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Globalization and the Question of Women Smugglers in East Africa: Observations of a Cross Kenya-Uganda Boundary (1980-2002)

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Defining Globalization and the Place of Africa in the Global Debate

To many people, globalization has meant a wide range of complex and contradictory processes and a phenomena characterizing contemporary history. It has become a powerful but malleable metaphor that accommodates widely divergent theoretical, empirical, and ideological paradigms, positions, and possibilities. For its triumphalist supporters, globalization is celebrated as inevitable and progressive, marking the end of history, while for its detractors it reinforces global economic inequalities, political disenfranchisement, and environmental degradation. Depending on how it is defined and perceived, globalization has its advocates, adversaries and those who are ambivalent (Zezeza 2002); it has several conflicting meanings, and in fact the debate about how to characterize globalization and its impact is so contentious that the only consensus is that there is no consensus.

For instance, there is a line of thinking that regards globalization as a compression of time and space. In other words, with new technologies that speed transactions and shrink distances, both time barriers and spatial differences are lessened. It is a part of the inherent unfolding modernity and a spur towards interconnectedness. We live in an increasingly interdependent, de-territorialized world, created by the emergence of new transnational information and computer technologies which tear asunder the spatial-temporal divides and distances of the past and they shrink the world, if not into a global village, then into neighbourhoods that are more familiar with each other. The motive is to diminish barriers to the flows of goods, services, information, capital, technology and people.

In his introductory remarks to the *Third World Quarterly Journal of Emerging Areas*, a special issue capturing globalization, James Mittelman admitted that, in the whole debate of space and time compression, one must look at the link between this compression and social relations, because globalization processes are not socially and politically neutral. Moreover, globalization is not yet a total phenomenon, as sizable pockets of the globe remain largely removed from it (Mittelman 2000:917-929). It is worth stressing, and I totally agree with Mittelman, that globalization is not a single, unified process, but instead a set of interactions that may best be approached from different observation points yet cognisant of the central theme that international connections have indeed grown in speed and with an intensity never witnessed before.

In summary, firstly, globalization may be seen as a complex historical process. The trajectories differ in various regions of the world, although all are directly or indirectly tied to the central institutions and growth mechanisms of the world economy. Second, globalization may be understood as a material process closely related to the accumulation of capital. It is caught up with the innovations in capitalism, especially the inner workings of competition, pressure that may be called hyper-competition. Third, globalization may be regarded as an ideology – the neo-liberal belief in free market and faith in the beneficial role of competition (Cox 1996 and Mittelman 1996). Hence, globalization is an extensive set of interactions, dialectically integrating and disintegrating economies, politics and societies around the world.¹ The globalization trend, it is assumed, offers many gains in productivity, technological advances, higher living standards, more jobs, broader access to consumer products at lower cost, widespread dissemination of information and knowledge, reduction in poverty in some parts of the world, and a release from traditional hierarchies in many countries. Yet, there is a dark side of globalization: the integration of markets threatens tightly-knit communities and sources of solidarity, dilutes local culture, and portends a loss of control, particularly in very poor countries, such that, whatever the position one adopts, the reality is that globalization creates both opportunities and constraints. In short there are winners and losers, the majority of the latter being confined exclusively to developing economies such as Kenya and Uganda.

As a student studying history and being an African for that matter, I must admit at this point that the forces driving globalization and globalization itself are not new in Africa and neither are its consequences. globalization is actually the fourth stage of outside penetration of the continent by forces, which have had negative social consequences on the African people's integral development. This penetration has taken place over five hundred years: the first was slavery, the second was colonialism, followed by neo-colonialism and now globalization. This process is tied to the expansion and dynamics of slavery and capitalism and

their contradictions. Capitalism, as we know it today, was born as part of the global system. Indeed, resorting to the international system has been a constant practice in the history of capitalism.

David Held once argued:

While the diffusion of European power mainly occurred through the medium of sea-going military and commercial endeavours, Europe became connected to a global system of trade and production relations. At the centre of the latter were new and expanding capitalistic economic mechanisms, which had their origins in the sixteenth century, or in what is sometimes called the long sixteenth century, running from about 1450 to 1640. Capitalism was from the beginning an international affair, capital never allowed its aspirations to be determined by national boundaries alone. Consequently, the emergence of capitalism ushered in a fundamental change in the world order: it made possible, for the first time, genuinely global interconnections among states and societies; it penetrated the distant corners of the world and brought far-reaching changes to the dynamics and nature of political rule (Held 1993:30).

