

Gender, Globalization and Feminization of Division of Labour

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Abstract. Differences between men and women in terms of economic contribution are largely socially constructed instead of being rooted in biological factors. Domestic work such as childcare and household work has traditionally been viewed as jobs primarily for females to perform. These types of jobs are frequently viewed as less productive and contributing less to the national economy than jobs traditionally associated with male workers. Thus, most governments are now encouraging women to be incorporated to the formal work that pay taxes. With the rapid wave of global capitalism, multinational corporations have spread across the globe. Developing nations embrace this trend and compete with each other to invite foreign direct investment, since they see this as an opportunity to improve government revenue. This has created significant changes in the labour force around the world, including the composition of men and women in the workforce. This reflective essay attempts to explain the relation between gender, globalization and the feminization of labour. It argues that the process of globalization has produced tendency toward feminization of division of labour particularly labour-intensive industry in developing countries. The ongoing trade war between United States and China may have escalated this trend by having more Chinese factories move to lower labour cost countries in Southeast Asia. This paper suggests that in relation with neo-liberal approach, globalization and economic integration only give benefits to the rich in terms of state and individual, female factory workers seem far away to be the winner (at least equal) in the labour force and gender relationship within workers' organization.

Keywords: Gender, Globalization, Feminization of Labor.

1 Introduction

Scholars differ dramatically on the conceptual definition of globalization, with a common agreed upon definition remaining elusive. Robert Patman offered a general definition of globalization as, “the intensification of interconnections between societies, institutions, cultures, and individuals on a worldwide basis” [1]. Patman’s point is that globalization reduces the perceived distances across borders and how much time is necessary to physically (and representationally) cross them. This reduced perception in distances extends across virtually all areas of life, including areas such as politics and security. Through the process of globalization, Patman even goes so far as to say that, “the world is perceived as a smaller place” [1].

Joseph Stiglitz, on the other hand, offered a definition of globalization that is more narrowly focused on the economic sector and is a phenomenon to be studied in more narrow economic terms [2]. While this limited focus on economics can be useful for focusing on part of the wider globalization phenomenon, most scholars employ a more comprehensive view of

globalization (similar to Patman's work discussed above) that is caused by numerous and far-ranging factors beyond economic trends that lead to the societal changes of interest to globalization scholars.

Thus, there is increasingly broad scholarly consensus that globalization represents a broader, more complex, and more nuanced phenomenon across a wide range of societal areas [3]. The scholarly research on globalization also raises numerous and difficult normative questions about potential trade-offs between economic growth and income inequality, including its impact on labour. Another potential area of interest for academics is the impact globalization has on gender issues due to the spread of cultural values across societies. This study uses a causative approach to understand the impact of globalization on both labour and gender issues. The data were collected through literary study in which relevant secondary resources were gathered and used according to the purpose of the study.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Gender and Globalization

Scholarship on globalization most often focuses on the areas of economics, technology, and even structural adjustment policies. Extant theories of globalization such as Immanuel Wallerstein's seminal world-systems theory have not given enough consideration to the effect of globalization on gender. Likewise, the theories offered by Robertson and Harvey (including the idea of "time-space compression") do not fully address gender questions. Even feminist scholars have viewed globalization in more explicit political economy terms, focusing on economic issues such as the international division of labour. These feminist perspectives take the view that the patriarchal world system allows international capitalism to thrive and often focuses an examination on dichotomies in the economic system such as public versus private sectors or production versus consumption behaviour.

According to Davids and Driel [4], in the literature on gender and globalization, the phenomenon of globalization is taken for granted and this stay underexposed. Studies examining gender and globalization, they argue, tend to be limited to one of two categories. First, many studies take a global perspective that focus on neo-liberal economic or social and political restructuring. Second, other studies limit their perspective to how local communities react to global influences (e.g., the so-called "feminization of poverty").

Another example is Bergeron's work on the economic effects of globalization [5]. Specifically, she argues that the profit motive embedded in capitalist economic systems is a causal factor that inexorably leads to modernization. This includes emerging technologies in both how people communicate and travel as well as changes in the production of goods and how money flows across borders.

