

Globalization and Women's Rights: Economic Restructuring, Women's Experiences and Responses to "Neoliberal Shocks"

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Global Research, March 08, 2020

Global Research 27 August 2019

Theme: [Poverty & Social Inequality](#),
[Women's Rights](#)

There is a critical nexus between colonial development and economic re-structuring processes in the Third world whereby globalization is an ideological weapon that extends imperial control over ex-colonies through persistent poverty and underdevelopment.

Globalization is also an external war that is waged against women's bodies, rights, autonomies and livelihood through the continuation of dispossession and violence. It must be emphasized that the concepts of violence and dispossession are not limited to seen, forceful, physical activities that are exerted towards less powerful groups by more dominant groups but the concepts are also unseen and institutionalized into socio-cultural, economic and political spaces.

The international political economy becomes a site for external imposition of Western standards to civilize and modernize economies of Global South through consistent emphasis on financialization, marketization and quantification of success in measures such as gross domestic product (GDP). As a result of these extensive forms of 'civilization' methods, women in Global South remain in the position of chattels ('properties') that are tied and subdued by multiple patriarchies in the sequence of: father, husband, employer, nation-state, local capitalists, private investors, development institutions and development planners, men within resistance movements and Western women.

Women's secondary status had remained tightly embedded in society's social and economic fabrics. This reinforced patriarchal, gender ideologies about women's expectations, justified dispossession and displacement and inequitable, power relationships. Gosh's astute observation that gender discrimination tends to be interconnected with others forms of social and economic disparity. This holds true to the fact that financial crisis forces women in informal and care sectors of employment in which their labour is unremunerated and unrecorded in national statistics. While the formal or better-paid sectors of employment are reserved for the occupation of men.

The deliberate distinction between 'formal' vs. 'informal' employment and 'men's' vs. 'women's' labour sets the foreground for a constant struggle between privilege and disadvantage. This is seen where women's labour is invisible and unpaid because it is seen as natural extension of their physiology while men's labour attracts profit because it is seen as more valuable to the success of the capitalist economy (Mies, 1986). The capitalist economy is an archenemy of women's upward mobility and independence because the market is allowed to determine the price of labour and the assignment of people to jobs that

are based on socially constructed norms and expectations. Similar to the proposition of Gosh on women's unpaid labour, Ehrenreich, Russell-Hocschild and Elson highlighted that national statistics do not take into account women's employment in the informal sectors neither do they capture the burdens of additional responsibilities and obligations indirectly and directly caused by financial crisis and structural adjustment programs.

Financial crisis and structural adjustment programs are instruments of violence that work in collaboration with nation states to re-direct the attention from strong social policy to financial policy because profit is more important than people's well-being and sense of self-worth. Additionally, access to social services are not seen as inalienable human rights in which citizens, especially vulnerable populations, are entitled to but rather ambitious public policy goals to be achieved by developing states (Vasciannie, 2005). Under neo-liberal globalization, rights are privatized commodities that are owned by a debt ridden, third world state and the controllers of wealth and production in the global economy.

Numbers are also used to conceal their personal and collective realities of instability, suffering and misery. Quantification is a top-down strategy of measurement that is used to present an illusionary version of a nation-state's success because it fails to answer the following questions: who benefits from success? is success equitable? at whose expense is success achieved? Thus, women are not integrated in development with the intention for them to be equally valuable stakeholders as men but to be victimized and to remain at the bottom of the social class, gender and race pyramids as servants to systems and structures that are against their interests. Thus, the personal is not just political, it is also economic (Scott, 1984).

It is against this background that Chant argues that women end up working for development instead of development working for them because the notion of empowerment denies the fact the women in the non-Western world possess the potential to define empowerment on their own terms. Projects and programs are bestowed upon women in the Global South under the banners of 'empowerment and gender equality' to fight against high incidences of poverty. These projects address women's access and enablement to various spaces but they still do not transform the existing power relations that propagate violence and women's marginalized position. The existing power relations will not be effectively addressed either, because development planners and Western institutions rely on the logic of the market to support their vested interests. The goal of international development is never about serving 'womankind' through good will but maintaining the status quo. Hence, the persistent poverty among women in the developing world is not a 'natural' process but a condition that is politically and socially engineered.