And, like capitalist modernization, globalization proceeded unevenly as in the earlier phases. Seen in this way, the world has been globalizing for a long time, although the process only accelerated rapidly during the course of the twentieth century and onwards.

The process reached Africa under the auspices of the World Bank and other bilateral donors to African countries, who adopted a wide range of policy reforms of African economies after a decade of depression (Pheko 1999; Lim 1999; Riham el-Lakany 1999 and Horgan 2001). The forces crystallised under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which have been the key instruments through which countries are expected to harness the benefits of globalization by pursuing policies that were intended to open their economies to global competition, foreign investment and technology. It was hoped that through these policies, African economies would be tightly connected within the world capitalist system, and that capitalism would survive in Africa.

However, what quickly comes to mind in Africa when one talks about globalization is increasing liberalization, privatization and deregulation, to the extent that the last two to three decades have been spent opening up economies through liberalization of trade and deregulation. These policies have been formulated and advocated for by the Bretton Woods Institutions since the 1980s. The programme involves the disbursement of trashed support in the form of SAPs or Sector Adjustment Loans, typically on concessionary terms, which are conditional upon policy reform. In fact, trade reforms are absolutely central to SAPs because there are powerful economic arguments in favour of free trade particularly.

However, summaries of literature emanating from the social, political and economic impact of SAPs are disappointing. The process of Africa's integration into the world capitalist system has been disastrous. And since the end of the 1970s, conditions have considerably deteriorated in most economies and social sectors. Indeed, the conditions have become worse than they were in the 1960s. The number of Africans enduring absolute poverty increased by almost two-thirds in the first half of the 1980s, accounting for more than half of the total population. The number of African women living in poverty reached nearly 50 per cent in the 1980s. Up until today, as I will show, the situation has not improved; Africans, particularly the women, are yet to find a better story to tell about SAPs. Zeleza may have been right when he opined that:

Clearly, Africa and globalization have a long and unhappy history together. Africa's purported marginalization from globalization hardly means that the continent is not integrated into the world, as such, but that it is integrated in a subordinate position. The degree of this subordination may have changed in recent decades, but its basic structure has not altered fundamentally since the emergence of modern world system. In a large sense, then, for African globalization represents an old problem in new context: hegemony of Northern processes, practices and perspectives (Zeleza 2002:7-8).

Globalization, Trade Liberalization and Women

As explained above, globalization is a very complex process supported by several policies, one of which is liberalization. Globalization and liberalization are integrally interdependent and mutually reinforcing. While globalization is the substantive process of both economic and technological expansion, promoting the opening up and the integration of the entire world into and under one capitalist economic system, liberalization provides the policy lubricant and produces an appropriate regulatory/legal framework to ensure the smooth and speedy implementation of the process. Simplistically, trade liberalization is all about reduction of tariffs and trade barriers to permit more foreign competition and foreign investment in the economy. However, in the context of this paper, trade liberalization will connote the relaxation or elimination of tariffs and removal of duties and/or quotas on export; alterations in non-tariff barriers such as import quotas and quantitative restrictions; changes in licensing and direct allocation of foreign exchange and in specific regulations for products; and removal or relaxation of export subsidies.

Bienen (1990) provides a detailed analysis of the debates of trade liberalization in Africa. He argues that many African countries have used tariff and non-tariff barriers to further import-substitution strategies. For example, in the 1970s, Kenya placed increasing reliance on import control and quantitative restrictions to save

foreign exchange and to encourage domestic manufacturing. This was administered in different ways. There were times when Kenya reduced quantitative restrictions, lowered and rationalized tariffs, and applied minimum tariff rates on goods previously exempted or that had very low tariffs. The idea was to reduce effective protection levels by reducing the spread between the highest and lowest tariffs. The Kenyan government's halting steps towards trade liberalization in the 1980s were typical. During this period, African governments backed off from trade reforms either because their competitive trade positions did not improve or they were losing foreign exchange. The Kenyan government moved from restrictive licensing by the Ministry of Commerce to restrictive foreign exchange allocation introduced by the Central Bank (Branson 1984).

The success of these initiatives depended on the condition of the private local manufacturing industry that a country had at stake in order to benefit from a protected market and here Kenya scored favourably. However, these policies tended to benefit powerful civil servants, politicians, the military and those living in the urban areas (due to food subsidies). The civilian and military employees of the State have always had direct economic interests in the maintenance of state-dominated trade and hence political considerations have become a major factor working against trade liberalization. That is why, on the whole, many African countries have undertaken stabilization policies, including devaluation of their currencies. Others have embarked on fundamental public sector reform programmes, but few have liberalized their trade extensively. However, as we move further into these globalized times, trade liberalization is increasingly regarded as a panacea to the problems of the developing countries. Underlying its prescriptions are the neoclassical economic assumptions that markets work and are generally complete and that market signals are good guides to efficient resource allocation.

