests there was no political intent to dispense the negative effects unequally on the population. Finally, the fact that Việt Nam's economic transition has been considered a relative success by the international economic community provides a more telling basis for analysis of relative change than in countries experiencing overall negative economic results from Structural Adjustment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“The purpose of development is to enlarge all human choices, not just income” (1995 Human Development Report, UNDP: p.11).

All human choices. And choices for all humans? Development theory has long been criticized for its biased distribution of benefits and burdens on the populations of developing countries. Development practitioners and academics from north and south have led virulent attacks against the very *raison d'être* of the development industry, arguing that the underlying propositions, policies and projects are inherently favourable to northern, urban, white, males (or a combination thereof) (Gunder Frank, 1996; Norgaard, 1994; Mehmet, 1995; Escobar, 1992; Shiva, 1988). Vast amounts of research have amassed providing evidence of systemic and fundamental problems with current mainstream development thought.

Within the development and academic communities, few would disagree that the mode of development thinking which has emerged as the pre-eminent model over the past two decades is essentially based on the underlying beliefs and goals of the neoclassical economic model. The acceptance of “efficiency” goals and the need for restructuring (enforced or self-imposed) has demonstrated that mainstream development and neoclassical economics diverge very little in their underlying assumptions and the policies derived from them. The neoclassical economic model has also endured a similar history of criticism for the way that it classifies and values individuals and society. As current mainstream development is largely based on

the fundamentals of neoclassical economics, corrections to problems in development thought must begin with the neoclassical economic model.

Development should be about actively seeking to increase choices for as many people as possible. Any development model or policies which either purposely or by omission overlook or refuse to consider a significant proportion of the affected population is biased. The Oxford dictionary defines bias as “an opinion...or influence that strongly favours one side in an argument or item in a group or series” (Hawkins, 1988: p.74) The definition suggests several possible manifestations of bias: in conscious thought and action (opinion), or in unconscious thought through acts of omission or oversight by way of advantage (influence).

Concern about gender bias among academics and development practitioners coincided with the rise of the women's movement three decades ago. It became increasingly evident that women were being systematically ignored in most mainstream theories and policies. A wealth of literature now exists on the issue of gender bias in the neoclassical economic model (Cagatay, 1998; M. MacDonald, forthcoming; Bakker, 1994a; Kabeer, 1994; Woolley, 1993; Ferber and Nelson, 1993; Folbre, 1988) and the resulting policies of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) (Sparr, 1994; Bakker, 1994; Elson, 1989). Both theoretical debates and empirical evidence have gone a long way to prove that there is an inherent gender bias in this model and the policies which result. The purpose of this inquiry is to apply the analysis of gender bias in the neoclassical economic model and its derived

policies to the case of Việt Nam's economic transition, by linking the model and its policies to the real and differential impact on the population.

Việt Nam's economic transition presents an excellent case for inquiry into gender bias in the model and policies for several reasons. Việt Nam undertook the process of economic transition at a very different starting point than most developing countries in terms of gender. The socialist model meant that prior to economic transition the gender gap was relatively small. This fact makes assessing changes to the gender gap since transition began easier than in many developing countries, where change from restructuring must be measured against often enormous discrepancies which existed prior to economic change.

The Vietnamese government publicly committed itself to maintaining social equity at the same time as adopting the transitional economic model. This suggests that the government assumed these two goals could be achievable simultaneously, and that there was no political intent to dispense the negative effects unequally on the population. Finally, to date the economic transition in Việt Nam has been considered successful in economic terms by the international economic community. This contrasts with many of the countries experiencing the negative effects of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), where GDP and other traditional means of measuring success have dropped substantially.

The idea of critiquing the mainstream development/neoclassical economic model for gender bias is not an original one, nor is the argument that Việt Nam's transition is affecting

women more adversely than men. The originality of this thesis comes in drawing a direct correlation between the biased model and policies, and the biased effects of economic restructuring. While research and criticism abound within the academic community on both these issues, the biased policies continue to be pursued. Tying these two arguments together will help strengthen the direct link between the model and its impacts, and add another strand of evidence to the ongoing discussion of the effects gender bias.

To achieve this, the thesis will highlight the most relevant assumptions underpinning the model and the policies which are consistent with this model. The critiques of these assumptions and policies will then be applied to the case of Việt Nam's transitional policies and the resulting changes in gender relations and relative status of women to men. Finally, a variety of strategies and alternatives to overcome the model's negative impacts on gender relations in Việt Nam will be discussed.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the evolution of women's position in development theory, and the rise of feminist economics. The theoretical framework, methodology and methods adopted for this thesis are then presented, along with a brief overview of the most relevant literature on the issues at hand. Chapter Three delves into the neoclassical economic model, feminist critiques of the underlying assumptions on which it is based, and evidence of gender bias in economic restructuring policies. In Chapter Four, the case study of Việt Nam's economic transition is introduced, providing background on the country, people, and the economic restructuring process. Chapter Five brings together the

feminist economic debates on gender bias and the effects of Việt Nam's economic transition on gender roles and relations, providing insight into the consequences of gender bias in neoclassical economics on people's daily lives. Chapter Six presents an overview of various alternatives to the policies and model currently being followed, as well as some concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives

2.1.1 Historical Overview of Women's Position in Development Theory

The field of development grew out of the post- World War II effort to rebuild Europe. The prevailing assumptions about “progress” and the need to “modernize” underlying this effort were transposed onto the “underdeveloped”¹ areas of the world. Mainstream development theory was defined in terms of economic growth through modernization, with the assumption that the benefits of growth would “trickle down” to improve the general standard of living.

Classic development authors such as W.W. Rostow, with his linear explanation of the development process, formed the basis of the development model which became predominant in the field's early years (Rostow, 1990). The initial conceptualizations of development left little room for analyzing regional, cultural, environmental, societal contexts which did not necessarily coincide with northern experiences. Similarly, decades of development initiatives passed before any mainstream thought was given to the role and situation of women in the development process. Prior to the 1970s, it was either generally assumed that development

The terms progress, modernize and underdeveloped are being used here in reference to development thought processes of that era. They are intended to demonstrate the mentality that prevailed during this period, and by no means reflect the author's perspective.

projects affected women and men in the same way (“women walk on roads also”)², or their effects on women were not considered significant.

The tide began to turn with Ester Boserup's seminal work, Women's Role in Economic Development in 1970. Based on her research in rural Africa, Boserup revealed major flaws in the assumptions behind the effects of development projects on women. Boserup argued that not only were western assumptions about the division of labour and decision-making processes of dubious relevance to many African farming households³, but the effects of such misunderstandings were potentially devastating for women's position in the household and community (Boserup, 1970).

Since the early 1970s feminist academics, researchers and development practitioners have fought on a variety of levels to have the experiences of women recognized and incorporated into development issues. Following Boserup's lead, the early feminists writing on development argued from what has come to be known as the “WID” (Women in Development) approach. As with all new theoretical perspectives, WID was a product of its environment and was strongly influenced by both mainstream development and liberal feminist theories which prevailed at that time (Rathgeber, 1989). WID was based on the belief that

²This quote has been related by Jane Parpart, but its origins are not known by this author.

³ In this thesis, Francine Blau's definition of household will be adopted. For Blau, a household is considered to be: “one or more persons living in one dwelling unit and sharing living expenses” (Blau, 1986: p.6).

women must be incorporated into the economic sphere in order to become beneficiaries of economic growth stimulated by modernization projects (Rathgeber, 1989). WID advocates sought to lighten women's workload and improve their efficiency to enable them to participate and become more productive in economic activities (Overholt et al, 1990).

Disappointment over the limited ability of WID proponents to affect lasting change led some feminists in the 1980s to gravitate towards a more transformative agenda. One of the more influential of these perspectives became known as the "GAD" (Gender and Development) view of development. GAD theory was developed in the 1980s largely by socialist feminists as a viable alternative to WID (Rathgeber, 1989). At the same time, a number of development theories were emerging as alternatives to modernization. Like WID, GAD borrowed its framework from the development and feminist theories of its era, incorporating many of the progressive aspects of development into its framework.

Development theorists at this time were promoting a number of alternative visions, including people-centred, human development, and empowerment theory, which were based on the assertion that economic growth in itself was insufficient to bring about improved standards of living for the general population. GAD borrowed from these approaches a grass-roots, participatory and empowering concept of development. The assumptions underlying the GAD perspective were often in direct opposition to WID and mainstream development thought. Whereas WID proponents believed in the need to incorporate women into the existing system, GAD theorists pointed to fundamental structural problems in the system.

These flaws have created and maintained gender identities and roles which systematically subordinate women to men (Moser, 1989). GAD proposed an empowerment-oriented transformation of the system itself, overturning the underlying structures of inequality which favour men over women in the distribution and control of resources, work, income, political and social participation (Moser, 1989).

The shift from “women” to “gender” reflected GAD's affirmation that it is the relationships between women and men, and not women themselves, which hold the problems and solutions to inequality (Moser, 1989). GAD attempts to encompass all aspects of gender roles, including productive, reproductive and community management activities. The shift also reflected the view that women are not an identifiable group with universal requirements based on their shared biological nature (Moser, 1989). GAD recognized that the needs and interests of women vary greatly depending on the socio-economic, ethnic and class contexts in which they live (Moser, 1989), and attempted to deal with the multiple oppressions of women due to class, race and gender (Young, 1986). While recognizing the importance of these distinctions, however, GAD proponents argue that “the ideology of patriarchy operates within and across...” these differences to the disadvantage of women (Rathgeber, 1997: p. 206).

2.1.2 Feminist Economist Lens

Some feminist academics have turned their attention to the predominantly economic aspect of mainstream development theory. Modern economic analysis has dealt with the issue

of women in a variety of ways, from discussion of wage differentials in the 1930s to household production during the 1960s and 1970s (Beneria, 1995). During these periods, however, inequalities between men and women were analyzed by focusing on the dynamics of the market rather than gender relations (Beneria, 1995).

The emergence of the women's movement precipitated economic interest in women on two distinct levels. The majority of analysts followed the path laid by the New Household Economics developed by Gary Becker, which applied market-oriented concepts and models to the household (Beneria, 1995). Some feminists, however, diverged from this direction, raising concerns about the narrowness of the standard models and their assumptions. Some sought answers in alternative models such as Marxism or institutionalism. Criticism of the neoclassical model grew during the 1980s, as rising conservatism and the negative consequences of SAPs became increasingly prominent (Beneria, 1995). At the same time, GAD theory and the popularity of postmodernist perspectives lent strength to the voice of dissent against the mainstream. Many of these perspectives converged during the early 1990s. Feminist economists formed the International Association for Feminist Economics in 1992, and the first issue of the organization's journal, *Feminist Economics*, was published in 1995.

The field of feminist economics is not simple to define in relation to other methodological approaches, as feminism in general is characterized by many voices expressing broad diversity in assumptions about human behaviour (Grapard, 1996). Within

the field of feminist economics, there is a broad diversity of opinions, perspectives and proposed solutions (Grapard, 1996). The discipline also claims a range of professionals, including economists, scholars from other disciplines, activists and practitioners (Grapard, 1996). The underlying feature in feminist economics which unites the diverse perspectives, however, is the view that there is a fundamental problem with all claims to knowledge that systematically ignore or downplay issues of gender (Grapard, 1996).

Feminist economists challenge the very assumptions underlying mainstream economic thought, and stress that there is an inherent gender bias in these underlying assumptions on which subsequent assumptions, prescriptions and policies are based. Criticism stems from the view that as with all theories, this model is a reflection of the experiences of the (white, northern) men who developed it. While the model has undergone some adjustments for the modern day, the underlying assumptions have been preserved. These assumptions do not reflect reality and, as a result, have an adverse affect on those on whose realities are not reflected in the model.

2.1.3 Other Perspectives

Questioning women's role in economic models is not a new phenomenon. Marxist and socialist thinkers in the late nineteenth century grappled with what was termed “The Woman Question”, women's status under capitalism. Frederick Engels was one of the first Marxist authors to deal specifically with women's relationship to the production process. In his book, The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884), Engels

postulated that private property, the dichotomy created between private and public sphere, and hence the rise of women's dependence on men, is the primary cause of their subjugation (Wilson, 1986). Engels argued that the integration of women into the productive market would all but eliminate discrimination:

“...the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible...as long as women are excluded from socially reproductive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree” (Engels, 19--: p.25).

The “double day” which burdens women with productive and reproductive labour would be eliminated with the complete socialization of reproductive activities once revolution had taken place (Albelda, 1997).

Some feminists in the 1970s attempted to find harmony between feminism and Marxism. Socialist feminists saw economic and sexual oppression as twin oppressors, and sought to confront them together. The Marxist analysis of capitalism provided insight for socialist feminists, but they argued that capitalism and patriarchy must be given equal priority. Socialist feminist analysis focussed on the dual domination of gender and class, particularly with respect to domestic labour, sexuality and reproduction (Wilson, 1986). For many socialist-oriented feminists, however, there remained substantial problems to overcome for working within the Marxist framework. Many feminists realized that Marxism views women's oppression, and other important non-class power relatives, as a derivative of class relations. For many feminists, it became increasingly evident that while exploitation

between classes was of primary importance for Marxists, the issue of exploitation within the same class, within the household, was being largely ignored. This was despite Engels' stated view that: "In the family, he is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat" (Engels, 19- -: p.20). As Heidi Hartmann affirmed;

"The marriage of Marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism. Recent attempts to integrate Marxism and feminism are unsatisfactory to us as feminists because they subsume the feminist struggle into the "larger" struggle against capitalism" (Hartmann in Albelda, 1997: p.127).

The experiences of women involved in socialist experiments lent further credence to the scepticism. Despite near-full participation in productive work, most women remained largely responsible for reproductive activities and experienced a dramatic increase in overall workload. For these and various additional reasons, many feminists became disenchanted with the Marxist development paradigm. Nevertheless, many leading feminists of today have retained important elements of a political economic analysis, and socialist feminists have played a principle role in the development of GAD and feminist economic theory.

An alternative perspective has attained considerable influence in academic circles in recent years. Proponents of a postmodernist feminist perspective have gained some support within development academia for their work to deconstruct meta-development theories and allow room for the diversity of women's experiences to be heard (Parpart and Marchand, 1997). At the same time, there is substantial criticism from opponents, who argue that taken to its extreme, the postmodernist feminist perspective is divisive, "an indulgence" (Parpart.

1997: p.1), and nullifies any possibility of action based on shared experience. The perspective does, however, offer some legitimate criticism of the way difference and multiple oppressions have tended to be shelved by other mainstream and alternative views of development and gender. There is a real need for greater appreciation and incorporation of diversity issues into the feminist economic and GAD approaches. While GAD makes attempts in its theoretical analysis to incorporate the various levels of constraints including, but not limited to, ethnicity and class (Moser, 1989), in practice GAD tends to fall far short of realizing a comprehensive strategy for dealing with diversity of experience (Rathgeber, 1997).

Feminist economists have only recently delved into postmodernism. The very nature of economics, with its “firm commitment to the modernist premises of (its) enterprise”(Amariglio and Ruccio, 1995: p.13), its dependence on rationality, economic agency, and determinism, makes it an obvious target for the postmodernist critique. Indeed, postmodernism may have directly contributed to the rise of feminist economics and the convergence between the two (Amariglio and Ruccio, 1995).

The reductionist basis of economic meta-theory lends itself to postmodernist deconstructionism. Some of the specifically postmodernist work undertaken by feminist economists include Donald McCloskey’s focus on economic rhetoric, and Diana Strassman and Julie Nelson’s discussions on discourse and dualities of economic theory (Beneria, 1995). Ulla Grapard (1992), Lee Levin (1993), Gillian Hewitson (1993), and Rhonda

Williams (1993) also figure among feminist economists who have explored a postmodernist approach (Nelson, 1996). This type of work “has facilitated the formulation of new questions about the discourse of economics and its androcentric biases” (Beneria, 1995). By bringing the issues of gendered subjectivities and knowledges to the forefront, postmodernist feminism has already contributed to the feminist economist agenda (Amariglio and Ruccio, 1995).

Many feminist economists explicitly oppose the connection of their work to postmodernism (Amariglio and Ruccio, 1995). Indeed, as with GAD practitioners there is apprehension among some that the tendency of postmodernism is to oppose any efforts to draw conclusions based on cultural or social analysis, stalling the discussion at the academic level and making policy alternatives and other action-oriented strategies impossible (Nelson, 1996). Among most feminist economists, however, there is growing awareness that their own particular form of “deconstructing” the discipline forces them to examine their own scholarship, and recognize that “women” is not a universal (Grapard, 1996). To discuss “women’s issues” without looking at specificity privileges one perspective on social relations at the expense of others, depending on age, ethnicity, class (Grapard, 1996).

