

Reflections on Feminist Gender, Agriculture

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L'auteure assure que la recherche sur le genre et le marché mondial devrait développer de nouvelles échelles d'évaluation et des politiques alternatives à partir d'une analyse féministe, des impacts différentiels de la libéralisation du commerce et des politiques reliées aux normes du travail des hommes et des femmes qui travaillent dans la production et la distribution agroalimentaires. Ces échelles serviraient à évaluer et à analyser ces impacts et ces politiques et pourraient se pencher sur les valeurs inhérentes à ces politiques, voir comment les femmes fonctionnent avec ou sans ces politiques et en même temps pourraient fournir une base utile pour proposer des politiques alternatives.

Globalization is often used interchangeably with global economic integration through trade and production, as it is the economic that is its most controversial dimension. However, there are other political, socio-cultural, technological, ideological, and environmental dimensions of globalization that are equally important to understand. Feminist scholars, for example, are beginning to address a number of key questions on the gendered processes of the following four dimensions of globalization and global trade.

Economic

How is the integration of local and national economies and markets (capital, financial, consumer) into a global

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system of production, consumption and exchange transforming the gender division of labour and women's work? How does global economic restructuring, accompanied by structural adjustment programs create differential impacts on women, men, children, races and classes?

Socio-Political

What are the gendered effects of global trade, emerging forms of global governance, and the global spread of democratic ideas and human rights concerns in the post-Cold War era, or more commonly

referred to as democratization or political liberalization? How are the increased integration and interdependence of the inter-state system due to the emergence of global trade and financial institutions (e.g. WTO, World Bank, IMF, ILO) and sub-global regions of economic unification (e.g. EU, NAFTA), or co-operation (e.g. ASEAN, APEC), creating new policies and conditions that have implications on gender roles and relations? How do globalization and global trade affect the political and social cohesion of women in local communities and feminist organizations, including women's international networks?

Socio-Cultural

How are new global cultural convergences, characterised by the homogenisation of consumer wants, global consumption patterns (e.g. "McWorldization," "Coca-colonization") and paradoxical growth of secularism and fundamentalism recreating the workplace and the politics of identity (self, group, community, gender, ethnicity, race, and class) in an era of globalization? How does global trade through multinational corporations and international migration, produce cultural tensions and hybridity in gender structures when work operations and people are transplanted overseas?

Technological

How does the rapid development of global trade production, transportation, new reproductive technologies, and communication information systems, which facilitate the global movement and reproduction of people, goods and ideas, re-creating or modifying the processes and conditions under which women and men work, live, consume, and procreate?

Feminist Research on Global Trade and Agriculture

The analysis of global trade and trade agreements from gender analytical or feminist economic lenses have only been done in the last seven years (e.g. Chavez-Malaluan; Hale; Haxton and Olsson; Joekes and Weston; Joekes 1995, 1999; UNCTAD). These studies benefited from broader earlier studies on women's work, development, and global restructuring in both industrialized and developing countries (e.g. ARENA 1995a, 1995b; Aslanbegui, Pressman and

Policy Research on and Global Trade

Summerfield; Bakker 1994, 1996; Beneria and Feldman; Elson; Sparr; Tinker; Ward 1990). International trade is a complex issue, as it requires the ability of agents and institutions to trade signals not just within communities, sectors, and nations, but also across borders globally and across the height of specialization and division of labour (Chavez-Malaluan). Given differences in abilities, policies, endowments, size of markets, market behaviour, and capital and technology relations, the results are often uneven impacts that are reflected geographically, across and within communities, sectors, nations, and borders. Export industries are often seen as key to the economic growth in both developed and developing countries pursuing market-oriented policies. The importance of export-oriented industries in the current era of increased globalization is very clear in the rise of high-tech growth enclaves and industrial zones within metropolises and mega-cities around the globe. Canadian “growth triangles” (e.g. Montreal-Toronto-Ottawa) and regional cities such as Ottawa and Greater Vancouver have been home to such growth centres, often referred to as the “Ottawa Silicon Valley” or the “North Vancouver Silicon Valley” in obvious reference to their counterpart in California.