In examining the impact of trade policy in Africa, Bienen (1990) contends that African governments must account for the extent to which factors of production are mobile. Also, they must assess their own strengths and weaknesses and the prospects for political instability that may arise not only from economic policies but also from ethnic tensions and institutional factors in their countries. This is so because trade liberalization policies lend themselves to incremental change in that tariffs can be removed product by product and also altered by degree. Equally, trade liberalization policies may also alter the power, status and income of institutionally-based groups as well as occupational ones. Moreover, these policies alter the relative welfare of different social groups which can conveniently be defined in terms of the owner of factors of production, different sectors (say, agricultural versus industrial or import versus export) and in terms of gender, particularly women versus men.

Using the concept of relative price changes, intersectoral factor mobility and ownership of factors of production, Bienen (1990) divides society into gainers and losers from liberalization policies, but while he expands his analysis on the losers and gainers to institutional and ethnic terms as well as economic ones, he pays no particular attention to the gender differential impact of these policies. He however succeeds in pointing out that the whole panoply of import controls has increased corruption in Africa. Those who have benefited most have been public sector officials with the power to control licenses, quotas, and access to foreign exchange, and with knowledge about future policy. Also benefiting have been business associates of public officials who have been awarded scarce goods. Again, those who received wages from the state and parastatal corporations and who received side payments from their operations benefited enormously from the system. In Kenya, allocation of imports was left to the discretion of officials and therefore corruption was inevitable. The removal of trade restrictions and import controls helped to end artificial scarcities and decreased the benefits that accrued to the middlemen involved in smuggling and other illegal actions by which profits were made.

As can be observed, the advocates and beneficiaries of trade liberalization are found among the ascending countries and technocrats, the dominant economic enterprises and commercial classes, while the adversaries are concentrated in the dominated countries among peasants, workers and all small businesses. Those ambivalent about liberalization consist of classes and enterprises that both won and lost from specific policies. The plain truth, to Zeleza, is that market liberalization by itself does not 'lift all the boats', and in some cases, it has caused severe damage (Zeleza 2002). Therefore, in selling it to Africa, the whole process promised an improvement in economic welfare through more rapid growth that is labour intensive and poverty reducing. In the words of Mkandawire, 'all good things flow from globalization' (Mkandawire 2001). However, the period over which trade liberalization is said to have accelerated has witnessed slower growth rates in almost all regions of the world except for Asia and the Pacific. In many regions, globalization has been responsible for the ever-increasing social, economic and even political upheavals. It has accounted for the situation in Africa which has been ever worsening since the 1990s when market liberalization was noticeable especially in trade, finance, and liberalization of politics. The dogma enunciated by large and powerful financial institutions was that the only way Africa could survive and solve its enormous economic and political problems is by becoming fully integrated into the world economy (Lumumba-Kasongo 2001).

The UNCTAD document on *Trade, Sustainable Development and Gender* (UNCTAD 1999) noted that the gender effect of globalization is complex and its effects are mixed. Overall, globalization to date has done little to minimise gender inequalities. While in some circumstances it may have decreased them

(particularly in countries where it has led to an unprecedented employment of female labour) in other cases it has intensified them. Thus, overall, globalization, as a new form of intensified market-driven activity, has not yet managed to overturn gender-based discriminatory forces of economic development where they have traditionally been at work. The realities of feminization of the labour force are quite complex and lead to certain ambiguities, as there are political, economic, cultural and even health impediments which have not only made many countries adopt this female-led export strategy but also made it difficult for women to claim economic betterment. Thus, as the borderless world takes on increasing significance, women are largely displaced, either as a result of technological improvements or just because of other cheap migrant workers (Beneria and Feldman 1992). Moreover, there is compelling evidence showing the deleterious health hazard – both physical and mental – when it comes to the condition of women workers within the Export Promotion Zones (EPZs) worldwide.