It is possible to accept much of the postmodernist critique without accepting the “full, radically, subjectivist Postmodern prescription”(Nelson, 1996: p.138). Rather than adopt a pure postmodernist approach to their work, many feminist economists have opted to accept a perspective of postmodernist feminism which encourages them to “use a more

complex metaphor” (Nelson, 1996: p.146), but which does not necessarily hinder them from drawing conclusions and offering policy alternatives.

2.1.4 Theoretical Framework Adopted: a GAD-Feminist Economics Perspective

Both GAD and feminist economics are consistent with this author’s ideological perspective. The world views posited by these two approaches are strikingly similar. Some of the current leading figures in feminist economics have played principle roles in defining the position of GAD within the development debate, including Caren Grown, Lourdes Beneria, Diane Elson, and Bina Agarwal. In contrast to the WID/mainstream vision of society, both GAD and feminist economics perceive fundamental inequalities at the structural level, and focus on overcoming the resulting systematic subordination.

Both approaches focus on all levels of gender relations, from the individual and household unit to the national and international political arenas. Both underscore the importance of valuing all aspects of the work that women do, including productive, reproductive and community work. Both views focus on “gender” (as a fluid social construction) and the relations between men and women, rather than on “women” (as a universal biological entity) as the unit of analysis. Both attempt to incorporate other dimensions of diversity and constraints, particularly class, into the analysis.

The most discernible difference between GAD and feminist economics lies in emphasis in their respective prescriptions for change, reflecting the different focal points of

the two disciplines. GAD proponents have placed greater emphasis on action strategies at the micro level, using a dual approach of meeting immediate (practical) and long-term, transformative (strategic) gender needs and interests⁴. More recently, some have entered the debate on developing a macro strategy. One such effort is “Gender Planning”, an approach which seeks to incorporate the realities and experiences of women and relations of gender into policy (Moser, 1993). Most feminist economists are concerned with restructuring the economic model itself, arguing that fundamental changes to the underlying assumptions offer the most effective means for change. At the same time, the development of alternative policies and methodologies do play an important role in the work being done by feminist economists. The GAD-feminist economist perspective is the framework within which this thesis has been developed, and will provide the basis for subsequent analysis.

2.2 Methodology/Methods

There is no hegemonic feminist methodology (M. MacDonald, 1995). The early concern with feminist methodology was to critique existing empirical and quantitative approaches. GAD researchers have generally tended toward research approaches advocating empowerment and transformation. These forms of research should involve a specific focus on activism and participation (Reinharz, 1992). Approaches to research which are identified

⁴For more on practical and strategic gender needs and interests, refer to Moser, Caroline O. (1989a) “Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs” *World Development* 17 (11): 1799-1825.

by SIGAD⁵ as empowerment-oriented include participatory rural or research appraisal, farming systems, and action-oriented research (SIGAD, 1994). According to MacDonald, “Feminist economics is at a relatively early stage in addressing these issues...” (M. MacDonald, 1995: p.178). However, feminist economists have borrowed from much of the feminist methodological literature in recent years (M. MacDonald, 1995). For the purposes of this thesis, methodology is viewed as the element which ensures consistency between the chosen theoretical framework and the methods used.

A variety of constraints has made primary research for this thesis impossible, making a detailed section on consistent research approaches unnecessary. This short discussion serves only to explain how choices for use of secondary material were made in a manner consistent with the ideals behind the theoretical framework chosen for this study. Sources used in the economic debates for this thesis have not necessarily been chosen to provide a balance between mainstream economists and feminist economists. Instead, most of the sources used for the economic debates come from feminist economists, who are able to provide both background on pertinent issues and critiques on certain positions. The validity of their critiques will be explored by relating them to real experience in the case study of Việt Nam. The arguments will be tested by making the connection between the theoretical analysis of the model, the resulting policies, and the lived experiences of the transition in Việt Nam.

⁵Summer Institute on Gender and Development.

A research method is “a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence” (Harding in M. MacDonald, 1995: p.177). A variety of methods for assessing gender bias in Việt Nam's transitional model would be consistent with the above methodology. Indepth interviews, participant observation and surveys are all underutilized methods in economics (M. MacDonald, 1995) which would provide useful insights into the situation. Participatory research methods offer more empowering and potentially complex research results than other approaches. Perhaps the most accurate view of the changing realities in Việt Nam would result from household surveys carried out through primary research over a prolonged period of time, preferably with pre-transitional material to compare with current information. This type of data, coupled with information from participatory case studies and statistical data, would allow for an indepth representation of the complex nature of people's lives, negotiations and interactions. Although this thesis relies on secondary materials, a sufficient amount of research has been carried out by local and international scholars to make an assessment through the use of secondary sources.

One of the principle sources used for assessing the Vietnamese case is Dr. Tran Thi Van Anh's research. Dr. Van Anh is an Oxford-trained local gender specialist and researcher based at the Centre for Family and Women's Studies in Hà Noi. Some of the information and material presented in this thesis was obtained during a meeting with Dr. Van Anh in Việt Nam. During that meeting her views and methodology were discussed at some length. Dr. Van Anh's perspectives correspond closely to GAD, an approach which is consistent with her Oxford training. Most of Dr. Van Anh's primary research deals with the North of Việt Nam;

therefore while the general statements on policies can be generalized to the whole country, evidence of specific effects relates primarily to the North. Dr. Van Anh has concentrated much of her study on gender relations within the household, and her research on the subject will be used here. For more general information on access to resources, changes in education and health care, the thesis will rely on a wide variety of other materials, from both foreign and local researchers.

Several graduates of Saint Mary's M.A. IDS programme have written on related subjects with respect to Việt Nam and women/gender. Bui Thi Lan's thesis, "Gender Differentiated Impacts of the Changing Agricultural Policies in the North of Việt Nam", was based on primary research she carried out in the early 1990s in her home province. This thesis is intended to complement her work and expand the debate initiated by Ms. Lan. Similarly, Nadia Steuwer's thesis "Re-Thinking Development, Environment and Women in Việt Nam: Building a Feminist Sustainable Development Framework" has provided insights for this thesis.

2.3 Overview of Literature

There are three specific areas of research which are pertinent to this discussion: the feminist critiques of the neoclassical economic model; the policy critique; and the literature on Việt Nam's transition. Feminist economists have directed their criticism at two distinct levels: the assumptions behind the neoclassical model, and the policies consistent with this

model, most readily exemplified in SAPs. Feminist economist Diane Elson has written extensively on the issue of bias in neoclassical economics. In the introduction of her book Male Bias in the Development Process (1991a), Elson highlights the main critiques of mainstream economic thought. She argues that the use of gender neutral terminology such as “farmer”, “worker” and “family” hides gender differences which result from the sexual division of labour and resource allocation. The supposition that work which is not paid is of no economic value has made much of the work that women do invisible. Elson draws attention to the many mechanisms which support these biases, including every day practices, analyses and policy-making. The remainder of her book seeks to test the hypotheses of gender bias which she presents in her introduction: the policies instituted, their gendered effects, and various strategies undertaken by women around the world to mitigate the negative impact of SAPs on their lives.

In her article “The Feminist Critique of Economics” (forthcoming), economist Martha MacDonald overviews some of the main arguments made by feminists against traditional economic assumptions. She looks at “individual choice” as one of the basic underpinnings of economic theory, and argues that in reality, the amount of choice people have varies greatly depending on the structures that constrain them. Women are rendered invisible by economics' focus on market transactions, with only paid labour counted as “work”.

Nancy Folbre and Heidi Hartmann, in their article “The Rhetoric of Self-Interest: Ideology and Gender in Economic Theory”(1988), delineate some of the assumptions made

by economists which lead them to see gender differences as outside economic analysis. They argue that these assumptions lead to a dichotomized view of society, which defines and values concepts in relation to their presumed opposite, such as public/private, market/household, and self-interest/altruism. The article deals primarily with the self-interest/altruism dichotomy, and the assumption that while self-interest motivates individuals in the public domain, altruism rules in the private sphere. Folbre and Hartmann argue that the notion of “Joint Utility” within the household conflicts directly with growing evidence that a complex interaction of conflict and cooperation takes place in most households. The inability of economists to recognize this reality leaves no space for considering the critical issue of unequal resource allocation and bargaining power within the family.

Nancy Folbre's book, Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint (1993), adds both complexity and authenticity to the debate by insisting that the analysis include class, race and a multitude of other constraints. Folbre argues that both the feminist economic and GAD analyses fail to adequately deal with the complex nature of multiple constraints guiding peoples' lives and decisions. While many women face constraints on choice, decision-making and flexibility because of gender constraints, the intensity of their constraints depends largely on their positions with respect to class and race. Similarly, men may benefit from gender bias while being constrained by other forms of bias, such as those related to ethnicity, religion or economic status. It is clear that constraints cannot be viewed exclusively in terms of gender, and ignoring the diversity of people's constraints would result in a great over-simplification of the issues.

A great deal has been written on the gender bias inherent in SAPs and their effects in various countries around the world. In her contributions to the book Mortgaging Women's Lives: Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment (1994), Pamela Sparr begins her discussion by providing a detailed list of the key feminist economic critiques of the neoclassical model. In her list, she includes the assumptions that neoclassical economics is an objective science, that economics can exist autonomously from society, that the individual is the only truly relevant unit of analysis, that human nature is motivated by personal greed, and that people behave rationally and for their own interests. Sparr then highlights some of the inherent weaknesses and gender biases in these assumptions. The contributions which follow Sparr's introductory chapters provide empirical evidence of the gendered impact of SAPs from various countries.

Diane Elson has published several articles on gender bias and the effects of SAPs (Elson, 1991a; 1991b; 1989). In these articles, Elson argues that macro-economic policies which are developed on male assumptions often result in an unfair distribution of the burden of SAPs on women and men. Elson concentrates her discussion on several key SAP policies. Policy-makers view switching production from non-tradeable to tradeable goods as a costless operation, when in fact the household absorbs these costs. Social spending is cut in the name of "efficiency", when in reality the costs of reproduction are being transferred from the public and visible sphere to the unpaid, and generally female, sphere of labour. These transfers increase women's workload and decrease their ability to balance their time between productive, reproductive and community management activities. Elson argues that, contrary

to assumptions inherent in the model, women's capacity to undertake extra work is not infinitely elastic.

A significant amount of research has been carried out on the gendered impact of economic transition in Việt Nam. Foreign feminist scholars have prepared substantial works outlining the overall gendered effects of Việt Nam's transition. These articles include discussions on access to health, education, child care services, changes in productive, reproductive and community management work patterns, political representation and other general indicators. Principal foreign researchers and authors on these topics include Peggy MacDonald (1995), Melanie Beresford (1994), Julia Samuelson (1995), and Monica Fong (1994).

Local scholars, including prominent local researcher Dr. Tran Thi Van Anh, have undertaken the critical analysis of changes in gender relations within the household. Dr. Van Anh is particularly concerned with land tenure in the privatization of land, and its possible effects on gender relations in the household. "Household Economy and Gender Relations" (1995) provides an overview of some of the possible side-effects of land tenure certificates having been signed by males as heads of households. In her article, "The Direct Loan of Capital from the Bank to Develop Production and Gender Equality" (1992), Dr. Van Anh looks more specifically at the issue of land certificates as collateral and the problems women face getting loans without them. Dr. Van Anh and Nguyen Manh Huan deal with the overall negative effects of economic transition in "Changing Rural Institutions and Social Relations"

(1995). This literature, along with the wealth of material available on the feminist critiques of the neoclassical model and policies, provide a solid basis for linking the three perspectives into a coherent analysis of gender bias in Việt Nam's economic transition.

Chapter 3: Neoclassical Economic Model and the Feminist Critique

Neoclassical economics has now gained a pre-eminence unparalleled in this century. The “fall” of socialism has led to a general acceptance of the tenets of neoclassicism around the world. Global and national restructuring is taking place at an unprecedented rate. Policies voluntarily accepted in northern countries and forced upon southern countries adhere strictly to the neoclassical economic framework. The ever-increasing dominance of this model makes the research being done by feminist economists and other sceptics both crucial and timely.

3.1 Defining the Model

The neoclassical economic model was a product of the environment in which it was developed. New social conditions surrounding the European transition from feudalism to capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries radically altered views about society. The transition took place within the context of the Protestant, Industrial and Scientific revolutions (Wolff, 1987). The old theories based on feudal society no longer adequately explained experiences. The beginning of a new economic analysis first took hold in England where the Industrial Revolution had progressed most fervently (Wolff, 1987). Emerging natural law theories governed the shift from monarchy to constitutional government. These theories were based on the emerging view that individuals are naturally selfish in their pursuit of their rights as individuals to life, liberty and ownership of property (Fusfield, 1990). Humanism replaced God with Man at the centre of the universe.

It was in this context that a new economic theory arose, one which was fundamentally individual in nature (Wolff, 1987). This general economic theory provided by Adam Smith and refined by David Ricardo came to be known as “Classical Political Economy” (Fusfield, 1990). The analysis of economic systems followed the new political analysis of society. Smith advocated a system of natural liberty in which the individual would be left free to pursue and advance his own interests (Fusfield, 1990). Smith’s view was that the greatest hindrance to economic progress was government, a belief based on the government systems of the time, from which he developed his renowned faith in the “invisible hand” of the market.

Classical Political Economy dominated European thought about economics from 1780 to 1880. The Classical school of economics shifted its focus after the 1870s from macro-economics, the capitalist economy as a whole and its growth over time, to studies of the decision-making process of individuals and individual enterprises, or micro-economics. Concepts of “individual preferences”, “marginal utility”, “production functions”, and “marginal costs” were developed during this transition. The shift was significant enough to warrant a new name for the adaptation of the classical model, and neoclassical economics was the fruit of this evolution (Fusfield, 1990).

While the model has evolved over time, the main assumptions on which it is based have not been dramatically altered. The main differences between traditional classical economics and neoclassical economics relate to specific economic theories. The underlying assumptions about society and individuals have remained almost unchanged. The neoclassical

economic model rests on an analysis of how scarcity and choice underlie the allocation of resources. Competition and private enterprise in free and open markets are emphasized. The model focusses on individual behaviour motivated by rational self-interest. The economy is merely the end-product of individuals who always act to maximize their own material self-interest (Wolff, 1987). Individualism and self-interest are the key behavioural attributes built into this model (M. MacDonald, forthcoming). Individuals maximizing self-interest generate and determine the supply, demand and allocation of commodities and resources (M. MacDonald, forthcoming).

A set of policies consistent with the goals, values and assumptions of the neoclassical model underlies the actual restructuring processes taking place around the world. The primary objective of these restructuring policies is to correct imperfections in the market, resulting from government intervention and hindrances to the free flow of information and resources. The prescribed policies are geared to decreasing the role of government in economies, increasing private enterprise competition and specialization, and eliminating restrictions impeding trade, thereby allowing the market to function properly in allocating resources.

The policies dictated include currency devaluation, reduction in public expenditure, employment and wages, elimination of price and wage controls, abolition of subsidies, privatization of public services, and trade liberalization (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1990). Not all countries adopt all of the above-mentioned policies, nor do they all adopt the policies to the same degree. However, this combination of fiscal and monetary economic policies

forms the basic package of restructuring programs adopted in the north and imposed on the south.

3.2 Feminist Critiques of Underlying Assumptions

Feminists take issue with neoclassical economics on a variety of levels. For feminist economists, the key concern is the inherent male bias of the neoclassical model, a fundamental problem which relates to the assumptions which underlie all theories and policies connected to the model. These assumptions do not reflect the realities of most people. The model and policies are profoundly flawed and, as a result, women's disproportionate burden of the negative impact of adjustment becomes almost inevitable. The starting point for most criticisms is that women and gender relations, among other concerns, were omitted when the model was conceived. While the roles and positions of women in society have transformed over the past two hundred years, the model continues to overlook the realities of gender relations in society. Women have been left almost entirely out of the equation.

Feminist economists point to a great number of concepts which are based on explicit or implicit assumptions about individuals, motivations and society which do not reflect most people's realities. These assumptions can be found both in grandiose conceptualizations of humanity and the economic system itself, as well as in specific assumptions about the household and gender relations. The concepts of "individual agency" and the assumed

“objectivity” of economics provide examples of overarching and highly questionable assumptions made in the economic model.

