GLOBALIZATION AND THE QUESTION OF GENDER-JUSTICE: 
THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE.

By
Chis Okechukwu UROH (Ph.D.)
Department of Philosophy
University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Introduction
The underlining philosophy of neoliberal economy, a major component of globalization, is that state intervention in the economic life of the people, however well intentioned, is “counter-productive” and therefore undesirable. The major policy of globalisation thus include trade liberalisation, devaluation of national currencies against ‘major’ currencies, especially the US dollar and deregulation of the public sector or, simply, privatisation of public utilities. The social and economic consequences of these policies have been the retrenchment of workers and consequently, massive unemployment, reduction in government spending on social infrastructure, cut in government subsidies for social services wherever they are available and subsequent increase in the of cost these services.

For women the impact of market liberalization and the integration of the national economy “into the global economy” have been “complex and equally contradictory”. Instructively, while the fact that neoliberal economic policies, especially the structural adjustment policy (SAP) in developing nations have not achieved the envisaged economic empowerment of the generality of the people, is a copiously documented and almost over-researched issue by scholars (Mbiliyi, 1991; World Bank, 1998; 1994; Adedeji, 1994, etc), not so much attention has been paid to the fact that SAP has affected women in ways worse than their men counterparts. In Nigeria, women as the “domestic gender” whose “traditional” roles include domestic chores and reproductive activities; who occupy the lowest rung of the societal ladder, the least educated and so usually employed at the lower grades, etc, are the first to feel the direct impact of policies that adversely affect social services.

This paper is an attempt to fill-in this theoretical and empirical void in gender studies in the Third World, using Nigeria as a case. It interfaces the prevalent patriarchal ideology and its cultural inferiorization of women with the deplorable socio-economic conditions of the Nigerian woman.

Specifically, the paper argues, among other; (1) That while men and women in the developing countries suffer economic dislocation as a result of neoliberal economic policies, women, because of their culturally constructed position as “domestic gender”, suffer even more; (2) That the main source of women disadvantageous economic positioning which has been further worsened by structural adjustment policies is not, strictly speaking, economic but rooted in the age-long cultural bias and practices which have led to the devaluation of womanhood by patriarchy which, in “domesticating” the woman, sidelines her in social reckoning.

I shall however, in line with the general theme of the Cairo meeting preface this discussion with the examination of some of the issues that have engaged the attention of gender scholars in Africa in the past millenium.

The African Gender Discourse
There is a sense in which one would be right to say that the early major attempt to theorise the gender issue in Africa equated it with feminism. Gender scholarship was reduced to the interrogation of “the woman question.” It was a scholarship whose main concern was the examination of issues relating to women’s marginalisation and/or oppression by their men counterparts and the society at large. The recurring themes on gender discourse in Africa then, remained economic disintegration of the African woman, the discrimination against her in the labour market and work places, her political disempowerment; the neglect and sometimes deliberate denial of women rights and so on.

The second-rating of the woman is the issues here. Sometimes this is clumsily put as: Women are not given the chance (Mohammed, 1985:50) which sometimes raises the question, “not given the chance” by who? From this stand-point, feminist literati in Africa, engaged in a more or less deconstructive scholarship dictated and sustained basically by the desire to answer a cluster of questions made imperative by the social positioning of the woman: How did male domination arise? Why was it so widely accepted in the past? Why does it still have a lot of potency in many societies in the world till today? What are its consequences? How and why, until recently, did men manage, with a semblance of legitimacy, to exclude women from formal politics, gainful economic ventures, social recognition and so on? (See Mansbridge and Okin, 1996:271).

Many factors were implicated in attempts to respond to these questions. Among these is the exaltation of “the male subject by conversely obscuring the female,” in such away that made women "absent in human history"(Ahikire, 1994:41). By denying women the status of historical actors, and portraying, "men, their lives and their beliefs as the human norm", (Harding and Hintikka, 1983:x), we are left with only the account of human development as a narrative dominated by men. The attempt to displace or deconstruct “history” and properly situate the woman within in what
A study by Babara and Schildrut (1986) among women in the predominantly Muslim-Northern Nigeria underscored the extent to which childhood indoctrination can color people’s understanding of social phenomena, including their own oppression. According to the study most Muslim women in Northern Nigeria believed that God decreed that they should remain submissive to their husbands irrespective of their behaviours. Their research reveals that most women believed that the woman is only a subject of the law, and that the interpretation and use of the laws were the prerogative of the men. Aristotle (1952) does not see any leadership quality in women. “The male is more fitted to rule than the female, unless conditions are quite abnormal,” he writes. And so, unless there are no men to hold positions of authority it would be wrong to give it to a woman which is why Aristotle was against democracy. Aristotle berates democracy which gives everybody especially women, the equal opportunity to take part in decision making process. “Between male and female this relationship of superior and inferior is permanent”, Aristotle says.