The “urban bias” in the study of globalization tends to reinforce the relegation of agriculture to a residual status in an era of deep urban-based industrialization that is often associated with development. Hence, policy-makers and researchers tend to neglect the importance of developing sound industrial-agricultural linkages, ignore the possibility of development driven by modern agriculture and rural-based industrialization, or worst, assume that rural economies will simply wither away under the bright and shining sun of global industrialization and urbanization. The “urban bias” of globalization studies is sadly reflected too in many gender studies that tend to focus more on the feminization of industrial labour, especially in export processing zones, and the changing gender identities of urban-based populations. This happens despite the fact that the large majority of women and men around the world are still based in rural areas, and that there is a lower unemployment rate of women in rural areas than in urban areas (ASEAN 1999: Table 3).

The implications to the rural and agricultural sectors of the above questions on gender and globalization linkages are interesting to address. How may we re-write these questions while taking into consideration the specific

problems and unique character of the rural and agricultural sectors? Do these questions only need rewriting to recast them within the context of rural, agricultural and environmental concerns? Do they suddenly become relevant to agricultural concerns just by replacing the implicit urban context of globalization and adding the word “rural-agricultural”? Or, instead of simply rewriting these questions, should we begin to look at how globalization has been affecting the rural agricultural sector and the global commodity chains, and at the same time re-examine how gender identities, roles and relations figure in its effects? Hence, a few nagging questions remain: How may we effectively integrate gender into studies on global trade, agriculture, and agro-food systems? How are the gender questions in agriculture, environments, agro-food systems, and natural resource studies going to be transformed when we introduce globalization in the equation? Likewise, are the gender questions raised in globalization studies going to be the same, or modified when these are asked in the context of the rural/agricultural/environment issues? How would such transformations or modifications look like?

Much of the earlier women, agriculture, trade, agro-food systems, and the environment literature draw parallels between women’s exploitation, agricultural crisis, and environmental plunder. To many writers in the field, especially contributors to the growing eco-feminist literature, globalization provides the contextual and situational background to the understanding of new trends taking place within global discourses on the environment, agricultural, food security, and sustainable development. Examples are the studies done by Shiva and Mies and Shiva on the impact of GATT, seed patenting, and restrictions on intellectual property rights on women based in agriculture; the works by Agarwal (1994, 1997) on gender and food security; and several anthologies on gender, sustainable development, and environmental linkages (Braidotti, Charkienwica, Hausler and Wieringa; Hombergh; Harcourt; Kettel; Angeles and Tarbotton). There are also writers who focus more

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on the political implications, organizing and networking activities that result from women's greater awareness of global gender and environmental issues (Kettel; Angeles and Tarbotton). To a number of mainstream writers on the global agricultural and food systems (e.g. McMichael 1994: 199), on the other hand, gender issues are not central questions, but simply become an "add-on" to be addressed in separate chapters written by women contributors to anthologies on global agriculture (e.g. Collins).

More recently, there are gender-focused studies on the globalization of agro-food systems and the gender implications of trade agreements on women, work, and food security (e.g. Barndt; George; Mies). There are already a number of studies dealing with the gendered implications and impacts of trade agreements signed by Canada, such as NAFTA and Canada's membership in the WTO and APEC on trade and trade-related labour policies in export-oriented industries. Some of these materials have emerged in light of women's activism against the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that preceded NAFTA, and the current Free Trade Agreement in the Americas (FTAA). Contributors in Barndt for instance trace the role of women in the North American food chain made more efficient by modern agro-industrialization and free trade agreements. They examine production-distribution-consumption links between women tomato-growers in Mexican farms, female workers in tomato-canning factories, and female fast-food restaurant workers who slice and serve them in between hamburger buns at McDonalds, Wendy's, and Burger King. This study, among others (e.g. Barrientos), draws parallels between the creation of a feminized and flexible work force and increased contractualization of labour in the agro-industrial sector. Other recent studies provide a feminist interpretation of global commodity chains that draw attention to women's indigenous theories that recognize "winners" and "losers" in global trade and new possibilities for women workers (Ramamurthy).