3.2.1 Objectivity

Economics is defined as a social science and not a science precisely because it depends heavily on key assumptions made about society and individuals. Yet objectivity and neutrality remain fundamental suppositions underlying the neoclassical economic model. The notion of objectivity is grounded in the Enlightenment and the belief in the ability to establish universal and absolute categories of analysis and truth based on objective criteria. Objectivity goes hand in hand with scientific methodology, on which current mainstream economic analysis rests, which claims to be neutral and value-free, so that the same objective results will be obtained by anyone using the same methodology and methods.

Feminist economists argue that the neoclassical economic model’s aspirations toward objectivity are entirely consistent with its reductionist methodology. This Cartesian formulation of scientific method strives “to reduce involved and obscure propositions step by step to those that are simpler, and then starting with the intuitive apprehension of all those that are absolutely simple, attempt to ascend to the knowledge of all others by precisely similar steps” (Kabeer, 1994: p.72). In this way, the reductive approach to knowledge production seeks to break down components, study separate parts in isolation, and reduce the “background noise” of complex social realities (Kabeer, 1994).

In reality, neoclassical economics is based on culturally and historically specific interpretations of human behaviour (Sparr, 1994). The fact that the model allows for no differentiation of social realities means its relevance for the vast majority of the world's population is dubious. In the south, basic assumptions about access to "perfect information", competition and free market are wholly inappropriate. For feminist economists, neoclassical economics not only omits half the population from its analysis, but also bases its assumptions of "homo economicus" on a highly idealized and questionably relevant masculine (and northern) model (Grapard, 1996).

3.2.2 Individual Agency

The neoclassical economic model is also based on a presupposition of individual agency. Market outcomes are seen to reflect the preferences and abilities of individual decision-makers. This assumption completely denies the role of social norms and institutions in shaping preferences and constraining choice (Peterson, 1994). In reality, the choices people have varies greatly depending on the structures which constrain them (M. MacDonald, forthcoming; Folbre, 1994). The concept of individual agency also ignores constraints within the household, including the gender division of labour and the often unequal distribution of decision-making and bargaining power.

Individuals are viewed as the relevant unit of analysis rather than groups within society. The "separative self" concept assumes that individuals can be assessed in isolation (England, 1993). Society is assumed to exist outside of economics, and economics, to be

autonomous from social norms and influences (Peterson, 1994; Sparr, 1994). These assumptions simply do not reflect reality. Individuals interact with the realities that surround them, and social, economic and political pressures greatly influence an individual's desires and actions. Similarly, economics is certainly not autonomous, either from politics or social pressures. This is particularly true given the ever expanding trends of economic and political globalization.

It would be exceedingly difficult in the confines of a thesis to prove a direct link between the overarching theoretical biases of objectivity and individual agency and the economic transition in Việt Nam. The relationship is more evident in biases which relate to a specific component of society: in this case, gender relations and household. The definitions of value, and assumptions about the gender division of labour and joint utility within the household provide the tools to determine a direct causal relationship between bias and effect in the case of Việt Nam.

3.2.3 Value of Labour

The neoclassical model has institutionalized and depends upon a set of dualisms, which result in devaluing the roles that women play in society. The public/private dichotomy legitimizes the separation of economy from the family. The “public” free market economy thus becomes defined as the only legitimate sphere of economic activity. In contrast, social provisioning activities in the home are defined as “private” or non-economic (Peterson, 1994).

In this model, labour is treated as any factor of production (Waring, 1988). Work performed, services rendered and products made that do not have an explicit price are deemed to have no economic value (Sparr, 1994).

The model considers human beings and their labour to be non-produced units, as any other “given” factor of production (Kabeer, 1994). The countless hours of work required for maintenance and reproduction are not considered “...because that work is unpaid, and therefore has no repercussions for macroeconomic variables with which adjustment is concerned” (Elson, 1992: p.35). The reality that most non-market work is not valued in national accounts is a direct consequence of the biased assumptions on which this model is based. The distinction between production and consumption, public and private makes women's labour in the household invisible by relegating non-market production to the sphere of consumption (M. MacDonald, forthcoming).

The non-value of women's reproductive “outputs” results in a distortion of resource allocation at the household, community and national levels. Women are denied adequate access to productive inputs, which lowers their productivity and reduces their total output of valued products. As production of value is directly correlated with bargaining power, women are caught in a circular trap of decreased bargaining power from the household to the national levels (Elson, 1991a).

3.2.4 Gender Division of Labour

The division of labour within the household is seen in neoclassical economics as a matter of comparative advantage (Peterson, 1994). Labour “... can be flexibly allocated on the basis of its comparative costs in market and non-market activities” (Evans in Kabeer, 1994: p.105). Gary Becker contributed greatly to the development of the household labour theory that each family member specializes in those activities which give them the highest relative returns.

According to this argument, “women specialize in household production to a greater extent than men simply because they are better suited, biologically and emotionally, to this work” (Folbre, 1993: p.93). Women will continue to devote their labour to household production as long as the value of their work is greater than the market wage. Women choose to enter waged employment when technological change increases the productivity of work outside the home more rapidly than work within the home (Folbre, 1993). Changes to returns for a member’s time will induce the household to reallocate its labour resources so as to restore equality in the marginal returns to different labour units (Kabeer, 1994). Time allocation will adjust so that previously idle labour within the household will fill the reproductive labour gap which is created, or women will purchase services for home from the market.

In reality, however, social, cultural and personal “rigidities” prevent this from taking place. Male labour does not substitute for women's decreased time for reproductive work:

even fathers who are unemployed or engaged in home-based income-earning activities devote little extra time to child care (Kabeer, 1994). Evidence suggests that the adjustment is made by a decrease in women's leisure time. Time devoted to domestic work and child care remains roughly the same (Kabeer, 1994). In addition, female children are taken out of school to compensate for women's decreased time allocated to household work. In this way, increases in women's wages may actually decrease their daughters' long-term ability to compete for gaining comparative advantage in the paid marketplace. Labour is not just another factor of production: the age, gender, and status of the labourer is a key determinant in the role the individual will play within the market.

The assumptions of labour flexibility and fair competition also leads to a heightened gender inequality in the productive labour force and a more pervasive gender division of labour. Gender is a major dimension in labour-market inequalities, which are created and sustained not only through cultural norms but also biased models and policies (Kabeer, 1994). The assumption of women's low productivity is pervasive in neoclassical economic writing (Pujol, 1995). Women have been generally characterized as unskilled and low grade workers. As the market is assumed to be perfect and infallible in its determination of wages which reflect productivity, women's income is therefore attributed to their choice in human capital investment and low productivity occupations. Orthodox economists argue that since employers are assumed to aim to maximize their profits, discrimination is unlikely to result as other employers could increase their profits by employing the lower paid workers (Sinclair, 1991). At the same time, it is argued that differences in wage levels which are not

due to differences in productivity levels are eliminated by competition, which implies that women's lower wages are due to lower productivity (Sinclair, 1991).

The reality is that fair competition does not exist in the labour market. Men have historically enjoyed privileged access to education and training, new technologies, and fewer social constraints against paid work. Far from being less productive, Marjorie Williams argues that women's productivity has been the silent factor behind the structural changes and adjustments in north and south. SAPs and economic liberalization depend on women's economic contribution (Williams, 1994). Williams argues that "Further economic liberalization...will not inherently improve women's economic and social status; rather, there is a strong potential for it to increase the exploitation and marginalization of women both in developed and in developing countries" (Williams, 1994: p.72). The perception of women's lower productivity is a consequence of the non-value attributed to reproductive work, as well as institutionalized discrimination in education and within the labour force. These are perpetuated by biased policies. For example, a policy which provides state compensation to workers based on continuous time served in the labour force does not take into consideration the realities of women and childbearing.

The labour market is highly complex and far from perfect. Gender bias continues to emanate from the antiquated notion of a predominant male breadwinner, as well as "segmentation and gender-typing of jobs" (Palmer, 1995: p.1983). Women's bargaining power in the workplace is constrained by a gender gap in skills, information and education,

as well as reproductive responsibilities, employer's assumptions regarding women's abilities, work commitment, efficiency and needs, cultural specifications of appropriate female behaviour, and policy and legal barriers restricting women from some work considered dangerous (Agarwal, 1997).

Gender composition of the labour force typically undergoes systematic changes over a period of long-term economic development. Women's share of the labour force varies with macroeconomic fluctuations and shifts in macroeconomic policies (Cagatay and Ozler, 1995). Structural adjustment policies typically lead to a "feminization" of the labour force, through changes in income distribution reflected in a reduction of the share of wages, and through shifts in the outward orientation of the economy (Cagatay and Ozler, 1995). SAPs promote the expansion of the export-oriented sector, which tend to be feminized, labour-intensive, and use "unskilled" labour. More household members are forced to seek paid employment to compensate for declining household incomes due to the increasing inequality in income distribution resulting from SAPs.

For these reasons, women may indeed have a "comparative advantage" in household work over men. The realities of discrimination give men the comparative advantage in the paid labour force, and women a seemingly greater advantage in reproductive work (Folbre, 1993). However, this has much more to do with social construction of systematic discrimination than biological or natural predisposition to either role, and should not be used to justify erroneous assumptions about the nature of the gender division of labour.

3.2.5 Joint Utility Function

One of the most glaring biases relates to the concept of joint utility, and both feminist economists and GAD proponents have been particularly articulate on their criticism of this assumption. Conventional economic analysis assumes that households can be treated as a unity with one unitary set of preferences (Elson, 1991b). This assumption stems from the belief that while self-interest motivates individuals' decisions in the market place, altruism guides men (as head of household)'s actions within the household (Folbre and Hartman, 1988). Grapard sees irony in Smith's most often quoted phrase (Grapard, 1996):

“It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love” (Smith in Galbraith, 1987: p. 64).

Indeed, it is not from *their* benevolence that men expect dinner, but rather from the benevolence (and unremunerated labour) of their wives and mothers. In this way, it is assumed that while men are naturally inclined to act in self-interest, women are naturally altruistic in their motivations (Grapard, 1996). According to Folbre and Hartmann, “Adam Smith counterbalanced his praise of pursuit of individual self-interest in the market with the claim that natural affection ruled the family” (Folbre and Hartmann, 1988: p.187).

More recently, neoclassical economists have resorted to the idea of a benevolent dictator in the family. In New Home Economics altruism was introduced as a form of self-interested behaviour. Becker claimed that separate individual utility functions could be reconciled with a single one by assuming an altruistic head who makes decisions in

everyone's best interests (M. MacDonald, forthcoming), with the intent of maximizing the utility of all members (Elson, 1991b). Becker argues that:

“the household welfare function is considered to be identical to that of the benevolent dictator who heads the household and ensures that welfare resources are optimally allocated between household members” (Becker in Kabeer, 1994: p.99).

Becker acknowledges that this does not necessarily mean that welfare inequities will not exist within household, since those who produce more may have a greater claim on household consumption. According to Becker, household members agree to certain household management rules regarding distribution of income and labour within the household. (Kabeer, 1994). Becker's assumptions were based on his belief “that altruism dominates family behaviour perhaps to the same extent as selfishness dominates market transactions” (Becker, 1981: p.198).

There is a substantial body of work now which rejects this unitary model of the household with evidence from both north and south (Phipps, 1993). Evidence from around the globe confirms that the household is a locus of both conflict and co-operation (Sen, 1990). Family members often have very different needs and priorities, and the home is often divided over income and expenditure decisions. Caroline Moser points to the often conflicting needs and responsibilities of husband and wife within southern households:

“Gender divisions of income allocation vary widely....In some societies husbands are responsible for housing and children's education. While income for food and clothing can vary, ultimately, almost universally women allocate income to day-to-day food, clothing needs and domestic goods. The fact that they take primary responsibility for household provisioning, means far greater

allocation of women's income than men's to everyday subsistence and nutrition"(Moser, 1993: p.24).

Joint utility is premised on the assumption that all household resources are pooled and then distributed. There is substantial evidence, however, that the gender of the primary income-earner or resource-owner has a systematic effect on the patterns of resource allocation within the household (Kabeer, 1994; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1990). Numerous studies have shown that income given directly to women increases the share of household calories going to women and children (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1990).

Micro-level research has confirmed the existence of gender bias in intra-household distribution. One example of research from the 1980s points to health and nutritional differences and sex ratios in South Asia. This research provided clear evidence of food distribution based on gender within families (Moser, 1993). Kabeer highlights Folbre's point that, "while discrimination against female children might be compatible with parents maximizing the total *income* of the family, it (is) difficult to see how it could be seen as maximizing total *welfare*" (Folbre in Kabeer, 1994: p.101).

The assumption of altruism masks the power dynamics, selfishness and conflicting interests which are so often at play within the household. While altruism may play a role in household dynamics, it certainly cannot be assumed to always guide the household head's decision-making in the allocation of resources and duties. Feminists argue that the moral,

altruistic family has been used to legitimize inequality between men and women for centuries (Folbre and Hartmann, 1988).

3.3 Gender Bias in Economic Restructuring Policies

Restructuring policies being adopted around the world have been developed on these assumptions. Feminist economist Diane Elson has carried out extensive research on the issue of gender bias in these policies. For Elson, gender bias in SAPs is most evident in relation to the division of labour, unpaid domestic work, and household power relations (Elson, 1991a). Restructuring requires large transfers of labour between activities, often from non-tradeables to tradeable goods. Policy-makers assume that there are no structural barriers to switching labour from one productive act to another. The assumption that labour is highly flexible is less true of women than men because of burdens of non-paid work. Elson claims that this ignores the barrier to labour reallocation presented by the gender division of labour (Elson, 1991a). Women may face more serious barriers than men to switching from one activity to another, including reproductive responsibilities, limited ability for mobility, unequal access and control over productive resources.

Cuts in public expenditure are a fundamental component of restructuring policy. Reduction in spending on health care, education and other social services in the name of efficiency does not eliminate the need for these services; it simply shifts the burden from the paid (visible) sphere to the unpaid (invisible) reproductive (female) sphere (Connelly, 1996;

Elson, 1991b). The conceptual framework of structural adjustment relies on the availability of unlimited supplies of female labour. In reality, women's labour is not infinitely elastic. While there may be no immediate repercussions for the monetary economy, the extra burdens on the households and individuals absorbing the costs of restructuring may well have long-term and harmful repercussions (Elson, 1991b).

Women and girls are less likely to receive the care they require under these circumstances than their male counterparts (Elson, 1991b). The introduction of user fees in education has increased pressure on families to keep their children at home. Girls are most often the first to be taken from school: families need the additional help with agriculture or reproductive activities, and the (often correct) perception remains in many families that daughters have fewer chances to advance economically than sons (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1990). Women's workloads are increasing at an alarming rate as caring for the sick and education of the young is transferred back to the household (Connelly, 1996). Many women have increased their paid work load in the attempt to lessen the impact of real wage decreases. At the same time, unemployment has risen sharply for both men and women. An increase in home-based work and informal sector work has been witnessed in some regions (Sparr, 1994).

Increases in food prices have necessitated household expenditure adjustment. However, men generally continue to expect their personal spending money for luxury items such as alcohol and cigarettes (Elson, 1991b). Women's workloads have often increased in

food preparation, adding to their reproductive burden and decreasing time available for other responsibilities. In some cases, an increase in domestic conflict and violence has resulted from these pressures on expenditure (Elson, 1991b).

Personal experiences of restructuring vary greatly depending on the complex web of structures under which people exist, and the form that changes take in different regions. Yet studies conducted in virtually all corners of the world now conclude that in general, women are bearing the heaviest burdens resulting from restructuring. These examples suggest that there is a direct correlation between the assumptions underlying the neoclassical economic model, the policies consistent with the model, and the differential effects on the population. For example, the assumption that individuals can freely choose their employment in the marketplace masks an existing gender division of labour (reproductive and productive). This division of labour typically places greater constraints on women's flexibility in competing within the labour market. This assumption is translated into policies, such as SAP policies which promote tradeable over non-tradeable production, discriminating against the position women play in the labour force. The effect of this assumption and resulting policy is that women are less able to compete for the jobs being created, they are more likely to lose their livelihood in non-tradeable, subsistence production. This results in decreased income and resource control, and increased workload as many husbands migrate to these take up these new positions (Elson, 1991a). The link between other assumptions discussed, the resulting gender-blind policies, and the impact on real lives is often equally apparent and, where not explicitly stated, can be drawn from the various components of this thesis.