Hence a growing literature, particularly from developing nations, shows that globalization has become synonymous with negative issues rather than positive ones. Women thus have been the prime victims in this general economic and social chaos. The suppression of food subsidies, cutbacks on water supplies, the decline of food production, the dismantling of the public sector and the new race for access to ever-dwindling resources, as well as the rise in market value have all combined to exact a heavy toll on women. In the agricultural sector, the weakening of state assistance and the emphasis on export crops has restricted women's access to assets, inputs and credits. The decline in food production has affected female labour, increased Africans' food dependency and increased the risk of famines, starvation, diseases and hunger, leading to what has been globally referred to 'feminization of poverty'. Increased poverty, changing state-society relations, and a breakdown in public services has increased insecurity for women. The level of violence against women both in private and public domains has markedly increased in recent years, including domestic violence, murder, physical and psychological violence (Taniguchi and West 1997; Mkandawire 1989; Sen 1996; Oloka-Onyango and Deepika Udagama 2000; Gladwin 1991 and Gibbon 1993).

However, overall, the picture is not all that gloomy. The globalization process, particularly direct foreign investment, has benefited some women. This may be understood when one considers paid employment in the ever-expanding informal sector. Women in the manufacturing sector, particularly those in EPZs, stand to benefit together with women employed in the service trade and to a lesser extent agriculture, where non-traditional export crops may offer better employment prospects for women than traditional ones. Therefore, the process of economic

liberalization has spawned huge growth in the informal sector and increased female participation therein. The sector has also provided better opportunities for women when it comes to combining paid work with household chores.

Despite the remarkable contribution, there is always a price to pay. Female workers in the export promotion zones find unionization and collective bargaining nearly impossible and therefore such labour forces are usually underpaid (Pheko 1999; Lim 1999; Riham el-Lakany 1999; Horgan 2001). Furthermore, feminization in the informal sector has had contradictory experiences for most women. On the one hand, becoming economically independent has led to many women having more choices about what to do with their lives. On the other hand, the double burden faced by all women because of their roles in the family means that the lives of women workers everywhere are fiendishly difficult as they try to reconcile work and family life.

Conceptualizing Border and Border Activities

Anthropologists, geographers, historians, political scientists and sociologists who have studied borders from the traditional point of view conceptualize borders as tools of separation and control, limiting people's movements within territories and marking the point where the authority of one state ends and that of another begins. To them, borders are primarily sources of political conflicts that undermine national peace and slow down the pace of international cooperation and integration. The border residents are seen as potential deviants who conduct subversive cross-border activities, including smuggling, prostitution and illegal immigration, which demonstrates the ambiguity of borderlanders' identities. Given the above, borders should be kept under close government supervision via police controls, customs and immigration regulations, barbed or electrified wires, watch towers and even military planes constantly flying over the borders (Hasting 1999). Some scholars in this camp also point out that border regions are typically rural and are socially, politically and economically marginalized (Kamazima 2000).

Following the above traditional view, many nation states developed policies and structures immediately after independence to tighten their borders. This they did in order to control, prevent and regulate economic, political and social interactions between borderlanders. Despite these regulations and given the economic and social status of the borderlanders, many of them have discerned avenues to solve common border problems for their survival. In doing so complex mechanisms of formal and informal cross-border activities have resulted in transforming borders into living realities that need to be carefully examined. As a coping strategy for the impact of trade liberalization and the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the Nigeria-Benin borderlanders, for example, have turned the border into a busy area to be conceptualized as rural or as socially, economically and politically marginalized (Flynn 1997). The doctrine

of mutual necessity has motivated borderlanders to conduct highly specialised cultural, economic and political interactions, which cannot be reduced to illegal, underground, or informal activities. As a result, the meaning of the borders has changed, so that border residents understand borders as symbolic representations of social groupings, defined by residence on both sides of the international border, where membership is determined by the length of stay as opposed to ethnicity, nationality, kinship or ancestral claims to land. Many borderlines operate under a set of rules and institutions (or the border regime), formal and informal, that aim at and succeed in regularizing neighbourhood behaviour, allowing cooperation across international boundaries but do not aim at integration that would lead to the formation of a transborder nation (Studdard 1986 and MacGaffey 1988).

Consequently, two types of economies have thrived along the borders – the informal economy and the formal economy. Indeed the former sector is frequently the fastest growing part of an economy during this era of globalization in Africa (Henriot 1999). Smuggling, which is the focus of this study, falls under the informal economy or sector. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defined the informal sector as that sector of economic activities characterized by relative ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership, small scale of operation, labour intensity, reliance on skills acquired outside the formal educational system, and unregulated and competitive markets. The sector can conveniently be divided into two: the modern informal sector where goods and services produced are similar to those in the formal sector and in the hands of the well-to-do, while the other sector comprises the community of the poor, which accounts for about 90 per cent of the informal sector (Malunga 1998). Within the informal sector, we must also pay attention to the underground economy or the illegitimate economy that flourishes outside the law and includes theft, corruption, bribery, prostitution, drug trafficking and smuggling. This is particularly true considering international business deals; prostitution spreads with sex tourism in many countries; smuggling of stolen cars is a big business in many states in Africa; and drug trafficking is reaching horrendous proportions throughout the world.

