

Chapter 1

Why study gender issues in the economies of sub-Saharan Africa?

Gender matters

This book offers an introduction to the analysis of gender in the economies of sub-Saharan Africa. Gender refers to the constellation of rules and identities that prescribe and proscribe behavior for persons, in their social roles as men and women. These rules and identities may be deliberate or unintended, explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious. All societies of the world are gendered. The focus here will be on Africa south of the Sahara desert, which basically means the predominantly Muslim, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern-oriented countries of Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco are excluded. Henceforth, sub-Saharan Africa shall be shortened to just plain Africa, in accordance with common usage in the social sciences.

Gender is sometimes peripheral to concerns about how economies perform. Much mainstream analysis never mentions gender. Instead, academic disciplines that analyze economic activity have small contingents of gender specialists. This is true for anthropology, sociology, and economics, especially insofar as these disciplines deal with poor, developing economies. Much gender analysis, often carried out under the rubric of feminist analysis, concerns gender relations in the wealthy, industrialized countries of the world. Gender specialists in development studies ask how gender is important in influencing the patterns and changes in economic activity, for men and women. That gender may be important seems obvious until one considers that most textbooks in the field of development studies contain little discussion of gender, often relegating the topic to a lonely chapter tacked on to the 'regular' analysis. This is wrong, and needs to be corrected.

Gender matters for girls and women

Gender requires analysis because a common outcome of the gendering of social activity is an unequal and inefficient distribution, between men and women, of the capabilities for realizing well-being. Everyone knows the truth that women get a rawer deal out of life than men, and girls a rawer deal than boys. The commonness of female disadvantage is one of the most interesting features of economic life, and one of the most poorly understood.

One of the goals of the book is to convince the reader that there are

measures of well-being that justify this generalization that women are typically worse off when compared with men. Certainly there are people, sometimes very influential and intelligent people, who believe that comparing the well-being of boys and girls, or men and women, is like comparing papayas and lemons. One is sweet and the other sour, and the difference does not imply unequal welfare. Men and boys have their lives to lead and girls and women theirs.

This argument might have resonance in Africa. On some key dimensions girls in Africa do better, compared with boys, than girls in Asia and the Middle East. For instance, there appears to be no 'missing girls' problem comparable to that of northern India and China. There, girls die more often than boys, or are never born. According to the reliable estimates of demographers, 80 million fewer women are alive than there might have been had girls had access to the same medical care and life chances as boys. In northern India and China, the chances of a first child being a boy or girl are not too different from the roughly even biological chances of having a child of one sex or the other (with a slight preponderance towards boys). But second children are more often boys, especially if the first child was a girl. And as the number of previous children grows larger, and more weighted towards girls, the chance that a subsequent surviving child is a girl diminishes rapidly. This means that someone in the family is deliberately killing girls (through abortion, neglect, or infanticide). The argument that girls and boys are given the same opportunities to life, but then choose or are guided into different paths, would seem to have little validity in northern India and China. But it does, perhaps, have some validity in Africa. Girls in Africa do not appear to be as disadvantaged when using measures of well-being such as sex ratios and nutrition allocations.

Unequal chances for education, inheritance and ownership of assets, employment and occupations, freedom from violence, and political representation, however, add up to unambiguously diminished welfare and capacity to fulfill life aspirations, for women in Africa. Of course, women might internalize norms or preferences about lower objective measures of welfare being associated with higher subjective welfare. Women may have a kind of false consciousness, and think that their relatively worse lot in life makes them better for it.

Gender might matter for economic growth

Much of the population of sub-Saharan Africa has experienced long-term stagnation or declines in income and standards of living more generally. People remain far poorer than the rest of the world. As shall be seen in Chapter 2, the economic problem for these countries has not been solved, the way it has been for the affluent, industrialized countries of North America, Europe and East Asia. Many people still journey from sorrowful, hungry, and frustrating life, to early, painful, and diseased death.

Perhaps reversing the decline depends on changing structures of gender in Africa. The skeptic might immediately want to put down this book. Gender and

economic growth? The two have little to do with each other. But consider a few lines of argument. One goes as follows. African economies are poor because of high levels of corruption. Men are more corruptible than women. Men dominate African governments. The solution: encourage and campaign for more representation of women in African governments. For those who think this argument a trifle glib, a recent book authored by the World Bank (2001, pp. 12-13) basically arrives at this conclusion:

Greater women's rights and more equal participation in public life by women and men are associated with cleaner business and government and better governance. Where the influence of women in public life is greater, the level of corruption is lower...women can be an effective force for rule of law and good governance.

Take another syllogism. Women prefer that social spending be higher and more oriented towards the well-being of children. More social spending on local infrastructure, schooling, and anti-poverty programs is good for economic growth. Empowering women in the political process leads to larger allocations towards growth-enhancing government expenditures. Too obvious? Except for the growth-enhancing part of the story, this is a theory of 'big government' in the United States. Lott and Kenny (1999, p. 1163), for example, find that the period of extension of the franchise to women in the United States, "... coincided with immediate increases in state government expenditures and revenue and more liberal voting patterns for federal representatives, and these effects continued growing over time as more women took advantage of the franchise." Edlund and Pande (2001) find evidence that more recently divorced women, desirous of higher levels of social spending, have increasingly voted for the Democratic Party in the United States. Finally, in a developing country context, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) find that when the government of West Bengal required that village leadership positions be reserved for women, village councils indeed invested in different kinds of public goods.