This idea that there are variations in the abilities of the two sexes, and the superiority of the man over the woman was also shared by Hegel (1973). “The natural determinacies of both sexes acquire through its reasonableness intellectual as well as ethical significance”. He writes further:

Thus one sex is mind in its self-diremption into explicit self-subistence and the knowledge and volition of free universality, i.e. the self-consciousness of conceptual thought and the volition of the objective final end. The other sex is mind maintaining itself in unity as knowledge and volition in the form of concrete individuality and feeling. In relation to externality, the former is powerful and active, the latter passive and subjective. It follows that man has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with himself so that it is only out of his diremption that he fights his way to self-substinent unity with himself. In the family he has a tranquil intuition of this unity, and there he lives a subjective ethical life on the plane of feeling. The woman, on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind (Ibid.).

Modern political theorists have equally affirmed that the “sexual differentiations” of roles in the society are biologically programmed resulting in the assignment of different political meanings to womanhood and manhood. In politics women take precedence only after the children. Because this perception has been internalized even by women...
themselves even when they engage in politics it is usually at the peripheral level. At the level of women wing of their parties or the _first ladies_ of their states. Thus, "the different attribute, capacities and characteristics ascribed to men and women by political theorists have become central to the way in which each has defined the political" (Pateman and Shanley, 1991:9-10). Or as Pateman and Stanley (Ibid.) further put it:

Manhood and politics go hand in hand, and everything that stands in contrast to and opposed to political life and the political virtues has been represented by women; their capacities and the tasks seen as natural to their sex, especially motherhood (Ibid:3).

This "systematic exclusion of women from taking part in and as full member and citizen of the polity in political debate, deliberation and contest" remains the greatest wrong to womanhood. Consequently women are perceived and treated as _objects_ or at most _minors_, who cannot take decisions on their own and so, have to be decided for by men.

There have also been some attempts to implicate the colonial experience of African societies for the condition of the African woman. The argument here is that the "colonial imposition of European systems in Africa-undertimed the traditional empowering structures of African women's socio-cultural systems," (Amadiume, 1995:37). Thus, by imposing and reinforcing "patriarchal systems" colonial rule "compoundd the woes of African women by (further) augmenting their ordinary burdens with those of their Western sisters" (Oduyoye, 1995:80). This was made possible, according to Lebeuf-Anne,

By a habit of thought deeply rooted in Western mind(in which) women are neglected to the sphere of domestic tasks and private life, and men alone are considered equal to the task of shouldering the burden of public affairs (Anne, 1962: 93).

Implicit in the above is that colonialism "corroded the privileged life of the African women" (Acholonu 1995:3). Because "the question of choice is very central to the issue of women's status in traditional Africa," (Ibid: 54) "the presentation of the African Woman oppressed, suppressed by a male dominated culture, and a status subordinate to that of the man, is a dangerous misinterpretation of the true state of affairs...." (Ibid:2-3).

Let us pause for a while and examine some of the issues raised above and ask, to what _extent_ do they represent what should be our concern as pursuants of gender equity? One of the major flaws of the compensatory history or _herstory_ project like many other _African discourse_ is that of overgeneralization. The impression is usually created that there is a _uniform_ cultural practice among pre-colonial African societies. But we must acknowledge the fact that "there are many and not one African community. There are numerous communities on the vast continent of Africa which have lived in self-contained isolation, under varying conditions of life and experience" (Bussia, 1975:147).

This being the case, one can expect almost different status for women in different African communities. For instance, it would be totally incorrect to expect that the status of women in a matrilineal societies was the same in patriarchal societies. I am not saying that these cultural practices were good in themselves. All I am saying is that some of them had been with us before we were colonized and so attributing them to colonialism would be a falsification of historical facts. Yet there is a lot of such misrepresentations of the traditional African settings that have gone, in the name of _re-writing_ women history.

Furthermore, while the idea of _herstory_ is trying to point out some of the _achievements_ of women in history, may help to rouse consciousness, point up past errors and oversights; "compensatory histories" has not shown any paradigmatic shift; an alternative to the dominant discourse as such. In fact, what it has done is to further legitimate the already existing historiography; a historiography accused of _male-domination or male-centred_. Put differently the _herstory_ project, with all its claim to _rightening_ a suppose prejudiced history, still remains within the paradigm of the traditional conventional history where whenever women appeared it was only the names of those whom great men loved or those who could enter fields customari ly reserved for upper class men (Ahikire, 1994:7 - Cleopatra of Egypt, Amina of Zaria, Efusetan of Ibadan, etc.