Smuggling or the form of trade under investigation has been variously referred to as a second, hidden, parallel, underground or informal economy, all terms intended to convey the sense of economic activity which is not officially reported to state authorities and which is therefore not directly taxable. Even though such activities are or may not be necessarily illegal, they may involve a wide range of degrees of illegality. While small-scale enterprises of the urban poor in particular, which make up an important part of the informal sector, have been a subject of frequent studies (Musyoki and Orotho 1993), far less research has been done on various forms of exchange which are also part of the informal economy (Ellis and MacGaffey 1996). The present aim is to examine this trade as it is affected by trade liberalization and how it eventually affects women whose livelihood depend

on it. In our case, smuggling involves the illegal transport of goods and persons in and out of a country to avoid taxation. It is that type of cross border trade that avoids imposed duties and restrictive trade laws and requirements. The evasion of tariffs and taxes on such commodities can realize sizable illicit profits. This has been realized in many parts of Africa and is particularly the case when it comes to the smuggling of timber in the Congo Basin Region and Cameroon where timber is felled and exported illegally.

A great variety of commodities are involved in underground economic exchange. One major category, both within and between African countries, is foodstuffs. Food crops moves between African countries and are exported to African communities in European cities. Canned and processed foods travel the same routes. Spices, fist, ivory, hides and skins are especially exported from East Africa, sometimes clandestinely. Cattle are moved in large numbers across African borders. Some export crops such as coffee, tea and *papaine* may be fraudulently smuggled as exports. Minerals are major commodities in clandestine exports, notably gold, diamonds and other gemstones, malachite and cobalt. The transit trade in drugs from Latin America and the Far East is increasing.

While some commodities move out of Africa, manufactured products are imported. These include pharmaceuticals, construction materials, vehicles, fuel, spare parts, soap, household goods and electrical appliances, electronic goods, office equipment, cigarettes and alcoholic drinks. These come increasingly from Asia, particularly via Dubai. Clothes, new and second hand, shoes, jewellery and other accessories are imported from Europe, as are beauty products from the Caribbean, the USA and Europe. Cloth, particularly wax prints, is imported from Europe and China and exported to other regions of Africa, and is the basis of an extremely lucrative trade, largely controlled by women. However, this study will focus not on goods of high value such as arms, ammunition and drugs, but on those goods that are easily tradable by the majority of women. It will also exclude those women smugglers enjoying state patronage and in cartels or associations.

The context of smuggling is diverse and continuously changing. For example, tax variations on particular basic consumer goods between neighbouring countries encourage smuggling to some extent. The more the governments in different countries increase taxes on tobacco, the greater the temptation for smugglers to sell contraband. At the same time, there are lax border controls, porous borders or just inadequate controls in neighbouring and regional transit points, and ample routes for smuggling drugs, weapons, explosives and other contraband goods. This has been encouraged by corruptible police and security forces, which make sub-Saharan Africa an inviting operating environment for international criminals. The convergence of growing economic disparity, continuing civil conflict and human rights violations as well as increased access to global communication and the transport network over the past two decade, have also all led to a significant

increase of *human cargo* – the movement of undocumented or fraudulently documented foreign nationals to prosperous countries such as the United States of America. In this context, smuggling of goods and human cargo has risen as a result of the unbearable social and economic difficulties for many people, particularly the inability to acquire basic needs exacerbated by the whole process of globalization.

Within East Africa and particularly along the Kenya-Uganda border, informal cross-border trade or what has commonly been referred to as smuggling has continued since independence. Cross-border trade has in many instances become one of the major activities along the border. Available evidence indicates that cross-border trading activities, especially between Kenya and Uganda, involve substantial quantities of agricultural and industrial goods being carried out informally. Rent-seeking practices in public and bureaucratic procedures encourage large and small-scale traders to use illicit means and/or undesignated routes. A report on cross-border trade between Kenya and Uganda indicated that this trade has been made possible by seasonal variations in climate, in exchange rates, seasonal halting of importation of certain crops, imposition of prohibitive tariffs and various non-tariff barriers such as phytosanitary conditions or generally impediments to trade among others (Ackelle-Ogutu 1996). Sites such as Suwam, Busia, Lwakhakha and Chepkube are historically known for smuggling goods across the Kenya-Uganda border. In most instances, smuggling has been carried out by women, especially those who are uneducated, as a response to declining economic opportunities in the wage economy by moving into grey areas of 'illegal' trade. It promotes the economic empowerment of women as it has several economic advantages for the livelihood of those who practise it, particularly for women who smuggle primary commodities across the border in exchange for basic commodities.