Moreover, Bergeron described these economic forces as "nearly absolute" because they create a "universal world economy and culture" which displaces local products and businesses with global ones (she cites Disney, Barbie, and other similar products as examples). As consumers turn to these global products and global cultural icons, they turn away from products produced by local businesses, who struggle to compete with the large transnational corporations. Often, the economic force of international capitalism works within a country's existing government. But these forces also affect international institutions (e.g., the Bretton

Woods system) and can lead to the emergence of new ones such as the World Trade Organization [5].

How does global capital affect these changes in labour markets? By leveraging the power of global capital into political power and influence within each country, which weakens the position of the working class. One example can be found in the IMF's "structural adjustment program", which provides countries with international capital in exchange for certain concessions that lead countries to focus on trade and other free market policies. The World Bank also provides these types of "structural adjustment program" loans to countries with the goal of increasing free market trade across countries and promoting economic development. This obviously gives greater leverage to global capital, often to the detriment of local labour. Because the IMF and World Bank negotiate and coordinate with the existing government institutions in each country, they can be viewed almost as an international state institution that promotes the interests of global capital over the interests of labour and local businesses [6]. As a consequence, the power and autonomy of nation-states has declined relative to transnational corporations and international organizations such as the IMF [6].

Those who promote globalization, especially in the economic sector, often argue that the declining autonomy and role of state governments is inevitable and even welcome. They view the efforts by the World Bank and IMF to integrate developing countries into the global economy as a positive trend to be promoted across the globe. Globalization advocates view this integration, promoted through the "structural adjustment policies" and similar programs, as a way to address a wide range of economic and even social problems within these countries [7]. Regarding the effects on women specifically, the World Bank has sought to integrate women into the transnational labour and financial markets, which would allow them to experience the "beneficial changes in the economy" that have simply been "slow in reaching women". In a documentary about a working girl in a jeans factory in Canton China titled 'China Blue' this so called 'integration of transnational labour' means cutting the loose threads from finished jeans for 6 cents an hour.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Globalization and the Feminization of Division of Labour

Scholars have tended to use the term "feminization of labour" in one of two ways. The first use of the term refers to an increase in women employment, particularly in the labour sector. The second use of "feminization of labour" focuses more on the types of work that women are doing in the economy, from working at home to subcontracting jobs. While, the division of labour means developed countries in North focus on capital intensive industry and developing countries in the South focus of labour intensive industry. Thus, making the process of globalization, in which looking for cheaper labour is the ultimate goal, in essence feminizing the division of labour.

As Bergeron explains, feminist scholars examining the effect of global capital on gender relations focuses on conflicts between multinational corporations and women, where many companies sought out female workers for a variety of reasons [5]. These reasons ranged from greater perceived docility of female workers (who would not mount as many challenges to management) and perceptions that women were less likely to unionize in the workforce [5]. This "feminization of labour" obviously did not simply increase how many women were in the

workforce, but also shifted the types of jobs women were performing (e.g., more part time work and more women working from home) [5].

In developing countries, women in the workplace have been marginalized by the international division of labour. The “International Division of Labour” (IDL) describes the process where production processes are divided among countries, each of which specialize in a specific part of the production process. This is sometimes cast in terms of the “structural division and the vertical relationship” between traditional colonial powers and their colonies in the developing world (e.g., Latin America, Asia, and Africa) [8]. This model has been transformed by a new system, the so-called labour-cost-intensive production processes in the developing countries, while machine-made products are mass produced in Western Countries [8][9]. This led to a shift following liberalization and market reform policies from the agricultural sector to a situation where women and men were more likely to be employed in manufacturing jobs [10].

One of the consequences of the new IDL, related to the gender relation in this form of division of labour, is the rising unemployment of workers in industrialized countries affected more women than men as many relocated industries had mainly employed women. These relocated industries (i.e., manufacturing) require cheaper workers who are less likely to unionize or otherwise conflict with management so that production costs can be lowered [8]. It is therefore clear that the relocation of manufacturing industries requires an abundance of cheap labour, high urban unemployment rates, and policies such as government subsidies such as tax halides or government loans. This shifts the advantage in world trade to more labour-intensive production, something that was essential to the liberalization of trade and economic reform [10][11].