By implication what such historiography tells is simply that _women are capable of doing those things men have done_. Or as it has almost become customary to put it: _what a man can do, a woman can (also) do_. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, is the first Nigerian woman to ride a motor car", is an example of this kind of history." By taking this rather _defeasist_ position, feminist scholars and activists unconsciously (perhaps) submitted themselves to the same masculinist standard of measuring achievements. And in that case, they are left with little than search for parallels in the activities of handful of women and their men counterparts which leaves them with one conclusion: "we can also do it" usually punctuated with "if given the chance". If the _herstory_ project must achieve its ambitious goals (assuming this is desirable) it must transcend the existing paradigm and give us an alternative historiography.

There is also the danger that the methodology of gender discourse in the last millenium had _the tendency_ of abstracting women or womanhood as "a category, frozen in time and isolated from general historical developments" (Ibid:10); whereas, the "women question" in Africa, as elsewhere, can hardly be _divorced from the realities of local_
and international economic relations” (CLO, 1991:24) which affect both men and women one way or the other. The impression that “women as women, have been oppressed throughout history” (Bello, 1985:24), it has further raised the question as to whether or not “history is not in fact a succession of class oppression and revolution”. Are women not an integral part of these classes? Has there been no qualitative change in the position of classes in general and women (as members of classes) in particular?” (Ibid.).

Again, a separate woman's history will only "stress stereotypes. One of such stereotypes is the conception of women as victims of this or that system” (Ahikire, 1994:6) which gives the erroneous impression that women have never fought back and have never been effective social agents on behalf of themselves (Harding, 1987). This implicitly presents women as a docile group marked out in every society for oppression. Not even the attempts to acknowledge the role of women in liberation struggles have helped matters in this respect. This is because in such accounts, “women are defined as having 'contributed' to this or that movements - as if they are contributing to something that exists/existed independent of them ... as though they are contributing to a project to which they do not have an intrinsic stake” (Ahikire, 1994:89). Conceptualizing women as “contributing, participating or being manipulated” denotes a kind of separation between women and society, and this itself is grounded within the premise that primarily defines women as the ‘other’ (Ibid.).

It is therefore doubtful if the herstory project has not in fact worsened “the woman quest” in more than one ways: At the level of theory for instance, it has led to the continuous “marginalisation” of women studies from the “main-stream” social science. At the level of policy and practice, there has equally been the marginalisation of women's interests as represented in the so called “women projects”, isolated from the rest of development planning, poorly funded, and in the words of Ayesha Imam (1990:243), scarcely taken seriously.

Globalisation, Neoliberalism and The Nigerian Woman

The concept, globalisation, is slippery and multi-vocal; “used in so many different contexts, by so many different people, for so many different purposes, that it is difficult to ascertain what is at stake in the globalisation problematics, what function the term serves, and what effects it has for contemporary theory and politics” (Kellner, 1998:23). In economic sense globalisation could mean the creation of “world market” where commodities in one part of the globe can easily get to other parts. It is thus a “social process in which constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become aware that they are receding” (Waters, 1995:3). In this context, globalization is a implies “that there has occurred an increase in the density of contacts between locations worldwide; that our life is structured in such a way that social interactions are embedded in global networks” (Axtmann, 1998:2). It means, in other words, the absence of local as distinct from the universal or the national from worldwide; that our life is structured in such a way that social interactions are embedded in global networks” (Axtmann, 1998:2). It means, in other words, the absence of local as distinct from the universal or the national from international. There is interface of everything with every other thing, of values against values, of distance in context of distances, of histories in context of histories, of their worlds against ours.

This reconfiguration of space and temporal shrinking of the world, “has made the identification of boundaries - and associated notions of “here” and “there”, “far” and “near”, “outside” and “inside”, home and “away”, “them” and “us”-more problematic than ever” (Scholte, 1996:49) Whichever one views it however, one thing that remains obvious is that globalisation “is strengthening the dominance of a world capitalist economic system, supplanting the primacy of the nation-state by transnational corporations and organisations, and eroding local cultures and traditions through global culture”(Kellner, 1998:23). To put the matter another way, globalization is only an intellectual distraction, the displacement of the earlier focus by scholars of the South, especially in the cold war eras, on “the domination of the developing countries by the developed ones, or of national and local economies by transnational corporations”. Globalisation is a cover up for “part of a discourse of neo-imperialism that serves to obscure the continuing exploitation of much of the world by a few super powers and giant transnational corporations, thus cloaking some of the more barbaric and destructive aspects of contemporary development”(Ibid.25). One instruments by which this domination has been sustained is the neoliberal economic policies that are forced on the less developed nations by the North-dominated IMF and World Bank among other IFIs. That unequal exchange sustained by globalisation has led to social dislocation in Nigeria, and more importantly, that it has further worsened the economic conditions of women, is the concern of this paper. It is to this that I shall now turn.