Due to the weakness of the state in addressing the marginalized position of women, and its inability to control this 'unorthodox' form of trade, many women and their families have benefited socially and economically through smuggling. In this trade, some women have been able to make up the deficit in household budgets and to maintain a certain status in society. Thus, while this clandestine trade impoverishes the state, it brings considerable wealth to the people who have no other means of acquiring it, particularly women (Niger-Thomas 2000). In the above context, smuggling should be seen as one among a variety of techniques designed to exploit opportunities offered by the state and to gain access to the profits generated by operating between local and international sectors but outside state regulation.

Snapshots of Women Smugglers along the Kenya-Uganda Border: Preliminary Observations

In order to adequately comprehend the complex and rather contradictory experience of female smugglers during this period, a brief history of smuggling in this region will be important. Given the nature of smuggling as an economic activity, it is difficult to predict with certainty when it began in any part of Africa. However, the political and economic crisis which most Africans have long been experiencing has left almost everybody supplementing their derisory wages and salaries with underground economic activities. This makes engaging in smuggling a means of survival when the political and economic situations preclude other possibilities.

The political upheavals or conflicts in Uganda and particularly during President Idi Amin's regime encouraged some form of smuggling between Uganda and Kenya. Amin, on taking over power in 1971, gave most key shops belonging to departed Asians to his soldiers and other persons in his government. Inexperienced as they were in business, the overnight beneficiaries soon found their stock finished. They flocked to Nairobi to purchase goods at retail prices. Prices skyrocketed, upsetting the market and creating a shortage in many commodities. This encouraged a thriving black market or just smuggling of basic goods into Uganda. Similarly, Amin's government exported Ugandan coffee to Libya but denied farmers the proceeds, which he used instead to purchase military hardware. So the farmers started smuggling their coffee over Lake Victoria to Kenya (*The East African*, May 27, 2000). Many women participated in this trade either due to their presumed innocence by the law enforcement agencies, as a response to the declining economic opportunities in wage economy or just to avoid state control.

In Kenya, and with regards to coffee smuggling, the situation was a little different. It arose out of the inability by state agencies concerned with marketing coffee to pay farmers promptly and adequately since 1975. Since then, large quantities of coffee have been smuggled into Uganda. Most of the farmers involved in this trade cite poor and delayed payment by their societies. An official at the Sasur Farmers Coffee Society in Mt Elgon, Mr Komon Cheprum, attributed the smuggling to delayed payment by the Kenya Planters Co-operative Union. He also said that farmers from the Sasur Factory alone were owed more than KShs 1 million as dues for coffee supplied during the 1998/1999 period, and therefore because they were pressed to pay school fees on time, they opted to get quick cash by selling the crop to Ugandan traders. This confirms the assertion by Bienen (1990) that small producers have been forced to export through state-organized commodity boards that have not only skimmed profits by paying lower than world market prices but have also short-changed farmers through many other practices. The response in many countries to state pricing and other monopoly practices has been, in the first instance, to smuggle where possible.

However, in the same year, the Executive Director of Western Province of Kenya Human Rights Watch, Job Bwanyo, acknowledged that some police officers at the border are involved in smuggling by setting up informal customs offices.

Further, research has confirmed that Kenya has comparative advantages in manufacturing and processing. Kenya's exports to Uganda are processed agricultural products (e.g. wheat flour) and manufactured goods such as hardware, textiles and beverages. Ugandan exports to Kenya are highly unprocessed agricultural commodities such as maize and beans and there is a substantial unrecorded cross-border trade between the two countries (Ackello-Ogutu 1996). This regional disparity, combined with seasonal climatic variations, flexible exchange rates, restrictive and prohibitive tariffs and non-tariff barriers, as well as the seasonal halting of importation of certain goods and the geographic positioning of Uganda in relation to Kenya seems to promote smuggling.

