

Women's Studies Intersecting Issues on Political Economy, Class and Gender

FILIPINO WOMEN AND GLOBALIZATION: THREE RESPONSES

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Globalization as a phenomenon has been the subject of varied analyses and discussions inside and outside the academe. The hosting of the Philippines of the 1996 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit was an occasion for protests with at least three alternative conferences held simultaneous with the official one. The May 1997 University of the Philippines Faculty Conference dealt with the topic of globalization and nationalism. Women's organizations in the Philippines have also participated in conferences on globalization and have tackled the impact of globalization on women.

This paper examines how globalization is viewed by Filipino women in relation to contesting perspectives on globalization.

The meanings of globalization

A review of literature reveals diverse meanings attributed to globalization. There are those who emphasize the disappearance of national borders; the move towards global homogeneity in the standard of living and in culture. There are those who refer to the faster interconnection among countries because of advances in transportation and communications. Others point to international migration, to problems with international dimensions such as the degradation of the environment, the transmittal of AIDS, the drug problem: problems which do not recognize national boundaries. These descriptions refer to the social aspects of globalization. (South Commission, 1990:5-7)

There is also the explanation that highlights the economic aspect of globalization. Globalization is viewed as "the rapid integration of the economies of both developed and developing countries. This integration is facilitated by the increased trade between nations through the lowering of the so-called trade barriers, spreading net of global financial institutions and the growth in foreign direct investments by firms operating across national boundaries, mainly, global or multinational corporations." (Ofreneo,1996: 5)

Globalization is essentially in line with the neo-classical economic model. This model believes that the market is the most efficient and effective determinant of production and prices and should not be regulated. Competition leads to rational production as countries produce goods that they can produce competitively and simply import those they cannot producing growth which eventually would redound to the benefit of society as a whole. (Bayan, 1996: 77-78)

The neo-classical underpinnings of globalization are very well articulated by the World Bank and the Ramos' government. The 1995 World Development Report clearly spells out this neo-classical approach when it broaches that "governments must pursue market-based growth paths that generate rapid growth in demand for labor, expansion in the skills of the work force, and rising productivity and take advantage of new opportunities at the international level by opening up trade and attracting capital -- but manage dislocations that international changes sometimes brings." (World Bank,1995:1-2)

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The Philippine Medium Term Development Plan (1993-1998), popularly known as Ramos' *Philippines 2000*, puts together a package of liberalization, deregulation and privatization. This opens up the country to foreign investments and foreign trade and hews to the neo-classical approach to development.

There are two major sources of opposition to globalization. One is what is referred to as the "civil society critique." The term "civil society" here is used to refer to the citizens in contrast to the market and to the state. Korten elaborating on the work of Nerfin uses the terms *the prince* (for the state), *the merchant* (for the market) and *the citizen* (for people's power). (Korten, 1990: 96)

Professor Leonor Briones' paper presented at the University of the Philippines faculty conference on globalization and nationalism in May 1997 represents this perspective. It accepts globalization as a given but also acknowledges that globalization has a dark side. It calls for the formation of global solidarity among different non-governmental organizations to critique the negative impact of globalization. (Briones, 1997). This perspective hews to a "critical collaboration" approach manifested by its view of reforming institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank through initiating dialogues with them. Non-governmental organizations, local and international, composed mainly of educated, middle class development activists are in the forefront of the "civil society" critique.

The nationalist/Marxist critique of globalization avers that globalization is imperialism in "new clothes" (Africa, 1997: 22). Imperialism, meaning international monopoly capital represented by such advanced countries as United States, Germany and Japan, among others, benefit from trade and financial policies and arrangements that facilitate the free entry and exit of transnational corporations in and out of poor countries to maximize their profits. (Loxley, 1986: 196) For Marxists, globalization refers to a model of development and relationships contained in the programs and policies known as structural adjustment being peddled by the IMF/WB, international "free"

trade bannered by the GATT/WTO and the regional "free trade." The latter is being pushed by APEC and the programs and policies contained in the Philippines 2000 development thrust of the Ramos administration. Unlike the adherents of the "civil society" perspective, the Marxist perspective does not accept globalization as an inevitability that cannot be opposed. Instead, it seeks to generate solidarity among the working peoples of the world to expose and oppose globalization as imperialism in new clothes. (GABRIELA, 1996: 7) Unlike the civil society approach, it views the working classes, the farmers and workers - represented by their own class-conscious organizations - as the key and leading actors in the process to oppose globalization.

Winners and Losers in the Globalization Process

Common to many of the literature on globalization, whether from those advocating globalization or opposing it, is the recognition that there are winners and losers in the process.