Though Nigeria formally introduced the structural adjustment programme (SAP) in 1986, it has always pursued dependent-capitalist or neo-liberal economic policies. The four “National Development Plans” as well as the “rolling plans” preceding SAP placed high premium on “market and private initiatives” rather than public investments. By the time the SAP was introduced the Nigerian economy was in a bad shape and the expectation was that SAP would ensure “national economic stabilisation and recovery through the simultaneous liberalisation of the market and the retrenchment of the state”(Olukoshi and Agbu, 1996:80). Nigeria’s plummeting oil revenue was jeopardising the country’s economic stability. Thus devaluation was expected to boost “government’s Naira revenue in the short term”. Given Nigeria’s precarious relationship with its creditors, it was felt that “debt rescheduling would be acceptable to its creditors only under conditions defined clearly in an adjustment program”. And persuaded “that the state intervention approach was not an effective development strategy” Nigerian policy makers concluded that a new development strategy that would turn “away from government-led growth-was now most desirable”
But as experience showed the magic did not work. But SAP was destined to fail. The indices that demand of its currency or liberalization of its economy which are the two major components of SAP. In the first place, the demand and supply of Nigeria's export produce are not elastic. The export goods of Nigeria cannot respond spontaneously to increase in demand. Secondly, Nigerian economy could not meet locally the domestic demands for some basic capital goods and services needed by the country. If it did it would have ensured that whatever gains were made through the economy of large scale production were not "recaptured", to borrow from Samir Amin, by the international market in the form of importation of needed capitals and services by Nigerians.

The sharp decline in Nigeria's economic fortune as well as the quality of life after SAP was introduced, was such that even the World Bank's acknowledged its failure. In its impact assessment of SAP in Nigeria the Bank notes for instance that:

Based on the World Bank Atlas Methodology GNP per capita (in Nigeria) in 1985 was estimated at some US$760... about twice the average for sub-Saharan Africa. However, with the drop in oil prices and the sharp devaluation of the Naira in 1986 to correct for its previous overvaluation, per capita GNP fell to US$370 in 1987 and it is expected to be about US$280 in 1988 and US$230 in 1989, as the effect of the exchange rate depreciation is more fully reflected in the factor for converting the Naira value of GNP into U.S. dollars(World Bank, 1988:2).

Of course the obvious implication of the above is that within two years of the introduction of SAP, Nigeria's GNP had gone down by half of the pre-SAP period. SAP thus failed to "stem decline in the country's fortunes and restore the economy to the path of growth". It probably couldn't have been otherwise bearing in mind the fact that for the massive and repeated devaluation of the naira, side by side the liberalisation of prices, interest rates and trade, and spirited efforts by the State, to curb public expenditures and recover costs, aided further decimation of the national manufacturing capacity(International IDEA, 2000:93).

It was at this stage that women became perhaps, not the intended but the first target of the adverse effects of SAP in Nigeria. Certain underlining assumptions which have informed the general positioning of the woman in the Nigerian society have been responsible for the fate women suffered under SAP and it would be necessary to highlight them in the course of this paper. First, there is the traditionally held view that "women's role was domiciliary and procreative" (Alele-Williams, 1988). Second, the custom of most Nigerian communities, privilege the male child over his female counter-parts, and so, when the choice is to be made between for instance, educating the male child and the female, the boy child gets it. Third, because, formal education has become the major determinant of ones placement in the employment ladder, women, being the least educated, (though not the least intelligent) a larger percentage of women are "found at the lowest rung of occupational ladder"(Mbanefoh, 1995). Therefore, "in spite of the fact that women are found in virtually all professions in Nigeria.. they remain underrepresented at the top management level"(Ibid.).