In addition, men are often viewed as the primary earners in their household, which makes women extremely attractive workers for the new IDL. Their (perceived) secondary place as household earners means that multinational corporations hire them for temporary jobs with lower pay and fewer unionization opportunities, all of which make women more profitable for manufacturing companies [12]. Because of this “occupational segregation”, women tend to earn lower wages than men and women are more likely to be concentrated in particular sectors such as manufacturing, commerce, and services [10]. Yu and Thang [13] also demonstrate that theories of labour market segmentation results in women working in the “periphery sector” which consists of “dead-end, low-pay jobs”.

In the manufacturing industry, women workers are often more attractive to companies than their male counterparts. This is not only because companies can pay lower wages to women, but as noted above also results from (often incorrect) perceptions of women as more docile, less mobile, and more subordinate than male workers [14]. Moreover, Kurian [10] argues that because of these (perceived) characteristics, they are preferred by multinational corporations for a manufacturing and production market that requires flexibility. Put simply, manufacturing companies can rely on cheaper part-time women workers for manufacturing products that often must be produced on short notice [10]. Thus, the feminization of the workforce of low-skilled, labour intensive industries has been related to the common view among employers that the wages of female workers are easily repressed and that women are more docile and controllable [15], more diligent, loyal, careful, patient and obedient than male workers [16], more able to master the repetitive tasks without intensive training on the ground of myth of ‘having nimble fingers’ [17], but who are also less prone to organize or join trade unions [10]. Furthermore, the feminization of division of labour is attributed to their capacity to bear children and to handle domestic chores. Maria Mies [8] goes so far as to describe, “the whole strategy [of the new IDL] is based on a patriarchal, sexist, and racist

ideology of women which defines women basically as house wives and sex objects". Yet it appears that women have few alternatives to worker low-wage, labour-intensive jobs as the cheapest alternative in certain economic sectors.

Mies states that definition of women as dependent house wives as 'housewification', which is the main strategy of international capitalism to put women all around the world into the accumulation process [8]. In support, Custers argues that identification of men as breadwinner and women as non-earners is the significant proponents of capitalist system that make much of women's work in the Third World invisible. Furthermore, the notion of women as housewives also significantly results in women subordination in the hierarchical structure of production relations [18]. Regarding this argument, factory can be seen as a way to place women workers as a wife in the context of gender division of labour, their income, and their structural position, as they also become the secondary income resources in the family. As of today, the ongoing trade war between China and the United States, may have escalated this trend of feminization of division of labour as more and more factories from China are moving to Southeast Asia and parts of Africa.

4 Conclusion

The global processes such as neo-liberal industrial restructuring in relation to gender has created a trend of feminization of labour particularly in developing countries in Asia Pacific. In relation with neo-liberal approach that is criticized to only give benefits to the rich in terms of state and individual, female factory workers seem far away to be the winner (at least equal) in the labour force and gender relationship within workers organization.

Some studies reveal the facts that neo-liberal approach as a result globalization toward world integral economy will continuously cutting social welfare budget to establish favorable environment for foreign investments. Such approaches as cutting education budget that obviously have driven many students out of school and liberalize market that has proven raise the food prices, will become the popular policies. As a result of patriarchal relationship, a woman will be the first person to be dropped-out from school, to be fired from job, and the latest person to be fed and to be consulted. Indeed, equal bargaining position with men would be only a dream.

Some efforts to increase women's participation and improve their sharing of resources, employment, opportunities and income aiming at enhancing women's living condition such as The UN Decade for the Advancement of Women (1975-1985) and Beijing Platform for Actions (1995) showed increasing attention to women's issues in development, but so far the progress is far from the expectation. Then there is remaining question, is the trend of feminization of labour is really global, in the sense that they occur on world scale causing the same effect everywhere? Does this make women the victims of globalization or women and men are equally victims of globalization?

In sum, I conclude that globalization with its associated free-trade that lead to the feminization of the division of labor may perhaps benefit women in terms of economic freedom. However, it also means women are more exposed to exploitation by companies and employers that receive the greatest benefits from these trends. Therefore, I propose increasing the state, civil society, and trade unions to protect women workers from this exploitation by multinational corporations.

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