The 1995 World Bank Report accepts that "labor does tend to suffer during the initial period of adjustment, and possibly more than capital itself" but believes that there are no "effective policies that would better sit the interest of the workers." (World Bank, 1995: 104) Its own review of the results of adoption of globalization policies in the four regions of the world undergoing economic adjustments emphasized that only skilled urban workers in all four regions gained from the process while unskilled urban workers lost ground. Women in "Asian agrarian" were the only gainers while rural workers in the industrial post-socialist were the only losers. (World Bank, 1995: 107)

Ofreneo's paper points out that "there are few winners and a large number of losers in Philippine society." The winners include transnationals from advanced capitalist countries, the East Asian tigers and some ASEAN countries. Local winners include bankers, stock market operators and leading law offices. But the vast masses of the people in the urban and rural areas are the perennial losers. (Ofreneo, 1996: 19-20)

The drive towards the integration of national economies into the world market means an emphasis on export-oriented industries and agriculture. The free entry and exit of international capital - facilitated by technological innovations in the production process, in transportation and in communications - means easy relocation of factories and firms from one country to another in pursuit of cheaper and docile labor force and better incentives. Infant domestic industries, which cannot withstand the uneven competition between them and established international giants, go bankrupt. Land conversions in the rural areas have led and are engendering the displacement of farmers. Lands formerly planted to food crops are converted to industrial estates, tourist areas or to the production of export crops. Displaced farmers are not absorbed by new employment and join the already vast army of unemployed. Labor contractualization, flexibilization and migration remain the only options of the working classes.

Another writer agrees with Ofreneo's view that women are among the worst losers in relation to the adjustment policies identified with globalization. Guillermo mentions the negative effects of globalization on Filipino working women:

... women will be doubly disadvantaged since the contractualization of labor primarily affects the large body of women workers who are assigned to low-paying piecemeal jobs, as in the garment industry. They cannot raise legitimate demands for higher pay and better working conditions because wages are kept competitively low and they are isolated from fellow women workers in the same industry. Like other workers, they are even in danger of losing their jobs, low paying as they are, if the multinational corporations move to another country offering lower wages and minimum demands in terms of workers' welfare. (Guillermo: 17)

Women's Responses to Globalization

Filipino women share a common oppression because of their gender: the reality of multiple burdens, the vulnerability to sexual violence, the lack of control over their bodies, among others. However, the degree and extent of the vulnerability of women to gender oppression differs on the basis of their economic position in society. As in other countries, Filipino women belong to various classes. Globalization has a different impact on women of differing economic and social positions and consequently the responses of women to globalization will differ depending on their economic position and the perspectives they have adopted.

I would posit that Filipino women involved in development work and/or social transformation would fall into three possible categories in terms of their responses to globalization. These are the "*women in development approach*," the "*gender and development approach*" and the "*women's liberation movement*" approach. All are premised on the need to address the inequality between men and women in society but diverge on the analysis of the roots of the inequality, their views on globalization and the strategies to be adopted as a response to gender inequality and to the phenomenon of globalization.

I would associate the adoption of the "women in development approach" or WID response to women and women organizations who adhere to the mainstream view of globalization as essentially not the correct path to development. The "women in development approach" looks at the subordinate position of women relative to men as due to the lack of opportunities and the legal constraints on women. It views the exclusion of women from the development process as the problem. It sees the need for integrating women into existing development process to enable women to benefit from it and to improve their welfare. Thus, the approach does not question the nature of the development model but merely addresses the omission of women from that process. (Rathgeber: 1-4) For WID advocates, globalization and the economic policies and

results of globalization are not problematic. What is important is for women to be provided opportunities to be involved in development activities and projects. This means providing them access to resources such as credit, new skills through training and assistance in terms of childcare, literacy or health needs. This is the approach adopted by groups involved in "mainstreaming gender in the development process" through gender sensitization of the bureaucracy. The same approach of groups involved in providing alternative income sources for women such as income-generating projects, cooperatives, credit facilities.

Such approach is not part of a broader program of empowering women or involving them in social actions and movements that can be critical of the status quo, in general, and of the adoption of economic and political policies inimical to the poor and to women, in particular. This is essentially the approach espoused by the government's "Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development" or PPGD which elaborates on programs for women within the context of the neo-classical direction of Philippine development contained in the Philippine Medium Term Development Plan.