Gaps and Future Directions in Canadian Feminist Research

Qualitative feminist research on women and globalization of agro-food system have yet to fully address public policy questions directly related to trade liberalization and labour dimension of trade policies. Feminist researchers on gender and global trade need to make an important distinction between trade policies and trade-related policies (Chavez-Malaluan). Trade policies deal directly with the administration of trade activities (e.g. trade liberalization through removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers

like quotas or quantitative restrictions, customs procedures, goods valuation methods, exchange rates, production subsidies, export incentives, etc. that restrict or expand access to markets). Trade-related policies, on the other hand, include those that will be imposed whether or not the country trades, or regardless of the manner in which they trade, such as macroeconomic policies (e.g. interest rates), investment policies (e.g. budget, public spending, rules regarding domestic and foreign investors), labour, immigration, and social policies (education, asset reform, multiculturalism, etc.). Trade policies and trade-related labour policies, in the context of labour market segregation and segmentation, are acknowledged to affect women's work, and the gender division of labour. Feminist researchers in the field therefore need to highlight their main interest in trade liberalization policies, while indicating, where relevant, the role of other trade-related investment and social policies such as education, training, and immigration, childcare, health, and welfare. Such studies will provide a good knowledge base of the (gendered) differential impacts of trade agreements to economic, regional development, and social policy makers so that future policies will not have adverse consequences for women.

A number of research gaps may be clearly identified from the existing literature. Gender and global trade research needs to develop new policy evaluation frameworks and policy alternatives from a feminist analysis of the differential impacts of trade liberalization and trade-related labour policies on women and men working in the global agro-food production and distribution systems. Such frameworks and set of criteria for evaluating and analyzing existing trade policies and impacts could examine the values embedded in these policies, and how women are doing with or without these policies, and could provide a useful basis for proposing policy alternatives. Specific trade policies and their impacts on women and men workers are *gender-sensitive* (with potential adverse effects on women or men), *gender-responsive or redistributive* (targets women or men as potential beneficiaries), and *gender-neutral* (has no discernible effects on both genders). Variations in policy implications and impacts of global trade may be gleaned from a comparative industry- or sector-level studies on export-oriented light manufactured goods (e.g. microelectronics, garments, textiles, leather, bags and other accessories); food and agricultural commodities (e.g. grains, fruits, vegetables, meat); services in emerging regional cities and province.

While trade-related social impacts on the Canadian agricultural sector as a whole tends to be relatively understudied, there are specific sub-sectors within that have received even more scant attention from a feminist perspective, such as the livestock, meat-packing, vegetable and fruit growing and processing industries. The fruit industry has been researched in terms of trade policy, work conditions and deployment of cheap migrant sea-

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sonal labour in Chile (Barrientos), California (Fuller), and North America (Martin). There is little comparative, cross-sector, empirical studies on trade agreements' gendered differential impacts on workers in export industries in Canada. Even more understudied are the impacts of trade agreements and the gender division of labour and work conditions in the export agricultural sector in relation to the high-tech regions in growth cities. Locally grounded regional case studies in particular may demonstrate national and global policy relevance by providing valuable lessons to governments and policy-makers in other Canadian provinces and regional cities (e.g. Vancouver in British Columbia, Ottawa and Toronto in Ontario, Calgary and Edmonton in Alberta, Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, Winnipeg in Manitoba, and Halifax in Nova Scotia) that are developing high-tech growth areas in the midst of rural communities experiencing agricultural crises. Such studies will be useful in the policy advocacy, human resource and program development of women's groups, NGOs, labour unions, farm organizations, and immigrant groups interested in human rights, gender equality, globalization, and social justice.

Also often ignored in feminist research on global trade is the relationship between merchandise export trade and the non-merchandise or labour export that has enabled the movement of skilled, highly trained and disciplined work force to high-growth areas and seasonal labour markets within and outside Canada. The meat-packing, vegetable and fruit growing industries have strong female and immigrant labour force participation, and thus provide good case studies to bring in the gender, class and race dimensions in the study of trade liberalization impacts. Another dimension ignored in trade studies is the differentiation and disaggregation of uneven impacts on women and men because of market segregation on the basis of sex, wage/salary differences, hiring, firing, and promotion practices and the effects of family responsibilities on productivity and career development. Thus, there is a need to examine how trade-oriented economic and labour policies are affecting the organization of work (i.e., work intensity and flexibility, gender hierarchies, gender division of labour, cost-cutting, etc.); labour management practices (i.e., recruitment, promotion, retrenchment, etc.) and labour (im)migration (i.e., inter-provincial, across the border, international) in these industries. What are the *negative* and *positive* consequences of such labour practices, market characteristics, and related policies on women and men workers in different job categories in the export agricultural industries? What are the differential impacts of these policies on women and men workers, on their families and family responsibilities, and on workers' health, productivity and personal development? How are these affected by the industries' increased demands for labour competitiveness and flexibilization that result in more stressful work conditions? What are the lessons learned on

the gender division of labour and labour rights from comparative studies of export industries?