After the above lengthy theoretical exposition, in September 2002 I went to the border region for two weeks to survey and to listen to women themselves about what they think, not only about smuggling but also about trade liberalization. I wanted to establish the role of ordinary women in reconfiguring borders, cross-border trade and liberalization. My study started in Nairobi where a fellow who has researched in this area introduced me to some female and male smugglers at the Busia border. After having thoroughly explained what exactly I was doing, the women became friendly and were very willing to talk to me. The discussions were very informal and the numbers were very small. However, after some time, realized that this was a very large industry employing women from different social and economic backgrounds, some being in this business for more than twenty years. I had prepared a specific set of questions to ask, but eventually I realized that I had to keep on probing for detailed information. I endeavoured to write as much information as I could in my field notebook, although at some point mobile calls interrupted our discussions.

Most of these women do not permanently reside at the border. They travel long distances to Kisumu, Nairobi, Mombasa, Kampala, Mwanza and Dar es Salaam and even as far as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some stay for some time at the border to ensure that their goods are safe. While here, they know when their consignments will arrive and so make necessary preparations to escape customs officers. These women argue that the customs officers are always aware of their activity and as such negotiations are always completed before the arrival of the consignment, normally in big trucks. This activity is not exclusively for women although it has several female petty smugglers. It is always normal for women to strike smuggling deals with men.

Asked why they prefer the activity, these women give several reasons, including hard economic times, to acquire property, to educate children, to get quick money, to survive and some women treat the trade just as any other form of employment.

For example, when asked why she particularly participates in the activity, Nyalengo explains, “Where do you work?” (she asked me and I responded) “...this is also where I work and earn a living.” However, some women hold a different view. To them customs officers, at least a majority of them, are comfortable dealing with women smugglers since they are least suspected to be smugglers. It is, however, when thinking about the commodities that are being smuggled and their quantities that one is able to appreciate the different classes of women involved in this activity.

Some of the goods commonly smuggled include cigarettes, batteries, soap, bread, blankets, cosmetics, biro pens, soft drinks, cooking fats, petroleum products, contraband goods, alcohol (particularly wines and spirits) and other consumer goods. The quantities differ. Some women deal in small quantities while established and wealthy smugglers transact in large quantities which are always hauled in big trucks across eastern Africa. It is at this point that a special group of female smugglers emerge. These are women who act as agents. These agents depend on petty smugglers to supply them with smuggled goods. Since the agents have the ready money, they are very popular with petty female smugglers. The petty smugglers supply goods in small quantities and get instant pay. It is these agents that at times sell the smuggled goods to established smugglers. Agents are found along borders like Busia, Chepkube and Suwam. Some of them are well known to security people. I asked Nyalengo to comment on the efficacy and the relevance of customs police in combating smuggling and she responded, “The security officers are always too harsh and hard on us, since they know we make a lot of quick money within a short time. And depending on the goods smuggled, the customs police usually demand high bribes. However, despite the bribes, they are our friends. Who doesn't want money? We know many of them do business together”.²

Smuggling as an economic activity thrives because of abnormal profits that accrue as a result. In the case of the Kenya-Uganda border, smuggling thrives because of two major reasons. First is the scarcity of goods such as cigarettes, bread, cooking fat and fresh drinks in Uganda. Since these goods can be found easily in Kenya and at a favourable price, there is the likelihood of making huge profits should one succeed in smuggling such goods into Uganda. From Uganda, smugglers are also able to smuggle goods such as alcohol, cosmetics, contraband goods and other consumer goods, which are cheap in Uganda and expensive in Kenya. These goods normally find a ready market in many parts of Kenya particularly among the poor. Second is the question of price distortions across the border. Smuggled goods, even after bribing customs officials, elicit high profits because they are acquired cheaply and sold at a much higher price.

Over Lake Victoria, petty smuggling is very common and involves very many consumer goods such as paraffin, batteries, cloth, bread, cooking fat, cosmetics, other valuable minerals and wild animal skins. Here, the demand for bribes is low

and depends on when one is arrested as the value of the goods is at times too low to warrant a high bribe. By the end of the interview, one wonders if trade liberalization has succeeded in what it was supposed to do. Trade liberalization was and is still premised on the assumption that the removal of trade barriers/restrictions and import controls would help to end artificial scarcities and decrease the benefits that accrue to the middlemen and women involved in smuggling and other illegal actions by which quick and big profits are made. However, this has not been realized between Kenya and Uganda; trade restrictions still persist and middlemen and women have not given up on smuggling.

Similarly, state officials have continued with their behaviour of unlawful accumulation, hence impoverishing the state. It is in this process that a group of women have decided to carve a niche for themselves. This they have achieved by using the weakness of the state law enforcement agencies and enriching themselves. Several women interviewed confessed having traded almost exclusively on smuggled goods including paraffin, petroleum products, cooking fat, soup, bread, sodas, cigarettes, blankets and electronic goods among others. Their success has depended on the availability of trade barriers (high taxes and pricing imposed on imported goods), vast borders, available and quick markets, non-availability of certain goods across the boundary and the easily corruptible customs officers at the borders.