The implications of the foregoing for women under a liberal economy where "rolling back the state" is a major policy guideline, are many. First, when there is any need for retrenchment, the first targeted groups are usually the junior level workers where women are concentrated in most establishments. Second, with the withdrawal of subsidies from kerosine which is the main cooking gas in the cities, forced many of the low-income families to resort to charcoal as alternative to kerosine. Coal cooking is not only tedious it is equally hazardous for the coal has to be worked throughout the cooking. Several women and children were reportedly killed in the several fire outbreaks at feeling stations where they had gone in search of the commodity which became scarce.

Perhaps, the most profound of these impacts which has not been given adequate attention is in the way the number of female candidate admitted into higher institutions dropped immediately after the introduction of SAP. For instance in the 1982/83 academic session, the enrolment figure for female students was 42%, 35%, and 26% for University of Ife and University of Benin, respectively. However, by the 1986/87 session, the percentage dropped to 23% and 28%, respectively. In fact, while the total female enrolment into 21 Federal Government owned universities in the 1982/83 academic session was 23, 855 representing 24.9%, the percentage went down to 23% in the 1986/87 session. The gap is higher when one considers the figure at the postgraduate level. The implication of this to the question of gender justice is quite obvious. And to me this is one issue that must be attended to by gender scholarship in this millennium.

The African woman has been a victim of a rather anti-feminist belief systems that place more premium on the proper upbringing of the male child, at the expense of the female counterpart. The male child is seen in many African societies as the bearer of the "family name", the heir apparent. He is the one who, come tomorrow, is going to carry forth the name of the family and so immortalize the lineage. The female child, on the other hand is conceived more or less as a temporary member of the family, who, soon becomes a member of her would-be husband's family. Whatever resources expended on training her is thus seen as a waste. The consequence of this is that less attention is paid to the education of the female child compared to the male counterpart. One implication of this for the
question of gender equality, is that with literacy increasingly becoming “a requirement for jobs, illiterate women who were denied educational opportunities in early life are” almost automatically, “being displaced from employment opportunities” (Rathgeber, 1992:18).

The African Regional Studies Program (1994:18) observed that “men and women play different roles and face different constraints in responding to economic policy changes and to shifts in relative prices and incentives”. This point which is said to be overlooked by scholars and anti-feminist literature, was equally elaborated upon by the 1990 Report of a Commonwealth Expert Group on Women and Structural Adjustment. The Report, noted, among other things, that women have suffered dis-proportionately from the debt crisis and adjustment policies, not only as producers and workers in formal sector employment but also as reproducers who have been forced to provide a private and individual basic health and other social services which formerly were provided by the state (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1990).

This also means that she would have lesser time to engage in profitable ventures. This development has further “strengthened the gender division of labor in household economy”, and reduced women’s access to regular formal employment (Ibid.). Now, with lower household incomes resulting from structural adjustment policies of the various African States, and the consequent reduction in social services provided by the state, women and girls are also forced “to work harder in unpaid household work, casual employment and highly exploitative forms of self employed cottage industry” (Ibid.).

One remarkable development from this is the way “sexual works” have become one of the major sources of higher income than other available form of employment for many women. Thus, prostitution among girls has been on the increase. At the same time even many married “women prostitute themselves on a part-time basis to bosses, teachers and other ‘big’ men in exchange for gifts of food, clothing, or an outing at one of the night clubs which flourish in all urban cities” (Ibid.). It could be that bad. Rathgeber has almost an exhaustive and graphic presentation of what have become the lots of the African woman in the face of the deepening crisis of economic adjustment in Africa:

Women in developing countries (now) work longer hours, earn less money, have greater responsibilities, are less literate and numerate and have lower caloric intake in proportion to body weight than do men. In countries and among social groups where there are few opportunities to escape from poverty women usually have none. In situations where everyone must work long hours to secure sufficient income to provide basic needs, women must work even longer for they are faced not only with the necessity to contribute to household income but also must undertake all or most of the reproductive labour, including bearing and caring for children, preparation of food, looking after the elderly, nursing the sick and the multitude of other tasks that are labeled “women work” in most parts of the world (Rathgeber, 1992:11).

When Tomorrow Comes

Let me conclude by suggesting that in the new millennium our quest for gender-equity should acknowledge that while women-men relations are important our research should focus more on the girl-boy relationship. In other words, it is not just women and men, but girls and boys who participate and are affected by economic adjustment policies differently. It is needless concentrating our researches on the effects of the globalization of the neo-liberal economic values on adults at the expense of children. The girl child should be accorded equal status as the woman in our studies if gender-justice research must achieve one of its major goals of bringing sex-based injustices to the realm of public discourse. Therefore as the state is painfully being rolled back in Africa, our policy makers should remember the most vulnerable of the vulnerable group in our society, the GIRL CHILD.
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