Vast amounts of research now exist confirming the unequal distribution of benefits and burdens resulting from SAPs (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1990). Research from the “economies in transition”⁶ has also begun to surface in the last few years (Moghadam, 1993). The following chapters will confirm this correlation between the model, policies and their effects through the case of Việt Nam.

⁶This term normally refers to countries which have undertaken a shift from a socialist or alternative economic model toward a capitalist system. Eastern European countries are most often cited in this group, but the term also refers to other countries, including Việt Nam.

Chapter 4: Case Study: Việt Nam's Economic Transition

Việt Nam undertook a dramatic transition in economic policy from the previous socialist system toward a market economy beginning in 1986. As discussed in Chapter One, Việt Nam's transition makes a particularly good case for studying gender bias in the neoclassical economic model and policies due to the relatively small gender gap prior to adopting a transition model, the government's commitment to maintaining social equity, and the relative economic success of the transition in Việt Nam.

4.1 Background on Việt Nam

The Socialist Republic of Việt Nam is located in Southeast Asia, and forms the eastern coast of the Indochinese Peninsula. Việt Nam shares borders with China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west. The South China Sea lies to the east and south of the country. The surface area of Việt Nam is 329,566 square kilometres and the capital is Hà Nội. Việt Nam's land and climate are diverse. Vast mountain ranges contrast with the flat, fertile Mekong and Red River deltas which are the lifeblood of the country. Climatic conditions vary from frosty winters in the northern mountains to year-round sub-equatorial warmth in the Mekong Delta. Wet and dry seasons set the rhythm of rural life. Việt Nam lies within the Southeast Asian monsoon zone (Kurian, 1992).

The population of Việt Nam is approximately 80 million, and is growing at a high annual rate of 2.2 percent. Women make up 51.5% of the population and 52% of its paid workforce (Beresford, 1994). Eighty percent of the population of Việt Nam lives in rural areas and is involved in agricultural production. The population is very unevenly distributed between the fertile plains and mountainous regions, with density surpassing 1100 people per square kilometre in the river deltas (Beresford, 1994).

The majority of Việt Nam's population is ethnically homogeneous. Việt speakers account for approximately ninety percent of the population. The remaining population is divided among 54 identifiable ethnic and linguistic minorities. Ethnic Chinese constitute the largest ethnic minority at under two percent of the population. Other groups include the Khmer, Thai and Hmong peoples (Duiker, 1989). Việt Nam's ethnic minorities live primarily in the mountainous areas and other remote regions. Religion has traditionally played a significant role in Vietnamese society. While there is no official or national religion, the vast majority of people practice Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism. Buddhism is the most prominent, but Confucianism has had a profound effect on the values and structure of society (Kurian, 1992).

Việt Nam's long history is one of occupations and bloody wars. The country was occupied by China from 207 BC to 939 AD. The French arrived in 1859 to exploit the country through mineral extraction and crop exports. The occupation of Việt Nam also provided France with a market for manufactured goods and a supply of cheap labour.

Various political parties emerged as a response to French oppression, most notably Ho Chi Minh's Unified Communist Party, which was established in 1930. Ho Chi Minh declared the country's independence from France in 1945.

Independence paved the way for the transition to socialism in the north. The socialist government sought to create a society based on equality and freedom from oppression. The goal of the socialist state was to “eliminate all inequalities based on exploitation and injustice” (Beresford, 1989: p. 102). The state immediately undertook a process of nationalizing major enterprises, abolishing capitalist relations and collectivizing agricultural production. The legal framework was rebuilt, and free universal social services were made available to the population.

The south provided the battleground for the war between the Americans and the Vietnamese communist government based in the north⁷. The south experienced a much stronger American and capitalistic influence and only began the process toward socialism after victory and unification in 1976. The centrally controlled government declared the founding of the unified Socialist Republic of Việt Nam in 1976. Despite the government's attempts to extend socialism throughout the south following unification, there was little time for the socialist programme to take root before the first reforms were implemented in 1981.

⁷The Vietnamese, as one might expect, refer to it as “the American War”.

Despite economic hardships and the devastation of war, Việt Nam achieved extraordinary results in its efforts to provide universal access to free education, health and child care, and economic and legal equality for the population. Việt Nam's social achievements are particularly remarkable considering the low per capita GDP (\$1,010 PPP in 1995) (UNDP, 1995). Life expectancy was 69 years for women and 64 years for men in 1995, a dramatic rise from 44.2 years in 1960 (UNDP, 1995). The infant mortality rate decreased from 147 per 1,000 in 1960 to 24 per 1,000 in 1992. In 1954, approximately twenty percent of all school aged children attended school; by the end of 1975, this number had exceeded ninety percent in the north. Adult literacy soared from just 25 percent in 1945 to 91.9 per cent in 1992, with female rates just slightly below the national average at 88.7 per cent (UNDP, 1995).

4.2 Gender Context

Prior to the creation of a socialist state in the 1940s, gender relations were largely influenced by Confucianism. Traditional Confucian values promote a strict hierarchy within society and the family. The conservative ideology promotes values of submission, sacrifice, obedience and suffering, particularly for women, who were much less valued than men under this ideology⁸. A woman lived under a system of “three obediences”: first to her father, then her husband and finally, upon his death, her eldest son (Beaulieu, 1994). Legal rights to

⁸Traditional Confucian sayings include “One hundred women are not worth one single testicle”, and “Men are to be respected, women despised” (Eisen, 1984: p.12)

property and decision-making within the family were retained exclusively by the adult male as head of the household.

The Viêt majority has adhered largely to the Confucian ideology concerning gender relations in the household. A daughter leaves the family when she marries and becomes a member of her husband's family. Since she is unable to look after her own family in old age, a family's investment in girls is therefore seen to be largely lost at marriage. However, some ethnic groups hold vastly different views on the role of daughters. The Hmong consider their daughters to be valuable assets in terms of labour power, and they are allowed to leave only reluctantly (Le Nham, 1994). There are also wide variances in gendered division of labour between the ethnic groups. Among some minority groups women and men have a more equal division of reproductive labour. Among others, however, the situation is more extreme. Such is the case with the Dao, a group in which a man has the right to live without working once he becomes a grandfather. His main occupation becomes receiving guests, while his wife must take care of both reproductive and productive activities (Allen and Tran Thi Que, 1992).

Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary government was ideologically committed to a society based on equality and freedom from oppression. Both the ideology and the economic realities faced by the government demanded that they espouse gender equality and an end to women's subordination. Women's emancipation depended on their full participation in the labour force, socialization of reproductive work, access to socialized services, and the promotion of legal equality.

Ho Chi Minh was personally committed to strong legal rights for women, stating: “‘If women are not free, half of the nation is not free’” (Ho Chi Minh in Eisen, 1984: p.87). Ho Chi Minh recognized the overwhelming obstacles facing this challenge in Việt Nam, writing on Women’s Day in 1952:

“‘What equality really means is a thorough-going difficult revolution, because contempt for women dates back thousands of years. It is deep-rooted in the thoughts and attitudes of everyone... Progress will have to be made in every field: political, economic, cultural and legal’” (Ho Chi Minh in Eisen, 1984: p.89).

The position of women and gender relations were dramatically altered by the establishment of the socialist state. Gender equality was promoted through legal changes that compare favourably with industrialized nations. Women were granted legal rights to equal pay for equal work, equal access to inheritance, the right to dispose of one's own income. Polygamy, bride price, violence in the family were forbidden by law, and husbands were enjoined to share equally in domestic work (Eisen, 1984). Laws entrenched universal access to maternity leave and day care centres. While laws alone do not change values and customs, legal changes lend legitimacy to women's demands for changes and enforcement of existing laws.

One of the fundamental tenets of this socialist system was the belief in the state’s responsibility to provide free universal access to social services, including education, health care, family planning and child care. The government developed a comprehensive system of health care clinics and hospitals throughout the countryside. Family planning services were

provided through health care clinics, and a child care system established through the state collectives. These provisions were seen as essential to the emancipation of women by decreasing women's reproductive responsibilities, thereby enabling them to devote more time and energy to production for the collective good.

The collective system helped to transform male-female power relations (White, 1987). Reproductive work was made more visible, and political intervention in enforcing adherence to laws was possible through government representatives at the local level. Income was paid to individuals on a work points basis, which increased recognition of women's productive contribution. Community management was organized largely through the collective system. Women's high participation rate in the productive labour force (82%) (UNDP, 1995) was facilitated by the state's comprehensive provision of child care and promotion of equality during the socialist era (Fong, 1994).

It is important to recognize that although the socialist system created many favourable conditions for women's emancipation, the goal of gender equality was never entirely achieved. The most fundamental problem was the inability of the government to fully socialize reproductive work. The gendered division of labour remained resistant to legal codes. Urban women were predominantly employed in the lower paid, low skilled positions. Rural women were given "light" tasks within the cooperative sector, and this work was accorded less economic and social value than the heavier work done by men (Leukhin, 1988).

Access to child care never became a reality for the majority of Vietnamese women, and most women retained primary responsibility for domestic work, including child and elder care, cooking and cleaning. Their overwhelming labour force participation meant that women were never truly relieved of their double burden. The influence of traditional views and customs, particularly within the household, remained pervasive and very difficult to overturn. Nevertheless, the gap between women and men was substantially smaller in Việt Nam prior to the economic transition (pre-1986) than in most developing (and some developed) countries (UNDP, 1995)⁹.

4.3 Economic Context

The perilous economic situation that overcame Việt Nam in the late 1970s undermined many of the government's goals. Việt Nam's economic model followed neo-Stalinist orthodoxy based on central planning aimed at rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. Large-scale industrial investment, self-sufficiency in food production and tightly controlled allocation of resources were the underpinnings of the model. However, Việt Nam never succeeded in consolidating its central planning system, and the

⁹ In the 1995 Human Development Report, Việt Nam's overall score for GDI (for definition, see footnote #10) moved up eleven points when weighted from its HDI ranking, the eleventh most dramatic increase in the world (nine out of eleven were (currently or formerly) centrally planned economies) (UNDP, 1995). Việt Nam women's non-agricultural wage as a percentage of men was 91.5%, second in the world only to Tanzania (1995). Việt Nam's overall female literacy rate was 88.7% in 1992, and its adult female literacy rate was 93% of the male rate in 1992, ranking it just below the most developed countries (UNDP, 1995). Unfortunately, no Gender-Empowerment Measure (GEM) for Việt Nam was provided in the UNDP's Human Development Reports for 1995, 1996 or 1997 (reasons for this are unknown).

state was unable to exercise as much control over the economy as most other centrally planned economies (Ryan and Wandel, 1996). The situation had reached crisis proportions by the early 1980s. Việt Nam's debt had grown to desperate levels, and the state's ability to supply inputs to the economy and food to the people disintegrated.

While the inclination of mainstream economists has been to lay exclusive blame for the crisis on the central planning system, there were many political circumstances which contributed to the crisis (Fforde and de Vylder, 1996). The decades of war caused unimaginable devastation. An estimated three million Vietnamese died in the French and American wars, among which many were young men who might have otherwise contributed to production. Chemical agents destroyed foliage and devastated harvests. The Cambodian war and patrolling of the Chinese border demanded excessive military spending, and sapped the productive system of a substantial number of the remaining young men. The American-led international embargo placed on Việt Nam in 1979 led to the country's near-complete isolation, severely restricting aid and investment in the country (Fforde and de Vylder, 1996). Việt Nam became increasingly reliant on assistance from the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. When these states began to falter in the mid-1980s, Việt Nam lost its last vestige of economic support from the outside world.

There is little doubt that the system of planned production, administrative allocation of resources and price controls did contribute to low levels of production (Fforde and de Vylder, 1996). The lack of incentive to produce for the collective system became evident with

growing opposition in the countryside. A series of bad harvests in the late 1970s increased the severity of the crisis, as sections of the Vietnamese population faced famine (Fforde and de Vylder, 1996). The system's failure in 1978-79 caused individuals, agricultural cooperatives and state enterprises to begin reforming the system "from below" (Fforde and de Vylder, 1996). This movement took a non-confrontational form which became known as "fence-breaking", and the authorities were forced to admit that the model had become unsustainable (Fforde and de Vylder, 1996).

4.4 Transition

By the early 1980s the government recognized that reforms were vital to avoid the country's complete collapse. A process of liberalization began in 1981 with modest agricultural reforms which transferred control and responsibility for production from the collective system to individual households. The government committed itself to moving toward a market economy after the Sixth Party Congress in 1986. Following the Congress, the government launched an ambitious "renovation", or "Doi Moi", which included liberalizing the economy, allowing private business to operate and encouraging foreign investment and trade (Mya and Tan, 1993).

The process followed a typical neoclassical economic approach, and the policies adopted are those prescribed in other restructuring models (such as SAPs). These policies included privatization and dismantling of state enterprises, fiscal restraint, cuts in the growth

rate of domestic credit, trade liberalization, devaluation of currency. Public expenditure was cut dramatically for all social services, and user fees were instituted for many services. State subsidies and price controls for food and inputs were eliminated, and the government legalized private business.

Land was essentially privatized with Decree 10 in 1988, which provided each farming household with long-term tenure and titles. The Decree formally transferred responsibility for all aspects of production, including financial management and labour allocation, back to individual households. The 1993 Land Law solidified and lengthened the tenure, and entitled each household to land certificates. Rights over land became transferable, and farmers can now exchange, rent, sell, inherit and mortgage the right to land use. Land was distributed to families on behalf of all household members born before October, 1994. The Land Law allowed for land to be distributed to households to use for a period of twenty years, and in the case of perennial crops such as rubber or coffee, fifty years.

To date the government has remained socialist and ideologically committed to equality while at the same time adopting a free market economy (Marr and White, 1988). These views are formalized in the address by General Secretary Do Muoi to the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of Việt Nam:

“Our Party’s Political Program has pointed out clearly: ‘A correct social policy for the happiness of all people is the great driving force to promote all creative potentials of the people for the cause of socialist construction’” (Việt Nam News, June 29, 1996: p.2).

One of five key goals in 1996-2000 five-year plan is: “to combine harmoniously economic growth with the realization of social progress and equity and to effect strong improvements in the tackling of pressing social problems and the combat against negative practices, injustice and social evils” (Việt Nam News, June 29, 1996: p.3).

The government’s belief in its ability to maintain or strive for social equity while adopting a market economy is a telling indication of the misconceptions about the neoclassical economic model and its policies. There are fundamental contradictions in ideological focus between these two goals (Marr and White, 1988). As has been discussed, neoclassical economics depends on competition and self-interest, individual and autonomous motivations and actions. The stated commitment by the government to equity either reflects political rhetoric which is meant solely to muffle dissention, or a complete lack of understanding about the underlying assumptions, views and requirements of the neoclassical economic model. Assuming that the latter is at least partially at play, it can only be expected that this contradiction will have serious consequences for those whose realities the model does not represent.

4.5 Overall Effects of Transition

The effects of the economic transition in Việt Nam have been varied, and any assessment requires a complex analysis of all the various components. Việt Nam’s transition has been heralded as a great success by many Western economists (Globe and Mail, 1996;

Far Eastern Economic Review, 1995, 1996; Dodsworth, 1996; Brown, 1995, Riedel, 1997). In December, 1996, Japan companies ranked Việt Nam second only to China in the world for economic prospects over the next ten years (Globe and Mail, 1996). Social sector analysts take a much more reserved approach in reaching a conclusion. The results of restructuring processes are rarely uniformly negative or positive. In Việt Nam, some of the changes associated with the transition have been very favourably received, while others have clearly not been positive for the general population.

Since embarking on the economic reforms, Việt Nam has experienced some real economic success. Growth rates averaged eight per cent per year between 1990 and 1995 (Gibney, 1995). The country achieved remarkable gains in agricultural production which transformed the economy from a net rice importer to the world's third largest rice exporter by 1994. According to the World Bank, the absolute rate of poverty decreased from 75 per cent of the population in 1984 to 55 per cent in 1993 (World Bank, 1996). Other statistics suggest that the decrease has not been as dramatic (P. MacDonald, 1995). However, it is clear that there have been some impressive improvements in economic production and food security.

Income levels have increased for many households. Increased income has brought greater security and stability for some individuals. More affluent households and individuals have the opportunity to purchase consumer goods and time-saving devices. This is

particularly the case in urban areas, where there is increasing domestic demand for luxury items. Affluence has enabled some families to hire domestic labour.