The *gender and development approach* or GAD views women's subordination as due to unequal gender relations, the differing power between women and men. GAD also calls for a "fundamental reexamination of social structures and institutions and, ultimately, to the base of power of entrenched elites" which affect both women and men. (Rathgeber, 1989: 7) The strategies in the GAD approach include lobbying work in multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank, to point out the negative impact of development programs on women.

Women are involved in non-traditional development projects as shown in the experience of women in Mindanao. Their project involves producing roof tiles and raising the consciousness of men regarding women's issues and concerns. Women's organizations and mixed-gender non-governmental organizations - with advocacy work and linkages with international

development agencies - have adopted this approach. *The emphasis is on building "social movements" which are essentially coalitions or loose aggrupations of various non-governmental organizations pursuing reforms in the areas of unequal economic and gender relations as well as restoring environmental integrity.* I would associate the GAD approach with the critique of globalization emanating from the "civil society perspective" mentioned earlier.

THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION APPROACH CAN BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE NATIONALIST/MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON GLOBALIZATION. THIS APPROACH RECOGNIZES THAT WOMEN SUFFER SPECIFIC FORMS OF SUBORDINATION AND OPPRESSION ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR BEING WOMEN. YET, IT VIEWS THIS AS INSEPARABLE FROM THE EXPLOITATION AND OPPRESSION OF THE WORKING CLASSES BY IMPERIALISM AND ITS DOMESTIC ALLIES. THUS, IT HIGHLIGHTS THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION NOT ON WOMEN AS A WHOLE BUT ON POOR WOMEN IN PARTICULAR.

Women especially from the poor sectors of society are the ones hardest hit by imperialist globalization process... (I)mperialist globalization further intensifies the displacement, commodification and modern day slavery of marginalized women of our countries. (GABRIELA, 1996: 1)

The *women's liberation approach* situates itself as an integral part of a broad national liberation movement which is anti-imperialist in character. Its strategies focus on education, organizing and mobilizing working class women to be in unity with working class men. Launching militant mass struggles against the dictates of the multilateral agencies and government's implementation of aid conditionalities is part of the agenda. The approach also deals with women-specific problems such as *violence against women* and women's multiple burdens. It contextualizes these within the broader struggle and views the emphasis on gender espoused by the *gender*

and development approach as blind to the reality of diversities among women because of class and racial differences. The *women's liberation movement approach*, while recognizing the need for generating economic support and other forms of services for poor women, **views these as not ends by themselves but as part of the over-all efforts to achieve radical changes in society.** It offers genuine agrarian reform and national industrialization as alternative to globalization and the economic programs being implemented by the government. Thus:

If 70% of the population who are peasants own the land they till then the problem of food supply and income will be solved. Coupled with national industrialization that will produce machines to encourage industrial production and open up jobs for the workers and ensure the absorption of women into the productive processes, we are sure a genuine development of our economy, benefiting the majority of the people will be realized. And women will enjoy the fruits of their labor. (GABRIELA: 12)

The Three Responses Manifested in the Communities

The Women in Development Approach: The BIDANI Streetfood Project

BIDANI stands for Barangay Integrated Development Approach to Nutrition Improvement. It is an extension network program of states colleges and universities in the Philippines with its base in the University of the Philippines, Los Baños.

BIDANI's streetfood project is aimed at poverty alleviation through the provision of a food cart and credit for initial capital in setting up what is called "nutrition on wheels." The project was launched in 1992 covering beneficiaries in Los Baños and Bay. BIDANI has conducted nine training to over 200 vendors, trainers, housewives, canteen operators and municipal barangay officials in Los Baños.

A total of 31 streetfood vendors were assisted in the form of vending carts and initial capital.

The results of the project are mixed. Ten beneficiaries returned the carts. The other eight beneficiaries - who were granted cash loans but did not opt to borrow the food carts - experienced failure. The successful ones earned an average of P199 "representing on average 65% of the total household revenue" (Garcia and Germain, 1995: 38). The business required extensive work hours (12 or more hours a day) and it is not surprising that many of the women involved are those without children of pre-school age. BIDANI summarizes the factors for success as:

- 1) *training to ensure quality and cleanliness of the food,*
- 2) *an individual with entrepreneurial and management skills and original cooking, and*
- 3) *a secure market...*

BIDANI's staff categorize the project as a *women-in-development* project. The project focused on providing additional income for women within a role (nutrition, food preparation) traditionally held by women. The education and training is confined to the requirements of the project (preparation of nutritious food and skills in running a small business) and does not deal with unequal power relations in society or between women and men. It focused on women as producers or income earners but do not have provisions for dealing with the effect of this role on the domestic roles of the women.