Economic expansion through trade liberalization has drawn women into the paid labour force, creating a new population segment that benefits directly from its growth through the availability of jobs and disposable income, even though these are often unstable and shrinking. Thus, given the boom and bust cycles of growth, it is important to chart policies that would ensure "the sustainability of women's gains from trade" (Joekes 1999: 44). But various classes and groups of women have differential abilities and amounts of gain from trade liberalization. Thus, feminist research on global trade must take into account diversity among women and men by considering how their work conditions and aspirations are affected by their position in the life cycle (age, single with no dependents, single parent, married, married with young children, married with grown-up children); their job category within the industry or firm (e.g. managers, assembly-line production workers, etc.); their educational background; their citizenship status (e.g. Canadian-born, long-time immigrant, recent immigrant, guest worker); their place of residence and ethnicity or racial/national origins.

It is widely acknowledged that the new global economy has led to further concentration of global corporate interests, through mergers and acquisitions, and the invigorated power of multinational corporate interests to pressure national governments and local communities to acquiesce to their demands. On the one hand, agro-industrial MNCs are well-known to engage in cost-cutting and labour-saving measures in an era of intense competition, particularly increased labour contractualization, contract farming, and automation of production. On the other hand, provincial and national governments are marching to the same tune of market liberalization, cost-cutting measures and political decentralisation. Hence, there is a need to examine the emerging trade and labour policy impacts (e.g. wages, benefits, training, recruitment, incentives, immigration, etc.) in the agricultural, manufacturing, and other export industries, especially in light of the political transitions to neo-liberal or conservative governments, as in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. In particular, we need to understand how trade liberalization of agricultural products, the removal of agricultural subsidies, and reduced availability of agricultural credits are affecting women farmers and other agricultural producers.

In addition, feminist policy research on global trade must bring in socioeconomic, demographic and mi-

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gration issues, in light of recent assessments of how rural and agricultural areas in Canada are integrating into the knowledge-based economy. This analysis is especially critical in the areas of human capital or resource development, social cohesion or connectedness, and innovation that contribute to success in the new economy (Industry Canada). What labour development policies could be supported by social partnerships between public and private sector groups in Canadian provinces, such as the various provincial Industrial or Agricultural Workforce Policy Boards and Technology Industries Associations that have an interest in labour and human resource issues facing the agriculture and high-tech industries? What may be learned from the experiences of Canadian provinces and regional cities that are attempting to develop their own high-tech growth areas in the midst of farm crises in rural agricultural communities?

There is also a need to revisit the old literature on women and agricultural technologies in the light of new evidence on how globalization of trade and agro-food system has been affecting work relations and gender identities. There are still very few studies done on gender, agriculture and new bio-technologies, especially those that relate to the use of genetic engineering in agriculture and labour-saving farm technologies, particularly genetically altered seeds with "terminator" characteristics. How do these trends directly affect the lives of agricultural producers, especially women farmers and workers? How are the spread of genetically modified organisms and increased awareness of environmental and health issues affecting the way Canadian families and individual women and men buy, prepare and eat their food?

Conclusions

It is said that to participate in competitive globalized trading markets, workers and institutions require "assets and endowments, information and communication facilities, capital, technology, human resources, infrastructure, access to markets, and capacity of associations," factors where access and control have been traditionally "biased in favour of men" (Bifani-Richard 84). More broadly, it is also often posited that globalization has caused a considerable decline in the significance of nation-states and state sovereignty. This claim, of course, has its critics who suggest that nation-states retain a considerable amount of their sovereignty when they reconfigure their territoriality, e.g. enforcement of borders and immigration policies, in the face of borderless economies (Sassen). The gender(ed) implications of the supposed "demise," "decline" and "decentering" of the nation-state, or the erosion or retention of state sovereignty, need to be explored further in an era of globalization of agro-food systems. This is most telling in the increased density of links in the global commodity food chains or webs that tend to further marginalise women's work and at the same

time, create new possibilities for resistance and solidarity. If indeed, women stand to lose from unequal participation in the global economy and from diminished state powers, then it is important to examine what groups of women, as well as disadvantaged or non-competitive men, bear the costs of trade liberalization policies. It is also equally important to assess how such costs could be minimised by appropriate policy directions.

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