There are greater employment opportunities for some individuals, particularly urban dwellers. The streets of Hà Noi are now crowded with home-based businesses including tailor shops, cafés and beauty parlours. A large number of these new businesses are being run by women (Pettus, 1995). The increase in informal sector work has allowed women more flexibility in balancing productive and reproductive work, and business opportunities have provided some women greater economic independence.

Economic transition in Việt Nam has brought political liberalization and a loosening of social control. The government recognized that the flood of foreign goods and information, and the return of production to the household unit would make it impossible to maintain the level of control over the population. This political liberalization has brought greater freedom of speech and movement for Vietnamese people. While the political system remains ruled by a single party, there is no question that the Vietnamese people welcome and value their greater political freedom.

The positive effects of economic transition have not been evenly distributed among the population. In fact, there have been enormous differences in experience based on regional, ethnic and gender disparities. In general, urban and rural dwellers near major roads seem to be benefitting, while those living in remote rural areas are suffering from stagnant or even

lower standards of living than previously (UNICEF, 1994). Agricultural production has increased much more rapidly in the south than the north: the Mekong Delta has provided the country with most of its increase in rice production since the transition began (Fforde and Sèneque, 1995). Many of the country's regions actually experienced a decrease in rice production between 1988 and 1994, including the Red River Delta, northern and central highlands, and the northeast region (Fforde and Sèneque, 1995). Rural/urban disparities in living standards are striking. Fifty-seven per cent of the rural population are classified as poor, compared to 26 per cent of urban dwellers. (P. MacDonald, 1995). These enormous rural-urban disparities can be seen in per capita income figures: in 1994, average per capita income was \$800 for Ho Chi Minh City and \$610 for Hà Noi, while the national average for rural areas was less than \$150 (UNDP, 1995).

Most ethnic minority peoples live in isolated rural or mountainous locations. The positive effects of transition have not reached most of these communities. Five to eight per cent of households in Việt Nam are classified as being in “dire circumstance”, earning less than the equivalent of eight kilograms of rice per month, and most of these families belong to one of the ethnic minority groups (Duong Thoa, 1995). In the northern mountains and central highlands, 74 per cent of the population was still living in poverty in 1994 (Beresford, 1994).

The effects of Việt Nam's economic transition have varied greatly depending on region, ethnic group and position in society. Some have benefitted from the liberalization,

while others have experienced a deterioration in living standards. In the following chapter, some of the most dramatic and obvious effects will be presented, when economic transition is considered with respect to its effects on gender roles and relations.

Chapter 5: Gender Effects of Economic Transition

There is increasing evidence that gender relations, particularly within the household, are becoming more unequal and that women are bearing the brunt of the negative consequences of transition in Việt Nam. One striking indication of this rising inequality is the recent dramatic change in Việt Nam's position in the UNDP's Gender-related Development Index (GDI) within two years¹⁰. In 1995, Việt Nam ranked 74th in the gender-weighted development index: by 1997 the country had dropped to 101st (UNDP, 1997; UNDP, 1995). Having discussed some of the well-explored effects of gender bias in the neoclassical economic model, the causal relationship between these biases and the gendered effects of transition will now become clearer as Việt Nam's widening gender gap is tied to its economic transition policies.

5.1 Cuts to Social Services: Bias of Non-Value of Unpaid Work

As presented earlier, the neoclassical economic model does not consider labour which is not paid to have value. This work, primarily reproductive and subsistence work, is therefore "invisible" to policy-makers and is not taken into account when policies are formulated. Women's labour in the home is considered to be infinitely elastic, and policies make no attempt to measure the effects of increased workloads on women and gender

¹⁰The GDI is based on the UNDP's well-established Human Development Index (HDI), but adjusts the index to weight the gaps in achievement between women and men for each country. A total of 130 countries are included in the index.

relations in the household. Governments commonly view cuts to social services as a cost-effective way to reduce public expenditure without causing severe consequences to the population. However, the increase in work and expense which has been transferred directly to the household is not considered in the equation. The repercussions vary depending on the severity of the cuts, but the greatest burdens for expenditure reduction at the state level is borne by women at the household and community levels.

By accepting the cost-effective view of social expenditure reduction, the Vietnamese government relinquished its responsibility to provide universal free access to services such as education, child care, family planning and health care. The principle of free health care was undermined with the introduction of consultation and treatment fees (Brazier, 1992). Individuals must now pay to visit health facilities and must purchase their own medication, and the poor rely almost exclusively on traditional medicine and self-treatment (Beresford, 1994). User fees were also introduced for child care and education. Many daycare centres and kindergartens, particularly in rural areas, have been closed permanently (Pettus, 1995), and in many places the education system has begun to fragment (Gilotte, 1994).

The policies adopted by the government have increased women's overall workload in all three of women's "triple burdens". The reversion to the household productive system has dramatically increased the productive workload for both men and women, as households strive to succeed in the newly-competitive market. Meanwhile, the rapid growth of male urban-rural migration has increased the work burden for many rural women who must

organize the agricultural production alone (Beresford, 1994). The cuts to social services have particularly affected women's workload in reproductive and community management activities.

While the elimination of many subsidies to health care, education and child care may have saved the government money, unpaid female labour has simply replaced labour previously provided by the state. As a result, transition has vastly increased the reproductive labour done by women. Many women are relying increasingly on their older daughters and mothers to assist in balancing the dramatic increases in productive and reproductive work. This has led to increased pressure for daughters to leave school prematurely, thereby decreasing their opportunities to compete against their male counterparts for higher paying, skilled employment in the future.

The responsibility for child care has also reversed back to unpaid female labour in the household. The provision of state child care has suffered from cuts to expenditure. The number of crèches and kindergartens has decreased dramatically, particularly in rural areas. State subsidies for child care were halved between 1986 and 1991, and many communes have eliminated subsidies altogether. In urban centres, the burden of child care has shifted from the employer to the employee (Fong, 1994). The cost is often as high as 100,000 Dong (\$10 US) per month, a fee simply unaffordable for many households. In urban areas, the retrenchment of child care services has restricted women's ability to compete for work in the formal sector (P. MacDonald, 1995).

Women's responsibilities for community management have been expanded since transition began. During the previous system, collectives were primarily responsible for community management and community-based support. With the dismantling of the collective system and the increased income disparity, there is an ever-increasing need for volunteer community management work. Community support is currently aimed largely at assisting poorer sections of the community who have been denied access to private sector services due to lack of income. These volunteer activities fall primarily on women in the communities. The Việt Nam Women's Union has initiated joint production teams, charity funds, savings groups, and revolving funds, all of which depend on local women's volunteer efforts.

Social services have become less accessible for many people, and particularly for rural dwellers, the poor, and women. As the primary users of health and child care, women and children are affected most adversely by decreased access. Decreased access to these services has resulted directly from cuts to social services and indirectly from women's increased workload, severely restricting their opportunities to benefit from the use of these vital services. Fees for health care services and medications have virtually eliminated access to these services for many families. The quality of health services has deteriorated. Salaries for health care workers have been slashed, and there is a severe shortage of health care workers, as most are opting for the legalized private practice or more lucrative income-generating activities. The existing public health services cannot begin to meet the needs of the ever-expanding Vietnamese population. Most rural health facilities are inadequate and in some

areas have been shut down. Women have taken on the added responsibility for use of traditional healing methods and self-treatment (Samuelson, 1995).

There is evidence that ill-health is rising more quickly among women than men, a consequence of both increased workload and decreased access to health services. The main health problems experienced today relate to nutritional disorders and infectious diseases, affecting primarily women and children. Surveys show that up to fifty per cent of rural women and thirty per cent of urban women are anaemic (Allen and Tran Thi Que, 1992). Fifty per cent of women over age 55 experience chronic energy deficiency, due partly to their increased labour burdens. Maternal mortality rates have risen in the last decade, from 100 per 100,000 in 1980 to 115 per 100,000 in 1993. Regional disparities are evident in these rates: maternal mortality rates in the central highlands are as high as 418 per 100,000 (Samuelson, 1995). Between 79 and ninety per cent of maternal mortalities in rural areas are preventable, and are due mainly to delay in treatment or referral, lack of transportation, blood or drugs (Samuelson, 1995).

Under the socialist system, the state was responsible for the provision of family planning services, and women were guaranteed access to family planning services and decision-making on basic reproductive matters. Access to and availability of these services has eroded as a result of the cuts in public expenditure. Services in rural areas are now provided only once per month. If a woman requires family planning services on other days, she must travel many hours at significant monetary and time expenses. At the same time, a

Family Planning Law in 1988 established a two-child policy, and families face monetary penalties for not complying with the legislation. These two realities have severely restricted women's reproductive choices (P. MacDonald, 1995). Decreased access to family planning services has also affected the abortion rate, which has risen dramatically in the past few years. The abortion rate in Thai Binh province was 330 per 1,000 live births in 1985, 707 per 1,000 in 1989, 850 per 1,000 in 1990, and an incredible 1,700 per 1,000 in 1992 (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1994). The last figure suggests that in this province there were almost twice as many abortions as live births in 1992. Abortions have increased exponentially in other provinces and in the major cities as well. The total abortion rate in 1992 was 2.5 abortions per woman in her lifetime (Samuelson, 1995). Abortion is currently the sixth largest cause of hospital morbidity in Việt Nam (Samuelson, 1995).

Access to education is a key determinant in securing employment, developing skills and increasing decision-making power. Việt Nam's remarkable educational achievements have come under serious threat since the restructuring began. School quality and enrollment have been declining at all levels since the late 1980s (Beresford, 1994). The number of children enrolling in school is declining by 0.8 per cent each year (Samuelson, 1995).

There is evidence that the gender gap in access and achievement is widening. Girls are dropping out of school at a much higher rate than boys. In 1980, the average years of schooling achieved by women was 71 per cent of men; by 1992, the rate had dropped to 59 per cent (Việt Nam Women's Union, 1994). Illiteracy is rising at an alarming rate among

women. In 1989, 16.7 per cent of the female population was illiterate. By 1992, that rate had increased to 17.69 per cent (Le Thi, 1995). In many families girls now have much lower education level than their mothers (Tran Thi Van Anh and Nguyen Manh Huan, 1995). While there are a variety of reasons for this drop in enrollment¹¹, several fundamental causes can be directly tied to transition policies and cuts in expenditure. The introduction of user fees has increased the family's financial burden, and many now consider education to be a luxury for children generally. There are increasing problems with the supply of education, particularly in rural areas. There is a huge disparity in educational facilities between urban and rural areas. Enrollment and attainment is lower in the south than the north. In Pho Tho district, 300 kilometres northwest of Hà Nội, only twenty per cent of girls are able to attend school regularly (Việt Nam News, June 19, 1996). This is not an exceptional case. Illiteracy is much higher among the ethnic minorities. Among the Dao in Ham Yen district, Tuyen Quang province, the overall illiteracy rate was 93 per cent in 1995 (Samuelson, 1995).

Outside the major cities, the cost of maintaining schools is too high for many local budgets. Many rural schools have closed down, and children must often travel long distances to attend school. Teaching in public schools has become such a poorly paid profession that there was a shortage of 65,000 teachers in Việt Nam in 1994 (Beresford, 1994). With the competitive nature of the new household economic system, there has been a great deal of

¹¹For example, some rural families feel that with the reforms, education is no longer necessary to make money and advance in employment (Fong, 1994).

pressure for children to leave school and work for the family. If a choice must be made, it is the daughter who leaves school to help her family earn extra income.

Women's access to legal rights and protection has been threatened by the transition. In its attempts to encourage foreign investment, the government has relaxed many of its strict legal policies concerning the protection of women's legal rights. Employers seeking to avoid the cost of maternity or child care commonly practice discriminatory hiring practices or ignore the legislation (Desai, 1995). At the same time, women's added reproductive and productive responsibilities have left them little time and energy for other activities including political participation. Women's representation in the local, provincial and national government has declined since transition began (P. MacDonald, 1995). The effects of decreased female representation combined with a general resurgence of traditional views are exemplified by a growing number of government officials contesting the legal rights of women, including maternity leave, equal pay and access to abortion (Moghadam, 1993).

5.2 Gender Division of Labour: Bias of Comparative Advantage and Fair Competition

The assumption that the division of labour within the household is based on comparative advantage ignores the complex web of social and institutional constraints which complicate simple decision-making processes. Similarly, evidence shows that women's competition for waged employment in the labour market is subject to restrictions which overshadow the notion of supply and demand. The opportunities and constraints arising since

Việt Nam embarked on transition provide a good example of the complexities of the gendered labour market.

Seventy per cent of Vietnamese women are employed in the agricultural sector (Beresford, 1994). The remaining thirty per cent work in industry and trade, areas which have been growing rapidly since transition began (Beresford, 1994). In 1992, women formed the majority of the workforce in commerce (71%), finance (78%), and light industry (65%) (Beresford, 1994). However, women's employment in construction, transportation, communication and finance dropped between 1989 and 1994. Layoffs resulting from the privatization and reorganization of state enterprises have hit women harder than men. Between 1990 and 1991, the state laid off approximately 553,000 women workers, and women accounted for 71.6% of staff laid off in the cultural sector, 78.4% in the health sector, and 82.1% in the commercial sector (UNICEF, 1994). By 1994, seventy per cent of laid off state workers had been women (Beresford, 1994).

The rapid expansion of the private sector has created many new employment opportunities. Many of the newly-established joint ventures have been in female-dominated light industry (Allen and Tran Thi Que, 1992). Women continue to be vastly over-represented in the lowest echelons of these new positions (Beresford, 1994). Lower levels of education and vocational training, the social and political fraternization of men, and the demands of reproductive work contribute to women's disadvantage in competing for positions in the

private sector. However, government policies have also played a significant role in limiting women's opportunities in the non-agricultural sectors.

Despite the privatization of a growing number of state enterprises, legislation which places responsibility for providing maternity leave and child care with the employer remains unaltered. The government has made no attempt to minimize discrimination by absorbing the costs of maternity leave and child care. There is some evidence that women have experienced discrimination in hiring as employers seek to avoid the cost of providing these support mechanisms (UNICEF, 1994). Other employers overlook the legislation, and evidence indicates that in some factories operated by foreign capital, workers' rights and conditions are generally being ignored, with workers expected to work long hours with no payment for overtime (UNICEF, 1994). In 1994, the state passed an Ordinance of Labour Protection. Article 19 of this legislation bans women from working in over fifty types of employment considered "too dangerous or strenuous", including digging wells, sawing by hand, hewing rock on mountains, and pouring concrete on water (Desai, 1995). Pregnant women and nursing mothers are restricted from an additional list of jobs, including work in radio, TV and telecommunication stations (Fong, 1994). While the practical implications of these specific restrictions may be negligible, they are symbolic of recent state policies which promote the further gender-segregation of the labour market (Desai, 1995).

Increased employment opportunities in private industries have not been sufficient to meet the needs and demands of the population. The informal sector has grown dramatically

in Việt Nam since transition began. While the informal sector provides income and allows some flexibility of schedule for women working a double day, informal work typically involves low wages, poor working environment, little work security, and no means of enforcing protective labour legislation (Beresford, 1994). In 1994, women comprised seventy per cent of the informal sector workforce, many of them former public sector employees (Beresford, 1994). The government has encouraged the expansion of the informal sector as a means to create jobs and income, and to alleviate poverty during the transitional period (Beresford, 1994). However, an ILO survey in 1993 showed that informal sector homeworkers, ninety per cent of them women, earned an average of \$17 US per month (Beresford, 1994). Yet recent legislation established a minimum wage \$30 US per month, which is still considered insufficient for most urban families (Interview with Bui Thi Lan, 1996).

Workloads for both men and women have increased with transition. In rural areas, reversion to household production has dramatically increased agricultural labour requirements (Le Thi, 1995). Women are responsible for the majority of the work in rice paddies, including planting, transplanting, harvesting, field maintenance and weed control, while men perform activities which require the use of small-scale technological devices. Women perform the greater share of many kinds of work related to both primary and sideline activities¹² in rural

¹²Women's sideline activities play a very important role in increasing the family income. Sideline activities include producing and selling coffee, tea, small animals and fish (Bui Thi Lan, 1994).

Việt Nam (Allen and Tran Thi Que, 1992). Increased household agricultural production has resulted largely from increased workload (Allen and Tran Thi Que, 1992).