The issue of the political engineering of poverty among third world women who are single mothers in third world have been addressed by Ehrenreich and Elson. The scholars note that the financial crisis have contributed to the significant decline in incomes, standard of living and the traditional male headed households in the Third world. As a result, women are forced to maintain households by seeking jobs in the care and informal economy in first world countries, amidst men who have abdicated their responsibilities.

Women are expected to be suitable alternatives to men by providing compensations for their absence or failures. They are also expected to meet multiple demands and obligations in order to be crowned the titles “good daughter, mother and or wife”. Femininity is a performance of morality in which women who comply with the strict regulatory norms of submissiveness and docility are rewarded while those who deviate are chastised. Chant discusses this subject matter in her cross-country case studies. She coined the term ‘feminization of responsibility’ in attempt to revise the ‘feminization of poverty’ thesis. This theme was also evident in the movie, ‘Return to Hansala’ where the female protagonist was chastised for her brother’s death and she tried to convince her father that she is a good daughter and good Muslim woman.

The identity of third world women becomes more complex when they migrate from their countries of origin to the first world. Their precarious connection with middle or upper class Western women transforms sub-ordination from gender issue to an issue of race, social class and sexuality. Western women and non-western women are not fighting in the struggle for the same type of equality and empowerment because the issue of oppression affects them differently. Their goals are also different. While upper or middle class, Western women seek to break the glass ceilings in well paid, male-dominated jobs, non-Western women are being employed in unpaid or underpaid jobs that still cannot help to meet their personal or family needs. Western women are critical components in the preservation of global, hegemonic masculinity because their victory in the employment sphere comes as a result of epitomizing the liberal goal of the ‘self-optimizing’ individual. They also actively or indirectly engage in the process of ‘othering’ non-western women in sectors that they no longer can or choose to occupy. While household patriarchy in the third world has declined, public patriarchy has remained tightly embedded into the social, economic, cultural and political fabrics of transnational borders.

Elson in another academic article provided the example of the Korean government requesting women to become supportive wives to their husbands in the context of the financial crisis in 1997/8 but men were not expected to provide reciprocal support. This reinforces cultural beliefs about the roles and expectations of men and women in Korean society. It also illustrates how gender ideologies and power dictates an unequal relationship of privilege and advantage for men vs. sub-ordination and disadvantage for women on the global stage. Masculinity and femininity are not equal, socially constructed dimensions and therefore, institutions are put in place to perpetuate the unequal expectations and treatment of men and women.

Nevertheless, women in the Global South are not passive victims to violence, dispossession and exploitation. Women are active in their defense of re-claiming the stolen possessions from 'mother nature' through resistance and collective organizing. Both Desmarais and Lind employ participatory approach to development research to examine the collective organizing and mobilization strategies of women who were attempting to survive amidst the turmoil of structural adjustment programs and trade liberalization. Trade liberalization has more severe negative effects on developing countries because they have weak social service sectors to compensate those who have not benefitted from their participation in the exchange of goods and services. Free trade also destroys incubator industries in developing countries that require state protection. Global free trade is a winner takes all system (Chang, 2008).

Although rural women were among the poorest and most affected by global restructuring processes, there were still silenced by men within the La Via Campesina resistance movement. This illustrates that while women were experiencing the violence of neo-liberal policies imposed by the state, they were also confronted by internal challenges of male domination and power struggles. The issue of patriarchy presents a gridlock situation for women in and outside the resistance movement but women used collective organizing and their personal experiences as counter methods to articulate an alternative model on food security. Here, women are subverting the feminine connotation assigned to nature in order to reclaim their ownership of the land. The land was stolen, previously through conquest and colonization but now through, privatization and environmental degradation by multi-national corporations and investors.