The Gender and Development Approach: Roof Tile Making Project of the Mindanao Land Foundation

The Mindanao Land Foundation (MLF), a non-governmental organization in Davao City, is involved in assisting urban poor dwellers of the city. Composed of paid development workers, MLF uses a community organizing approach to facilitate the acquisition of land by so-called squatters through participation in the Community Mortgage Program (CMP) which is part of the government's urban land reform

program. In 1994, MLF initiated a women's project after the staff underwent education on *gender and development*. This has support from a European funding partner. Consistent with its goal of assisting urban poor communities to acquire land and housing, MLF decided on the roof tile making as its project. The technology, originally derived from Europe was modified to suit the Philippine setting. It was seen as woman-friendly project which involves two women working together using a mold for the roof tile. The production of the roof tile complemented an ongoing production of substitute materials for plywood which employed men. Both are necessary in the construction of urban dwellings. The roof tile project was also an alternative means of livelihood for women. It veers away from the stereotypical view in the Philippines that work related to construction was a male domain. It assumes women were good only for enterprises involving sewing, cooking or food processing.

In this project, women were provided training on the technology of the roof tile production complemented by education on their situation as poor women. Their husbands participated in another seminar initiated by MLF. The seminar tackled gender relations and the need for couples to support one another and to share in the domestic chores and in child-rearing.

The project was conceptualized as a *producers' cooperative* involving 18 women. The women participants were chosen on the basis of some criteria [e.g., belonging to the "poorest of the poor" with income below P1,500/month, lack of work of husband or wife]. Members registered a paid up capital of P 500 payable from their weekly direct labor pay.

Initially, the project was successful with the women having mastered the production process and were paid for their efforts. For the three months of 1995 (July-September), the women earned income ranging from a low of P910.64 to a high of P1,274.00. They were also formed into groups to ensure collective planning and assessment of their work (e.g., to thresh out problems in their relationship with one

another). However, the inability of the market to absorb the products of the women and the end of the funding support for the project led to its discontinuance.

This project clearly illustrates the *gender and development approach*. It attempted to address women's subordinate position in society as women by involving them in a non-traditional job. Within an organization doing advocacy work on behalf of the urban poor, it tried to raise the awareness of both women and men on the need for equality within and outside the home.

*The Women's Liberation Movement Approach:
The GABRIELA Pilot Credit Assistance Project*

GABRIELA is a coalition of grassroots women advocating women's liberation in the context of the struggle for national sovereignty and democracy. In late 1992, it initiated a *credit assistance project* for women victims of violence as a pilot for its Commission on Women's Economic Development. It was implemented in Agusan del Norte and involved 15 women who are victims of gender violence. These women are victims of battering, women who have children who were victims of incest and women victims of militarization.

All 15 women belonged to poor families: farming families in rural villages or former farmers who have relocated in the urban center of the province and would be considered part of the urban poor. These women were recommended by the GABRIELA chapter in the province based on the criteria of victims of violence and economically disadvantaged. Each of the 15 women beneficiaries were given loans of P3,000 with a 15 % interest payable in six months. A participatory structure was formulated which involved the formation of the *women in groups of five* based on their location. While the loan was on an individual basis, the formation of the group was essential. This was aimed to enhance skills training and awareness building as well as a venue for political education and discussion. The project

was extended from six months to nine months. Nine (9) out of 15 of the business undertaking were successful. The total repayment reached 74%.

Part of the inability of project beneficiaries to pay was accounted by the fact that the credit was used for family consumption as the husbands lost their jobs or got sick. The successful ones have supportive husbands who maintained their own livelihood and/or had previous experience with the business they have decided to set up.

Another woman beneficiary was assisted by the farmer's association in her adopted village in setting up a small sari-sari store. The profit from that store was sufficient for her to pay back her loan and to buy a piece of land in the village. The experience taught GABRIELA the importance of considering provisions for support services/funds (emergency funds, health or sickness funds) to enable the credit to be used for its original purpose: the setting up of an economic endeavor.

The uniqueness of this project lies in the education component of raising the awareness of its participants. The groups became a venue - not only for acquiring skills in accounting and bookkeeping and in managing their businesses nor for training in decision-making - but also became a forum for education on the roots of the poverty and oppression of poor women and on the alternatives offered by a national liberation struggle. The women became participants in mass actions in the province to oppose detrimental economic policies such as the Philippines 2000 as well as in commemorating International Day of Working Class Women every March 8. They have added their strength and their voices in the people's movement for genuine change in the province.

Hence, this paper has attempted to show that Filipino women's responses to globalization are diverse and reflect the varying views of different political actors in the country.

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