Whether households are engaged in agricultural or non-agricultural work, women's increased productive workload has not resulted in a renegotiation of reproductive responsibilities between men and women. The gender division of labour remains clear in the reproductive sphere (Desai, 1995), particularly in rural areas¹³. Men continue to be responsible for the "great" tasks such as house and furniture repair, while women carry out the remaining activities, including child and elder care, cooking, cleaning, and laundering (Desai, 1995). The gap left by the elimination of social services has been filled by the increased use of daughters and grandmothers (Srouf, 1995), and decreased leisure time for women (Le Thi, 1995). Women's working day is much longer and more intense now (Bui Thi Lan, 1994). Rural women spend nearly eighteen hours working per day compared to fourteen hours for men (Brazier, 1992).

The gender division of labour within the household affects individuals' ability to respond to new employment opportunities. Most of the new opportunities being created are located in urban areas. Rural-urban migration to date, however, shows that men are much more likely to move to the city to undertake work than women (Beresford, 1994). This reflects the difference in labour "flexibility" available to men and women. Women's

¹³According to several Vietnamese women from the Centre for Population and the Environment, urban men recognize their duties for parenting to a greater extent than rural men (Discussion following lecture by Dr. Ruddick, Hà Noi, May 31, 1996).

responsibilities for child and elder care, for example, often do not enable them to take advantage of employment opportunities in the urban areas. Instead of benefitting from the new urban work opportunities, women's agricultural work burden has increased as many husbands migrate to the cities to assume these new positions (Beresford, 1994).

5.3 Privatization of Land: Bias of Joint Utility Function

The gender bias of assuming joint utility in the neoclassical economic model has had profound effects on gender relations in the context of Việt Nam's economic transition. The method used by the government to privatize land is clearly based on this assumption that a household unit can be assumed to have one unitary set of needs and requirements, and that the household head represents these unified needs of the household and distributes benefits and burdens fairly among individuals in the household. Some of the most blatant evidence of gender bias in Việt Nam's transitional policies relates to the methods used to privatize land, and the reversion to a household economy from collective organization of production.

The policies leading to the transition from collective to household production have been discussed. The first major reform in 1981 involved the introduction of output contracts which were meant to increase incentives for cooperative members to increase production. The second stage of reform followed Decree 10 in 1988, which effectively devolved all decision-making on production to households. Households were assigned plots of land for periods of up to 15 years and were free to decide what to produce (Beresford, 1994). The

1993 Land Law legally formalized the distribution of land, extended land tenure periods, and established the principle of equal ownership of land by all members of the household.

Land was distributed to the household as a whole rather than to each individual. The land tenure certificate issued with the privatized land had room for only one signature per household. When the government administrators set out to acquire the signatures, they approached the “household chief” as signatory. Under Vietnamese tradition, the household chief, regardless of the decision-making role played in the household, is almost always the oldest male in the family (Fong, 1994). This reality stems both from tradition and the long-standing perception that men's work has a higher economic value which entitles them to greater authority within the household.

The land certificates are of crucial importance in the structure of the privatized system. Land Title is given to the signatory (the household chief), who becomes the household representative to the commune land committee on all matters concerning household production issues, including loan and extension services (P. MacDonald, 1995). The government’s decision to distribute land and certificates in this way has had profound effects on gender relations. According to Dr. Van Anh, “Even the Land Management office agrees with me now that both names should be on the users-right (certificates). But they say they cannot change their methods because they have already given out many papers” (Tran Thi Van Anh in Beaulieu, 1994: p. 12).

The sudden increased responsibility within the household, and the way in which the government proceeded with land privatization, has had profound effects on household structure in Việt Nam. The household unit rapidly regained its pre-eminence¹⁴ as the centre of most productive activities. Responsibility for organizing the productive process, financial management and labour allocation were transferred from the collective system to the individual family.

The dramatic changes in the responsibility and duties of household and household members have had significant effects on power dynamics, the division of labour and the distribution of benefits within the household. The concept of power dynamics is a contentious one among scholars in Việt Nam, and some have argued that the concept of power dynamics within the family is a western feminist one which is not relevant to the circumstances of Việt Nam. Local feminist scholar Dr. Van Anh profoundly disagrees. Dr. Van Anh argues that as the household has become the centre for both productive and reproductive activities in Việt Nam, power relations within the household become the key determinant of access and control over vital resources such as income, food, shelter, health care and education. With the predominance of the household system, the power dynamic within the household holds perhaps even more relevance in Việt Nam than many northern countries, where women can rely on many external institutions for fairly equitable allocation of social services. According to Dr. Van Anh, bargaining power within the household is therefore a crucial component of

¹⁴ The household economy has strong historical roots in Việt Nam.

any study of Việt Nam's development (Interview with Dr. Van Anh, August 5, 1996). This view is consistent with a 'bargaining model' approach to households (see Chapter 6).

There is some debate over the precise nature of household decision-making in Việt Nam. Women's absolute level of decision-making power has likely increased since the transition began. Prior to transition, collectives made virtually all decisions concerning production, and their influence stretched across many other aspects of family life. Women held relatively few decision-making positions within the collective system. Men assumed a higher percentage of leading positions when collectives were first formed, as a result of their advantages in education, work experience, and connections to the bureaucracy (White, 1987). Over time a greater percentage of women achieved decision-making levels of authority in the collective system. However, men continued to have more time to devote to politics, educational endeavours and training than women who retained the primary responsibility for reproductive work which was not socialized (White, 1987). These realities coupled with "the deep-seated male resistance to the idea of women in positions of authority over men" (White, 1987: p.25) meant that few women were able to rise to the higher echelons of decision-making within the collective system prior to its demise.

Since the reforms began and decisions on production were relegated to the household, women have had a greater voice in production compared to the collective system. This reflects the fact that within the collective system, all major decisions were made by central authorities, and even decisions of lesser importance were centrally controlled by commune

authorities. With the reversion to the household economy, decisions about every aspect of production, income and resource allocation, have been transferred to the household. Men have taken a much more direct decision-making role since the reversion, and therefore men's role in making decisions has increased much more dramatically than women's. In this way, women's decision-making ability relative to men has actually been decreasing (Tran Thi Van Anh, 1995). A recent survey showed that the majority of decisions in the household are made by both husband and wife. The individuals were not asked, however, which person retained the authority to make the final decision in the case of a dispute (Interview with Dr. Van Anh, August 5, 1996). It is widely recognized that men hold this authority, and that they make the decisions concerning large expenditures (Interview with Dr. Van Anh, August 5, 1996). Other decisions made within the family have a huge impact on access to health care, education, and division of labour. A great majority of labour-saving agricultural technologies being purchased by households are used by men and do not help alleviate women's productive burden at all (Bui Thi Lan, 1994).

There is growing evidence that Land Title has consolidated male power within the household. The chief's increased authority extends to organization of consumption, creation of jobs, labour and resource allocation and arrangement of production (Le Thi, 1995). These changes to the family power structure may well lead to increased dependency on the household chief. Women's traditional rights to community property are in danger. Spouses inherit the right to land after the household head's death, but have few rights to land use transfer and rent while the chief is living. In some cases, the household head has sold the

entire household land holding without consulting his wife, forcing her and their children to seek new accommodations and livelihoods (Tran Thi Van Anh, 1995).

Control over household income is being consolidated in male hands. Earnings are no longer based on individual accomplishments and distributed individually as was the practice under the collective system. In the system of household production, goods produced by household members are sold and the income controlled and allocated within the household. Women's productive contributions continue to be considered less valuable than men's, and men have greater control over the household earnings and income distribution than women (Interview with Dr. Van Anh, August 5, 1996). As a result, women are becoming more reliant on the good will of their husband for fair resource allocation.

Access to credit is a crucial factor in increasing production and creating independence for women through income-generating activities. For agricultural production, households often require credit to purchase inputs, which are no longer subsidized, or to invest in technologies. Starting sideline activities, from which many rural women make a portion of their income, also requires access to credit. Although peasant households have been allowed to borrow capital from official banks since the early 1990s, the supply of state credit is severely limited: only 23 per cent of households access credit from the state banking system (UNDP, 1996). Currently most borrowers are upper-middle class, and less than ten per cent of state loans are given to women (Allen and Tran Thi Que, 1992).

Applications for loans must be made by the household chief. Collateral is still required for most loans. With the former system of collectivized ownership of most equipment, households have had access to few assets for use as collateral. Land titling certificates, however, are legally accepted for collateral, and are now by far the most commonly used form of collateral. While women may have some access to land titling certificates for the purposes of acquiring loans, men have control over the use of the certificate for this purpose (Tran Thi Van Anh, 1995).

The requirement of collateral for loans presents an enormous problem for women, who rarely have sole control over any of the key household assets. Some progress has been made in recent years in securing some credit for women. Since 1994, the Việt Nam Women's Union has acted as an intermediary for loans to women. However, the demand for credit among women remains much larger than the available supply from these official sources. Most women must rely on informal means of credit; currently about seventy per cent of borrowing is done through the informal sector at interest rates five to six times higher than the official rate (UNDP, 1996). High interest rates and difficult repayment schedules have created a cyclical effect of poverty for many poor and female-headed households, who are forced to sell their rice young in order to pay their debts, thereby limiting their income for the following year.

Agricultural extension is increasingly being targeted at men as head of household. Training in the use of technologies is no longer carried out by cooperatives. Extension

workers who disseminate critical information are dealing primarily with male farmers. Dr. Van Anh comments that “We have met with officials at the Ministry to ask them to teach women too, but they have little time for us. They are busy adjusting to the dismantling of the cooperatives” (Tran Thi Van Anh in Beaulieu, 1994: p.6). De facto female-headed households have great difficulty in convincing male-dominated local land committees for access to extension services or credit (Tran Thi Van Anh, 1995).

The allocation of land, extension and credit services has almost entirely overlooked the situation of those not living in the traditional nuclear family. As a result of both the war and migration, there are large numbers of female-headed households. Already burdened by a lack of labour capital, many of these women face barriers to accessing capital and land rights. Families who were not able to deliver the required crops to the cooperative during the collective system saw from six to twenty per cent of their land withheld for a period of time. In some areas these households accounted for fifteen per cent of the village population. Female-headed households have found it much more difficult to recover the land due to a lack of influence within the (male) commune leadership (Tran Thi Van Anh, 1995). These families were typically also given the worst pieces of land when it was distributed, as the female heads were either largely ignored or were unable to attend the crucial meetings because of work burdens (Tran Thi Van Anh, 1995).

The issue of land rights is also important for unmarried daughters who lived at home when land was allocated by household¹⁵. If the daughter marries within the same commune, it is feasible for her to maintain usage of her portion of land when she moves in with her husband's family. If she marries outside of the commune, however, she effectively loses control over the land allocated to the household on her behalf. She has no land of her own, and becomes a dependent, unpaid agricultural labourer for her husband's family. In theory, she could sell her rights to the land. In practice, however, once the land is allocated, distribution is left entirely to the household chief, and most would perceive little benefit in allowing a daughter to take a portion of the land for use by another household. In addition, household land is normally distributed in scattered plots of varying quality, and deciding who owns individual pieces of the household land creates serious problems (Beresford, 1994).

Divorce presents a serious potential for disputes over land. The division of land in the case of divorce is to be decided by the family itself. If a dispute arises, however, the case goes before the local land committee, which is composed almost entirely of male household chiefs (Beresford, 1994). In reality, rural tradition often allows the husband to simply refuse to divide the land, and thus women may find it very difficult in the future to exercise their land use rights. For these reasons, divorce is impractical for many rural women, who would become landless, and forced to find alternative accommodation and income. Many Vietnamese women find it preferable to suffer in unhappy or even abusive relationships.

¹⁵For a more detailed analysis of land rights for unmarried daughters, please refer to: Bui Thi Lan (1994) "Gender Differentiated Impacts of the Changing Agricultural Policies in the North of Việt Nam". Thesis submitted for the MAIDS at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Although the divorce rate has risen in recent years, it is still very low among rural families (Beresford, 1994).

Feminists are currently studying a variety of other effects linked to the economic transition. Increases in prostitution and domestic violence, for example, are raising serious concerns among scholars and activists in Việt Nam. Prostitution is a main occupation for some women, while for others it is a side activity to increase income for themselves and their families. Small traders, female students and vocational school pupils have been found prostituting themselves to meet their material needs (Le Thi Quy, 1995). Increased income disparity and changes in bargaining power within the household have corresponded with increases in family violence since the restructuring process began (Duong Thoa, 1995). Increases in domestic violence have been recorded in other countries undergoing an economic adjustment (Beneria, 1995).

In the context of this thesis it would be very difficult to prove a direct correlation at this stage between the assumptions underlying the transitional policies and the rising incidences of these types of activities. There may be a variety of other factors at play, particularly in the case of prostitution and domestic violence, including the government's belief that rising accessibility to Western media and consumer goods are a leading cause of the rise of these types of "social evils" (Việt Nam Women's Union, 1994). There can be little doubt, however, that increased poverty and the stress of having to compete in the productive

system have had some degree of effect on the rising incidences of both domestic violence and prostitution.

5.4 Conclusion

Making an impact assessment of economic transition on women and gender relations is not a simple task. The process of economic transition is not yet complete, and changes are occurring on a daily basis. It is undeniable that a large portion of the Vietnamese population has benefitted from some positive aspect of transition, be it increased production, income, food security, or freedom of speech and movement. In analyzing impact in terms of human development, however, it is critical to assess to what extent the process has enlarged human choices. This relates not only to income levels, but also decision-making, access to services and control over resources.

Women are bearing more of the burdens and receiving fewer benefits of economic transition relative to men. Most women have not been empowered to the extent that men have, and in some cases they have lost the ability to make key decisions about their lives. Access and control over income, credit, agricultural extension, and a vast array of social services have decreased absolutely for many women, and the gap in decision-making and control in the household has widened.

The transitional model adopted by the Vietnamese government predetermined that the effects of transition on women would be negative. The assumptions, particularly those of unpaid labour value, division of labour and joint utility function, are translated into policies, such as cuts to social services and land privatization. Some of these policies' most severe consequences for women have been detailed above. Feminists and development practitioners have been searching for alternatives to the neoclassical economic model. The search for alternatives may take many forms, but must begin with a redefinition of the model which precludes a positive restructuring experience for a significant portion of a country's population.

Chapter 6: Alternatives and Conclusions

There is abundant evidence that people are not affected by economic restructuring in the same way, and that the economic model on which the adopted policies are based all but guarantees that some will fare far worse than others. To ensure that this injustice does not continue indefinitely, an alternative to the currently predominant model and its policies must be developed. Designing alternatives to policies and models is always more difficult than criticizing mainstream thought, and there is very limited scope for such an attempt in this thesis. However, to present a critique of the current model and policies without attempting some discussion of strategies to overcome the existing biases would be negligent. Proposing a strategy for action, or at least a starting point, should be considered fundamental to any discussion of development. Without this strategic component, the discussion has failed to move any closer to offering a solution to the problems presented.

6.1 Adjusting Current Policies

As widespread evidence emerged on the negative consequences of SAPs in the 1980s, a significant number of governments and women's organizations developed measures to mitigate against these adverse effects. Emergency health services, food aid and short-term shelters were among some of the tactics used in developing regions experiencing adjustment. These stop-gap measures were intended to provide short-term relief for those suffering from the negative repercussions of adjustment. It was assumed that in the long-run, as the

economic system regained equilibrium, these measures would no longer be necessary, as resumption of growth would enable households to meet their basic needs independently (Moser, 1993). Although it is still too early to make a sophisticated assessment of the long-term consequences of SAPs, evidence suggests that there has been little relief to date for many who have been adversely affected by adjustment over the longer term (Sparr, 1994).

Similarly, the suggestion that current policies could be adapted to incorporate the realities of women and other groups previously overlooked is problematic. This approach would require an advanced level of gender awareness within the government. The degree of gender awareness within the Vietnamese government must be questioned in light of its failure to incorporate a gender awareness into its transitional policies from the outset. As has been shown, the Vietnamese government believed it possible to adopt a traditional market economy while maintaining social equity, and were unaware of the negative repercussions that might result from their policies on land privatization and social cuts. While a concentrated campaign aimed at developing gender awareness among Vietnamese policy-makers might unearth some support for incorporating a gender perspective into policies in the long-term, efforts by both local and foreign scholars and practitioners have had little impact on the awareness level to date¹⁶.