During my stay in Busia, The East African Standard newspaper, Saturday, September 21, 2002, reported 'Shs 20 Million Cigarette Netted'. In this report, Haroun Wandalo acknowledged that:

Customs officers at Busia Border impounded un-customed cigarettes worth KShs 20 million and arrested a suspect. Western Provincial Police Officer, Mr Francis Waithaka, said Busia OCPD had mobilized a squad of customs police who netted 412 cartons uncustomed haul after a tip off. Informed sources said that the cigarettes belonged to a local private company (*The East African Standard*, September 21, 2002).

The following month, *Daily Nation*, Thursday, October 31, 2002, reported 'KShs 6 Million Worth of Cigarettes Burnt'. The article quoted Mr Timona Namutula, a deputy commissioner of customs in charge of western region, saying, 'the authority was widening its scope in the fight against smuggling by escorting trucks ferrying the cigarettes right from the factories to the border'. He further acknowledged that trade in contraband goods was booming in border towns, but that the loopholes were being sealed. Apart from the cigarettes, the article also stated that the smuggled consignment had several cartons of smuggled Tiger brand batteries, which could not be destroyed and were kept at Kisumu Customs Stores.

Therefore, whatever the reasons put forward, smuggling thrives on most borders in Africa. It has several economic values for those who practise it, while at the same time it denies the state its much-needed revenue and also exposes it to

unwarranted business practices threatening its very foundation in Africa. It was hoped that the implementation of trade liberalization in Africa would eliminate this trade; however, the evidence available indicates that goods and services have not moved as freely as envisaged. What seems to be the case is that the trade has adjusted itself appropriately as the governments in Kenya and Uganda have failed to take broad measures and procedures to liberalize their trade. The customs officers inspecting the formal borders continue to be involved in corrupt practices, taking millions of shillings from women traders to allow their goods across the boundary.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study proposed to examine the extent to which globalization, particularly trade liberalization, has negatively or positively affected smuggling across the Kenya-Uganda border. Putting forward the case of women smugglers, the study has illustrated the assumed theoretical contradiction between trade liberalization and smuggling by arguing that, with the implementation of trade liberalization policies, smuggling as practised by women or men would be regulated or simply eliminated. However, preliminary observations show that this is yet to be realized. The concept of a borderless world is far from being a reality; borders are still traditionally managed, making them favourable sites for state officials to be actively involved in primitive accumulation. While this is detrimental to the state, in terms of revenue, a group of women have taken it upon themselves to gain from the situation.

While both petty and established women smugglers advance different reasons for their participation in the illegal activity, it seems that the unfavourable economic and social impacts of Structural Adjustment Programmes, together with the ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, have pushed many people, particularly women, into illegal activities. However, smuggling in the case of Kenya-Uganda thrives because of the comparative industrial advantages that Kenya enjoys, particularly when it comes to manufactured goods. No wonder that it is the value and the types of goods smuggled that keep on changing and not the intensity of the trade.

Since this study remains theoretical, it would be intellectually stimulating if research is carried out on the extent to which this activity will affect the prospects for re-establishing the East Africa Community currently underway, particularly when it comes to a customs union. Further research should question the gender participation in this trade and even estimates of the profits accrued. As smuggling remains illegal, the question should be, how can it be eradicated without upsetting the border economies? What makes African economies favourable for the trade in contraband goods? What makes the state agencies weak in combating the illegal trade? What other economic avenues are open to women along the border points? These are some of the questions that further research should attempt to answer.

Notes

1. In fact, other observers such as Peter Henriot likened globalization ideology to that of neo-liberal capitalism with absolute values on the operations of the market and subordinating people's lives, the function of society, the policies of the government and the role of the state. To Henriot, neo-liberal policy supports economic growth as an end in itself, uses macro-economic indicators as the primary measurement of a healthy society, promotes an export-oriented strategy of economic development in the context of free trade and privatization, imposes austerity measures that hurt those who are already hurt the most, curtails social programmes that may be demanded for the common good but are referred to as 'too costly', disregards environmental concerns, restricts the regulatory, protective role of the state, and reinforces the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small and undemocratic elite.
2. Oral interview between 17-19 September, Nyalengo, Nyakirindo, Madam X and Madam Y.

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