Lind explored, how the women in Quito, Ecuador also subvert the conventional expectations of nurturance by transforming them into strategies of resilience and survival to hold themselves, communities and households together. 'Mothering the crisis' is about women in the Global South exhibiting strength, endurance and presence in the context of instability, absence of male support and compensation systems because the only compensation women have is, unity among themselves. Nevertheless, the greatest obstacle of addressing the power structures that contribute gender equality remains unchallenged because their local struggles were aligned to an access and enablement model.

Criticisms

"Crisis has a negative impact on physical security on women through increased proclivity to gender-based violence and domestic violence as men look for outlets for their anger and frustration."- Gosh

Criticism: Is this a plausible reason for the increasing incidences of women's proclivity

towards domestic violence and other forms of gender based violence? This is a problematic argument because it performs the role of equating male violence towards women as a simple action that is motivated by anger and frustration. Violence towards women by men is an action that stems from private and public patriarchy in which there are specific expectations that are associated with masculinity and femininity across cultures and other social institutions. Masculinity is associated with violence in which men are expected to assert their dominance and ownership of a particular space through hostile relations towards less dominant groups of persons, especially women. This can be supported by a variety of case studies in cross-cultures that unearth the underlying assumptions that guide the surge of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence towards women. Additionally, the argument defeats the purpose of examining the influence of power in ascribing advantage to men and sub-ordination of women at the household and public levels.

“There is a strong movement for the cancellation of debt to poor countries and the re-building of a kind of development aid that supports human development”- Elson

Criticism: While Elson shared examples of countries that are attempting to re-shape the development landscape by merging strong social policy with financial policy, she fails to acknowledge that the movement that is pushing for the cancellation of debt to poor countries is led by Western institutions, developed nations and neo-liberal ideologues such as economist, Jeffrey Sachs (Wilson, 2008). Whether international capitalism presents itself as shock therapy in the form of structural adjustment programs or it is more reformed in the form of human development, the fact still remains that such a framework will not be truly beneficial to developing countries and their vulnerable populations, particularly women. An agenda becomes beneficial when there is active participation and power within developing countries and their vulnerable populations to shape an alternative destiny and the workability of this suggestion, is rare with only few exceptions.

“The feminization of poverty thesis must be re-constructed through a multi-dimensional and gendered approach”- Chant

Criticism: Chant provided an excellent analysis and critique of the feminization of poverty thesis. She also provided new directions for future discussion on the topic through the findings in her cross-country case studies. However, her recommendations answered ‘what to do?’ but not ‘how to implement the recommendations?’ The recommendation does address the broader, political problem of gender inequality but the practical steps to achieve this recommendation were not explored. This reflects a major gap in third world feminist theorizing where there is strength in the internal critique of Western hegemony and development but there are grave limitations to formulate or re-construct the alternative that is being proposed.

“Affluent career women earn their status not through leisure”- Ehrenreich and Hochschild

Criticism: If not through leisure, how then do affluent women earn their status? This argument needs to be substantiated by explanation. The article did not evaluate first world

women's social position in relation to patriarchy and how this sets the stage for class and gender privileges.

"To what extent do their broader social struggles contribute to broader social change and changes in their own lives?"- Lind

Response: If local struggles in Quito, Ecuador were aligned to the objectives of the Women in Development framework, it therefore means that the problem of access to material needs were addressed. This might contribute to marginal changes depending on women's social status before and after the financial crisis. However, the local struggles cannot contribute to broader social change because the framework in which the local struggles operates in; does not address structural issues. The structural issues are more difficult to address because the material needs of the oppressed group (women) has to be met before they can be engaged in the broader political struggle.

Women have been grossly affected by financial crises, structural adjustment programs and global re-structuring processes in the Global South. Despite their resistance and collective organizing efforts, the power structures that dictate gender injustices and inequalities remain unchallenged.

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