¹⁶Despite constant pressure from researchers and academics of the Centre for Family and Women's Studies in Hà Noi (including Dr. Van Anh), most policy-makers have been unreceptive (Interview with Dr. Van Anh, 1996). Similarly, there is a perception among many policy-makers that foreign scholars seek to import a "radical", western feminism into the country, which does not coincide with their values.

Rather, the political decision-makers followed the lead of developed countries and pressure from international financial institutions to adopt the standard model for its transition, thereby accepting gender biased assumptions about the nature and function of households. Despite its limited recognition of the negative consequences resulting from some of the policies, the Vietnamese government has done little to alter its course to incorporate a more gendered approach. Even if the government were to suddenly awaken to a heightened gender awareness, any fundamental shift in policy would prove exceedingly difficult under the watchful eye of international donors, including the IMF and World Bank.

Some authors have suggested that the Việt Nam Women's Union (VWU), as the largest women's organization in Việt Nam, must be considered for its potential to advocate progressive change for women in the current situation. Ann Koblitz and Valentine Moghadam, researchers of women's changing status in socialist and former socialist countries, have argued that the VWU has been responsible for most positive changes for women in the past, and that the VWU will play a crucial role in future positive changes (Koblitz, 1995; Moghadam, 1994).

While there is little doubt that the VWU has acted as a catalyst for many positive changes within the government in favour of women since its creation in 1930, many academics doubt their ability to advocate fundamental change within the government structure at this point. Nguyen Thi Oanh, a researcher of women's studies in Ho Chi Minh City, has argued that the top-down model of governance by the Women's Union “inhibits the

development of gender awareness, creative solutions, or real involvement by the people” (Oanh in Moghadam, 1994). Oanh suggests that Union policies promoting gender equality have been ineffective in part because “policy action does not typically involve a deep consideration of the roots of gender-related issues” (Oanh in Moghadam, 1994).

Christine Pelzer White, a specialist on Việt Nam with particular interest in women's issues, argues that the Women's Union was created for the same purpose as the other mass organizations and trade unions: to disseminate and implement party policy among women (White, 1989). According to White, a great deal more emphasis is put on mobilizing women to support the goals of national liberation and state socialism than organizing around specific women's issues (White, 1994). Activities organized by the VWU tend to foster women's traditional role in society. These include sewing and embroidery classes for girls, and education classes in which women are encouraged to be “good wives and mothers” (Brazier, 1992). An excerpt from the VWU's publication “Women of Việt Nam” (1994) tends to confirm this view:

“A distinction should be made between the housework of a woman in today's society and that of a woman in past society... the housework of a woman in today's society is the result of a division of social labour, while that of a woman in past societies was the result of woman's enslavement... If a woman does not accomplish her job according to the division of social labour, she only harms society...” (UNDP, 1996: p.133).

As Diane Elson contends, “in analyzing the potential of such organizations in combatting male bias we must ask to what extent they have a transformative perspective that includes the empowerment of women; and to what extent they are concerned more with

enabling women to cope with the status quo and to perform their traditional roles better” (Elson, 1991a: p.192). From the above evidence it seems clear that while the VWU may assist women with short-term actions to lessen the negative impact of transition, the Union is not currently dedicated to a transformative agenda for women. For this reason, the Việt Nam Women's Union cannot be relied upon for promoting long-term progressive change for women bearing the weight of transition in Việt Nam.

Another factor to be considered is the feasibility of adjusting policies to incorporate gender realities. Women continue to be grafted on to development policies and planning without consideration of structural and ideological inconsistencies within the policies (Moser, 1993). Caroline Moser has laid the groundwork for a “gender planning” approach as a planning tradition in its own right. She argues that ideology, methods and methodology of traditional planning approaches are not consistent with the transformative goal of releasing women from subordination, and that the existing approaches are unable to transform gender realities. Moser believes that a new approach to policy-making and planning is required which would start the process from a gendered perspective, taking into account disaggregated information about the nature of gender relations (Moser, 1993).

While “gender planning” is still in its infancy, Moser offers a skeletal framework for this new approach. Gender planning falls into what Moser calls the “transformative traditions” along with development, cultural and environmental planning (Moser, 1993). With the stated goal of women’s emancipation, the approach is necessarily political in nature.

The process combines the use of gender planning tools, gender planning procedures and components of gender planning practice. Moser stresses the iterative nature of this process. She argues for gender diagnoses of roles and needs through disaggregated data at the household level, as well as intersectorally linked planning, and the use of gender monitoring and participatory planning (Moser, 1993). Although not yet fully developed, the gender planning approach holds much promise for a more holistic means of fully integrating gender into development policy and planning.

6.2 Alternative Models

The limited effects of WID-style policies have shown that problems of restructuring will not be solved by simply “making women visible” or adding stop-gap measures to alleviate poverty. To ensure a more equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of economic life in the future, the biased assumptions underlying the neoclassical economic model must be reconsidered. Feminist economists, among other groups, have begun to address these issues and work to develop an alternative framework.

Despite the diversity of approach and opinion among feminist economists, most would agree that “feminist economics is about developing a more realistic and holistic economics” (M. MacDonald, 1993: p.111). Economist Chris Beasley points out that new paradigms are developed over time, and as such, feminist economics is not yet fully developed. Rather, what exists at this stage of development is a collection of “useful parameters which can potentially

provide a direction in the relatively new and uncharted waters of feminist economics” (Beasley, 1994: p.109).

There is some consistency in the parameters advocated by feminist economists. Many stress the urgency in developing appropriate theoretical and methodological tools to analyze the questions, concerns and ambiguities arising from the male-centred economic model. The need to move away from scientific positivism of neoclassical economics and toward a more complex methodology which reflects the complex nature of society is also stressed. Rejecting the existing structure based on concepts such as REM, “rational economic man”, necessitates the development of a sound alternative. One playful example of such an alternative is offered by Nancy Folbre in her IRSEP, “imperfectly rational somewhat economic persons”. With IRSEP, Folbre rejects the simplified model of society built on erroneous assumptions. In the world of IRSEP,

“...the future is uncertain. Information is costly...Sometimes there is little basis for rational assessment of the possibilities. Habit, tradition, and cultural stereotypes provide individuals with shortcuts. The actual practice of decision-making doesn’t always conform to the theory of rational behaviour... Mr. and Mrs. REM may, for instance, weigh \$5 quite differently depending on whether it represents a potential gain, a potential loss, an unexpected gift, or an anticipated reward” (Folbre, 1994: pp.20-21).

Although Folbre likely offers IRSEP to make a point, a well-formulated alternative to assumptions like REM are vital to transforming the model.

Most feminist economists see some inherent value in models. Benefits cited for working within the structure of models include the arguments that they encourage theoretical precision, clarify the direction and magnitude of key interactions, and provide an internal route to attempting modification of mainstream views (Cagatay et al, 1995). In addition, formal models hold a crucial place in informing policy-making, and therefore have powerful policy implications (Cagatay et al, 1995). In research and analysis, feminist economists generally agree on the basic tenets of an alternative model. They stress the need for conducting research free from androcentric bias, documenting and explaining economic inequalities as more than just irregularities, disaggregating all concepts of analysis, and rethinking concepts and categories typically used in economic inquiry (Garba, 1998). Feminist economists emphasize the need to use gender-defined indicators. Widespread acknowledgement of non-market activities as legitimate areas of economic inquiry would vastly increase the visibility of the unpaid labour of reproduction and maintenance of human resources.

Engendering macroeconomic models has been attempted from many angles and perspectives. Many of these efforts relate specifically to the biases raised in this thesis, and this link will be made apparent following a general overview of the main perspectives. The “gender disaggregation method” involves disaggregating existing macroeconomic variables by gender. Disaggregation makes visible many differences in gender relations which are invisible within the mainstream model. The gender disaggregation approach does not, however, explicitly introduce the reproductive sector into the model (Cagatay et al, 1995). Other approaches, such as the “two sector/system method” and the “combination method”

similarly attempt to conceptualize economic systems in terms which incorporate variables reflective of the inequality of gender relations and divisions of labour (Cagatay et al, 1995).

Various strategies have been developed to increase gender awareness within adjustment models. Elson recognizes the importance of disaggregating variables by gender. However, she contends that while this may be the most obvious way of introducing gender into a macroeconomic model, the strategy does not tend to call into question the basic vision of the model itself, and should be used to complement other strategies (Elson, 1995b). Another strategy attempts to identify missing variables which have a particular gender significance and incorporate them into the model (Elson, 1995b). Elson and McGee present what they term “the gendered macroeconomic variable method”, which conceptualizes the economy as a gendered structure (Elson and McGee, 1995). This strategy recognizes that gender relations are an inherent variable in all economic activities, and that “economic institutions which are not themselves intrinsically gendered are nevertheless bearers of gender” (Elson and McGee, 1995: p.1988). Elson proposes an institutionalization of a gender perspective by altering the values of the model’s parameters, such as capital-output ratios, savings ratios and import ratios, which she argues are partially determined by the degree of gender inequality in the economy. Engendering the macroeconomic model in this way would help to counter gender-blindness reproduced by these variables based on biased assumptions (Elson, 1995b).

“New institutional economics” provides a different perspective on the household by incorporating the role of institutions in structuring economic relationships (Kabeer, 1994). Whereas traditional explanations of economic behaviour focus on the production costs of economic activity, institutional economics is also concerned with the costs of transactions between different economic actors. The household is recognized as one of the institutional modes for organizing production (Kabeer, 1994). Household membership is seen as more than just an independent, individual decision, involving social pressures of conformity. Institutional economics acknowledges that behavioural outcomes within the household are likely to reflect contractual rights and obligations as well as economic incentives (Kabeer, 1994). Household conflict, cooperation and bargaining form the basis of the household contract in this model:

“The bargaining process thus generates intersecting contractual relationships between different household members, specifying their rights and obligations to each other, as the basis of household cooperation....Decision-making within the household is thus seen as the resolution of potential conflicting preferences through a process of negotiation between unequals” (Kabeer, 1994: p.109).

The “bargaining model” specifically deals with the household in economics through a bargaining approach which recognizes that interaction within the household contains elements of both cooperation and conflict. Outcomes of the bargaining process will be determined by the relative bargaining power of household members. A household member’s bargaining power may be defined by a number of factors, some quantifiable and others less so, including economic assets, communal support systems, social norms, or perceptions about

contributions and needs (Agarwal, 1997). One particularly strong determinant of bargaining power may be considered the “strength of the person’s fall-back position” (Agarwal, 1997: p.4). An individual’s bargaining strength within a subsistence-oriented rural household would depend specifically on factors such as ownership and control over assets, access to employment and other income-earning means, access to communal resources, traditional and formal support systems, and social norms (Agarwal, 1997). The bargaining model recognizes that individual action will be motivated by both self-interest and altruism. The model draws attention to the interrelation of bargaining within and outside the household, and stresses the external forces which help to determine and shape bargaining power within the household (Agarwal, 1997).

“Humanist economics” represents a similar effort to incorporate a more complex understanding of individuals and society into an economic model. Proposed by Mark Lutz and Kenneth Lux, humanist economics has many parallels with the feminist critique of the neoclassical model (Lutz and Lux in Nelson, 1996). Lutz and Lux provide a much more complex presentation of humanity than the neoclassical “economic man”, incorporating characteristics of ““reasonableness, principled behaviour, altruism, objectivity, rationality, selfishness, subjectivity, and purely personal goals”” (Lutz and Lux in Nelson, 1996: p.135). While feminist economists acknowledge that humanist economics offer similar critiques of neoclassical economics to their own, some argue that the approach still “retains too much in common with the mainstream ideology” (Nelson, 1996: p.137).

Efforts have also been directed at incorporating a more gender-sensitive approach to some of the fundamental tenets of mainstream economics. Recognizing the reproductive origins and costs of labour input within growth theory provides one example. Whereas the typical growth model assumes the labour force to be an exogenous factor of production, a more reflective model would recognize labour as a produced means of production with specific costs and characteristics (Walters, 1995). Not only would this approach encourage a more realistic consideration of the gender division of labour and costs of reproduction, but it would also more adequately represent the direct impact of labour reproduction on growth (Walters, 1995).

Disaggregation of all major analytical categories in economics is identified by many feminist economists as a fundamental and necessary step toward the recognition of gender in the traditional model (recognizing Elson's concerns about limitations and the need to go beyond disaggregation) (Elson, 1991c). This includes disaggregating the private sectors into categories which distinguish the formal and informal sectors, foreign-owned and locally-owned enterprises, those employing wage labour and those employing family labour, and the public sector into categories which disaggregate different forms of parastatals, services they provide, and which sections of the population benefit directly from them (Elson, 1991c). Once this information is available, the gender dimension can no longer remain "invisible".

These diverse alternative models attempt to overcome the gender biases inherent in the mainstream model. All of the alternatives presented deal either explicitly or implicitly with

the main biases discussed in this thesis. The bargaining model, institutional and humanist economics all specifically relate to the issue of joint utility, arguing that a more complex and realistic view of choice, conflict, negotiation and human nature be incorporated into an economic model. The gendered macroeconomic variable approach and new growth theory directly counter the bias of non-value of unpaid labour, presenting new ways to account for the costs and consequences of reproductive labour carried out (primarily) by women. The bargaining model, institutional economics and new growth theory all deal with the bias of comparative advantage and fair competition in the division of labour. Gender-blind theories mask the constraints and relative inflexibility of women's labour compared to men, and the institutional and social discrimination which negatively affects their ability to compete in the labour force. Approaches which do not explicitly relate to one of the biases may counter them indirectly. For example, while gendered macroeconomic variables does not appear to directly refer to joint utility or fair competition issues, it is clear that by institutionalizing gender analysis into mainstream economics, the effects of these biases will also be mitigated. Disaggregation of variables by gender relates to all of these biases. However, as Elson argues, disaggregation in isolation would not be sufficient to overturn these bias. An effective opposition to the biases requires a combination of all the alternatives being currently developed.

6.3 Alternative Policies

While recognizing the need for an alternative model or models, most feminist economists are simultaneously working to establish policy agendas which promote more immediate positive change. A variety of policy recommendations are being developed which seek to incorporate gender into existing policies and provide alternative policies based on a more realistic and gendered analysis of existing structures.

Several feminist economists have taken on the issue of gender relations and division of labour with respect to macroeconomic policies of taxation, expenditure and monetary and exchange-rate policies (Bakker, 1994b; Palmer, 1995). Bakker argues that direct and indirect taxes affect women and men differently according to their role in reproductive and productive employment. Indirect taxes tend to have a greater impact on women because of their role as household managers, while direct taxes affect men more immediately through income levels (Bakker, 1994b). Policy decisions on expenditure priorities including public employment, transfers, subsidies, service delivery and capital expenditures will also have gender-differentiated repercussions (Bakker, 1994b). The precise nature of the gender effects of monetary policy, government efforts to regulate levels of investment, output and employment, are not yet well-documented. However, evidence from structurally adjusted countries shows that the burden of negative effects from monetary policies used to alter investment and production levels falls disproportionately on poor urban and rural women and children (Bakker, 1994b). Palmer examines taxation and expenditures through a gender lens.

demonstrating how distributing the costs of reproduction can promote well-functioning labour markets and contribute to equitable and sustainable growth. Proponents advocate the introduction of new labour-saving technology which would “release women’s labour for incorporation into the non-market economy without requiring large outlays of capital” (Palmer, 1995: p.1984)¹⁷. The approach emphasizes long-run public investments in education, strategic intervention to distribute appropriate technology, and modernization of basic infrastructure (Palmer, 1995).

A broad range of policy suggestions are offered by MacDonald with reference to social security policy (M. MacDonald, 1998). MacDonald argues that intra-household inequality should be taken into account in the design of policies. Policy-makers must not assume that all households function as income pooling units, or that all family members are equally well-off (M. MacDonald, 1998). Policies should either encourage, rather than assume, income pooling, or ensure individual entitlements to security benefits provided by the state. Policies must be based on a recognition of the economic importance of social reproduction, the interrelation between production and reproduction, and the resources used and produced in the reproductive sphere (M. MacDonald, 1998). Policies must recognize the existing gender division of labour in the home, taking into account women’s disproportionate burden of reproductive work (M. MacDonald, 1998). Policies must be based on an understanding of the distinct labour market experience of women and men, recognizing the

¹⁷This prescription seems eerily reminiscent of 1970s WID approaches which promoted labour-saving technologies as a way of incorporating women into the productive sphere, enabling them to ‘reap the benefits of development’.

significance of informal work for women and the lower wages earned by most women in the productive sphere (M. MacDonald, 1998). Policies should not assume a particular family arrangement. Policies are often based on the concept of the traditional family, discriminating against individuals, same sex or unmarried couples or single parents (M. MacDonald, 1998). Finally, policies should encourage positive changes to gender inequalities in the distribution of workload, income and power (M. MacDonald, 1998). Policies should encourage sharing of caregiving responsibilities through public compensation for family labour, equal child care opportunities through paternity and family leave policies (Folbre in M. MacDonald, 1998: p.15). The policy recommendations offered by MacDonald touch on each of the main biases discussed. As such, they provide valuable suggestions for alternatives to current policies in both north and south.

Elson and McGee advocate dialogue and change at the policy level of structural adjustment. Some of the main processes they recommend for policy dialogue include policy expenditure reviews, poverty assessments, sectoral policy reforms, and study on the emergence of new markets (Elson and McGee, 1995). They argue that the purpose of such dialogue would be to “secure a greater voice for women and advocates of gender equality in the policy process, so that they can show how their concerns lead to more effective policy for sustainable human development” (Elson and McGee, 1995: p.1991). While the argument suggests gender equality to be a means to a greater end, there can be no doubt that Elson and McGee view gender equality as a fundamental concern in and of itself. The argument that

gender equality can actually improve effectiveness of programs is more likely, however, to make a lasting impression on policy- and decision-makers.

Policies on taxes, subsidies and expenditures must be broken down according to gender impact (Beneria, 1995). Alternative policies must take into account the connection between the documented hidden costs of adjustment, including the deterioration of infrastructure, interruptions in schooling for children, and the long-term losses in productivity, intensification of domestic work, and increase in crime and violence (Beneria, 1995). Adjustment policies must be accompanied by two types of social policy: short-run compensatory measures dealing with the most immediate consequences of adjustment, and transformative measures which seek to create long-term change to distribution of property rights and income, division of labour, and participation in the labour force (Beneria, 1995).

Among feminist economists and GAD practitioners there is a strong desire to develop and recognize alternative indicators of economic and social well-being. They seek to establish and popularize a measurement which is more reflective of human needs and equity issues than the GDP, currently the most widespread measure of well-being (Beneria, 1995). The GDP is critiqued by many for its failure to account for distribution, poverty or social welfare (Nelson, 1996). The Human Development Index (HDI) was developed by the UNDP in the attempt to incorporate these social dimensions. However, the HDI is still based on the gender-biased measures of GNP and labour force activity (M. MacDonald, 1995). Unpaid and reproductive work are not addressed in this alternative indicator of well-being.

In the 1995 Human Development Report which focused on Gender and Development, the UNDP presented several sets of indicators which attempt to take into consideration the overall level of gender equality in each country. As mentioned earlier, the GDI ranks 130 countries by the variables used in the HDI, but adjusts the measure by the gaps in achievement between women and men. For the same level of average achievement, the greater the gender disparity, the lower a country's GDI (UNDP, 1995). A new "Gender Empowerment Measure", or GEM, was developed to assess some critical opportunities that women have for using their capabilities. It ranks 116 countries by three variables that reflect women's participation in: 1) political decision-making (as measured by their share of parliamentary seats); 2) their access to professional opportunities (measured by their share of administrative, managerial, professional and technical positions); and 3) their earning power (measured by their access to jobs and wages)¹⁸.

There is considerable debate among feminists over whether unpaid reproductive labour should be subject to a monetary calculation (Nelson, 1996). Marilyn Waring supports efforts to monetarize this work, arguing the women's unpaid work will continue to be unvalued and neglected if not translated into monetary figures understandable and easily-configured by economists (Waring, 1988). Other feminists argue that emphasizing the value of housework may result in a perceived glorification of the role of housewife to the detriment of women's drive for equality (Nelson, 1996). Further, some feminists object to the idea of

¹⁸The GDI and GEM have become established indicators in subsequent Human Development Reports and has been given prominent position within the HDR tables.

trivializing the complex processes involved in reproduction into a simple economic calculation. For them, monetarizing childrearing for the purposes of neatly fitting the process into the current economic analysis is not an adequate solution. MacDonald points out that the goal is not measurement for its own sake, but for gathering information to enable a better understanding of the interrelation between the unpaid and cash economies (M. MacDonald, 1995).

One proposed measure of unpaid reproductive labour is the GHP, or Gross Household Product. The GHP would estimate the economic value added by unpaid work through a system which would count household outputs and value them at market prices (Ironmonger, 1994). Similarly, household-owned capital which is used in the production of household outputs would also be measured and given a monetary value. These values would be incorporated into the GHP. The Gross Market Product (GMP) would reflect the paid production in the marketplace, and the GHP, unpaid reproductive production. The Gross Economic Product, or GEP, would be the sum of the GHP and GMP, and would reflect total value added (Ironmonger, 1994).

Incorporating a calculation of reproductive labour into economic analysis would offer enormous potential for overturning the biases presented in this thesis. The non-value of unpaid labour would obviously be most dramatically altered, eliminating the bias of non-value within the model. However, reproductive labour would still remain unpaid, and quite likely socially and culturally undervalued. The gender division of labour which relegates most

reproductive responsibilities to women would not necessarily be affected by this change. It is feasible that this type of calculation would impact household decision-making, as more recognition was given to the value of women's time and energy. Similarly, the gender division of labour might be affected by a greater awareness of the value of reproductive work. It is most likely, however, that fundamental changes to the latter biases would only be achieved by taking the analysis to a higher (and significantly more controversial) level by creating a system of monetary compensation for reproductive work.

The majority of model alternatives and policy recommendations presented are directly relevant to Việt Nam's current situation. As has been argued, policies adopted did not take into consideration the possibility of intra-household inequality and assumed income pooling or a "benevolent dictator", resulting in the distribution of land to the household head. Similarly, policies did not consider the different experiences and degree of constraints faced by women and men in the labour market or the gender division of labour within the household. This is reflected in many ways, including the increased workload for women, the resulting female dropout rates from school, and in the changing nature of paid employment for Vietnamese women.

There is significant potential in all the alternative measures, policies, and research methods that feminist economists and GAD practitioners are working toward. At the same time, there is still much work to be done, both in solidifying the structure of these approaches, and in advocating their widespread usage. The model, its underlying assumptions and

methods have a substantial history and hold unprecedented power in the current global system, and the widespread acceptance of any alternative cannot be expected to occur instantaneously.

6.4 Grassroots Social Movement

Local social movements are often heralded as having the greatest potential to turn the tide toward transformation. Social movements vary dramatically from one region to another, but usually begin as a demand for meeting basic survival needs. However, there is an ideological aspect inherent in most of these social movements, and their leaders perceive achieving the goals of empowerment and participation as the only way to ensure access to basic needs is sustainable (Amin, 1990).

Until recently in Việt Nam, there was little room for organizations not sanctioned by the state. Political liberalization has resulted from the huge influx of international aid, investment and information, and with this new freedom many movements have begun to organize around various issues. Nevertheless, Vietnamese women still face a variety of constraints to organizing themselves. There seems to be a lack of gender awareness among many women. According to Dr. Van Anh, government propaganda has told them for decades that women and men are equal, and yet their realities have been quite different. The concept of equality has thus become meaningless for many women (Interview with Dr. Van Anh, August 5, 1996).

Time and energy factors may impede women's ability to join movements. The dramatic increase in women's workloads has meant that many women simply do not have the time to be involved in such activities. In addition, the replacement of cooperative work by home-based activities has increased women's isolation. Women have fewer opportunities to meet other women outside of their family circle with whom to discuss issues of concern.

While constraints do exist, there are also a wide range of opportunities for Vietnamese women to organize. The political space now exists for organizing. The government is publicly supporting social equity, and the increased political freedom means that an arena now exists for the creation of social movements. At the same time, the global movement for women's rights provides a positive force, and offers local movements linkages with movements outside the country. The very rapid deterioration of gender equality may actually lead to an increase in gender awareness and provide a catalyst for action.

The impetus to participate in local movements may be on the rise. There is evidence that people are rejecting the top-down bureaucratic system that governed their lives for decades. The Vietnamese people have had their own indigenous survival strategies for centuries. Their history of initiating action for change suggests that social movements may well develop to mitigate the negative effects of transition.

6.5 A Joint Effort

A variety of possible means to mitigate or overcome the gender bias in the economic transition model adopted in Việt Nam have been discussed. Far too often scholars become entangled in the debate over which approach is most important, and whether the battle should be waged from “within” or “without” the existing institutional frameworks. A truly successful and sustainable change to the prevailing economic system depends on the efforts of all the initiatives mentioned above. Gender-aware politicians must continue to press leaders for changes to the current policies, and local scholars must support these efforts with research and advocacy. Development practitioners and policy specialists must promote change from the grassroots to the large development institutions. Feminist economists must strive to have their alternative approaches to economic theory, methods, research and policy, incorporated into the mainstream economic model. Local people must organize, protest and struggle to have their voices heard by government and the international community.

Dr. Kassey Garba, lecturer with the Department of Economics at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, pointed to the necessary element for success at a recent presentation on Gender and Macroeconomics in Ottawa. Dr. Garba demanded that feminist economists, development practitioners and academics strive to bridge the gap between academic theory and development practice. She argued that academics have a responsibility to demystify the work they are doing, and to make their analyses accessible to non-economists by communicating to practitioners using common language. Similarly, development practitioners

must overcome their apprehension about the relevance of academic theory. Both have a responsibility to become actively involved with and support each other's work, recognizing the importance of efforts from all angles and levels to promote long-term, sustainable change (Garba, 1998).

6.6 Conclusions

Neoclassical economics enjoys a pre-eminent status among economic approaches which is unparalleled in this century. The pervasive mode of mainstream developing thinking over the past decades is based largely on the underlying beliefs and goals of the neoclassical economic model. Policies adopted by governments, large development bodies and international financial institutions around the world adhere strictly to the neoclassical economic framework. The neoclassical economic model, and its derived policies, are dependent on assumptions which reflect the experiences of those who shaped them: white, northern men. The majority of the world's population is not reflected in the beliefs about individuals and society which underpin the model and policies. Yet governments continue to adopt restructuring policies based on these false assumptions.

The case of Việt Nam's economic transition provides a strong example of the negative effects of these policies on women and gender relations. Specific examples of assumptions in the model can be directly linked to the deterioration of women's position in Vietnamese society. The government's adoption of a transitional model based on neoclassical

economics prescribed the standard policies including land privatization and cuts to social services. The effects of these policies to date in Việt Nam follow a strikingly similar pattern to other countries undergoing structural adjustment and economic transition. The position of most women within the household, labour market, and society has deteriorated in Việt Nam since transition, particularly relative to men, but in some cases in absolute terms as well.

There is sufficient proof that women are bearing the harshest consequences of economic restructuring around the world to conclude that this is not a coincidence. Rather, evidence points to an inherent gender bias in the neoclassical economic model which makes these negative effects an inevitable outcome of restructuring processes. While policy-makers may not deliberately define their objectives in terms that burden women more than men, the continued refusal to recognize the bias and its often devastating effects can no longer be justified.

Having laid bare the shortcomings of neoclassical economics, feminist economists, development practitioners and researchers are striving to develop a strong and viable alternative for the future. While proponents for change search for alternatives in research, measurement, theory and policies, they stress the importance of bridging the gap between work being carried out by academics and practitioners. Developing a viable alternative to the model which exacts such a degree of injustice while enjoying unparalleled support will require a monumental collaborative effort.

Feminist economists and development practitioners have made impressive progress in a short period of time; time will determine the extent of their success in the future for creating a successful alternative to the gender biased model which currently governs our lives. The economic transition in Việt Nam is still young, yet the impact has been swift and substantial for many Vietnamese. Local and foreign feminists alike must work diligently to present alternatives to the existing model and policies there, while offering practical and immediate solutions to mitigate the unequal distribution of benefits and burdens and the rising levels of gender inequality which have resulted from this gender biased process.

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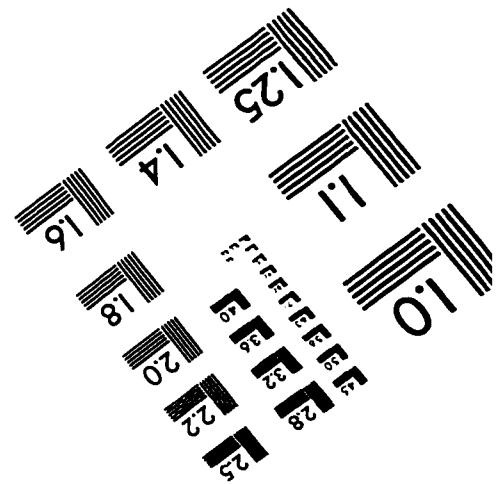
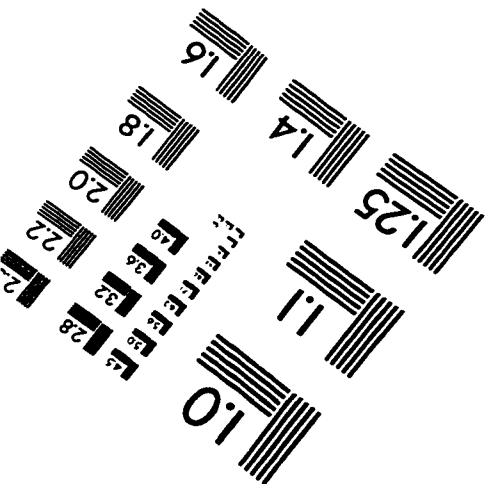
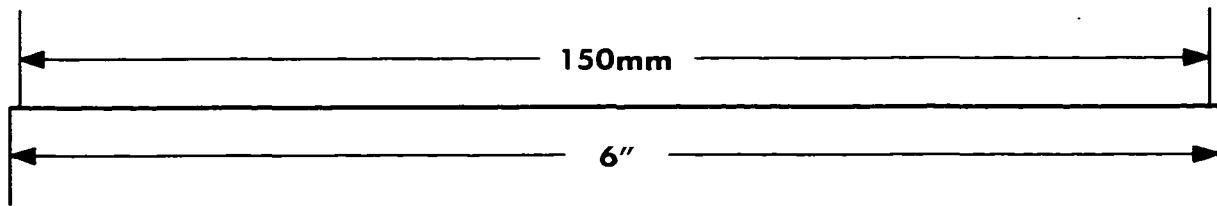
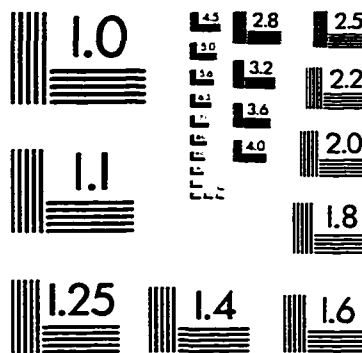
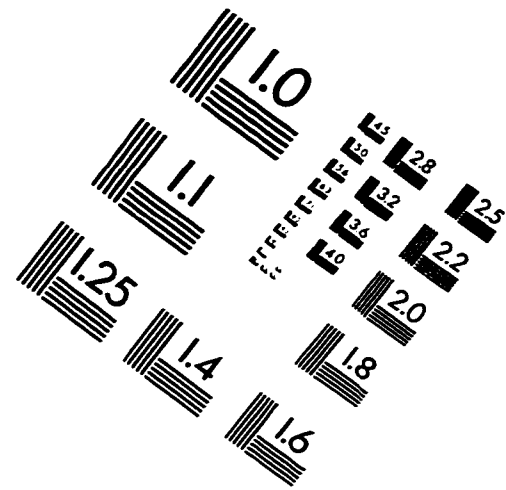
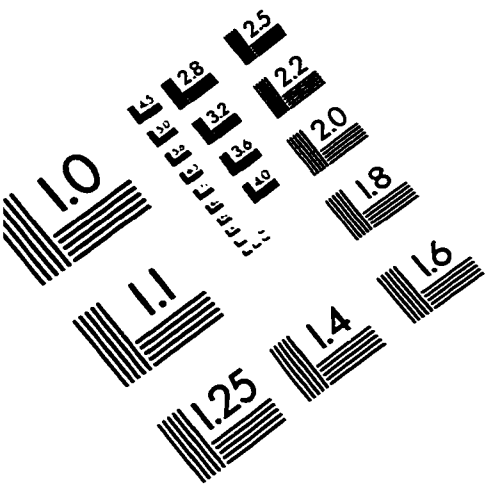
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