Another approach very common to African studies is to suppose that market-friendly policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have not led to growth because they failed to give consideration to gender inequalities (Gladwin and McMillan 1989; Safilios-Rothschild 1985; Staudt Spring 1987). Optimistic expectations of high responsiveness and innovation proved unwarranted. African women, in this view, were simply too downtrodden to take advantage of new opportunities. When they were able to take advantage, the surplus generated was wasted away in costly struggles with men over rights to control the new surplus.

Gender might matter for conflict

If conflicts of the future are increasing between ethnic groups or 'civilizations' with different identities, as argued by Huntington (1996), then these groups will justify violence by appeal to differences in norms and values. Prevention of conflict in

the future requires careful attention in the present to the sources of differences across cultures in gender norms and values.

Gender, as a constellation of norms, values and practices regarding the relative place of women in society, seems likely to increasingly shape the rhetoric and dynamic of conflict. Indeed, "freeing the women of Afghanistan" was recently heard as battle-cry of the United States in its war against Al-Qaeda. It is possible that this rhetoric heralds a change from the usual place of gender in conflict rhetoric. That place is about the symbolic purity of women and their need for male protection. Combat is justified as redressing rape on "our" women. At the other extreme, women may be portrayed as wicked sources of misfortune. Combat involves inflicting rape on "their" women. Mass rape, whether real or imagined in cultural discourses, figures prominently in crises of violent social unrest, as recently seen in urban riots in both Jakarta, Indonesia in 1997 and Nairobi, Kenya in 2001, and women's groups have accused the regime of Robert Mugabe, in Zimbabwe, of using rape as a tool of intimidation.

The new implication from Afghanistan is that conflict over gender norms might become seen as a legitimate justification for conflict and even war. Of the many values and norms that vary across ethnic groups and civilizations, few are as significant, visible, and incompatible as gender. The rise of 'civilizational' and ethnic primordialism solidifies defensiveness towards cultural values and norms; people may more frequently see their interests as lying with their civilization or ethnic group, and hence disagreements over cultural values or norms become more likely sources of contention.

The aspects of gender that are most likely to generate conflict are those that involve discrimination against females as a broad social category of persons. As noted, girls and boys are often given unequal access to nutrition and education, the building blocks for being able to take advantage of the opportunities available in free societies. As adults, women are often second-class citizens in legal and political proceedings. Women are often not allowed to own property. Women may be discriminated against in employment. Already, many industrialized countries have seen ethnic conflict within their borders over issues of female circumcision, Islamic dress for girls in public schools, and arranged marriages of child brides. These conflicts may well spill over into the international arena. One possible flashpoint: many Middle Eastern countries deny the right of women to travel without consent or accompaniment of a male relative. This has become a serious impediment to resolution of child custody battles, when the husband takes children with dual nationality out of their original residence and into a country where they no longer have the right to travel.

Discriminatory values and norms have been changing in many groups, and a large set of nations have implemented the reforms called for by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. This convention was adopted in 1979 and ratified by 170 countries, and includes

provisions for reporting and investigation, and the beginnings of an international judicial process for redressing cases of state discrimination against women. Chapter 11 deals with the treaty at length.

But many countries and societies are experiencing little change, and gender inequality remains a potential flashpoint for conflict. Rights and norms remain unequal in many parts of the world. Malawi saw in late 2001 a long public debate regarding the possible criminalization of marital rape, heretofore not a crime. The short-lived Taliban regime was an abject lesson in the enduring utility, in local politics, of the rhetoric of inequality in gender roles.

Intense debates among sovereign states persist, moreover, over other gender issues such as female genital mutilation, female seclusion, women's rights as citizens and economic actors, unequal inheritance, and quotas and affirmative action for women. Creating international institutions where differences in gender are reconciled is a legitimate priority for foreign policy. Academic work analyzing sources of differences in gender norms can usefully inform policymaking.

A mirror to affluent lives

Understanding how and why gender matters in African economies can help people in other countries understand more clearly their own gendered lives. This book is of course directed towards readers in the United States and other wealthy countries. That is the reality of book publishing and book purchasing. Why do wealthy readers want to read about gender in Africa? For the profound reason, well-understood by anthropologists from Margaret Mead to Jane Goodall, that by understanding others we understand ourselves, for we are 'the other', and we are and can be strangers to ourselves. Less poetically, we live in worlds that have been constructed as social worlds by our parents, but we grow up thinking they are 'natural' worlds. When Goodall reports on the chimps in the forest of Gombe (Lindsey, Goodall, and Jane Goodall Institute 1999), in Tanzania, she forces a realization that the social world is not natural. The chimps create their own social world. Understanding a different social world inhabited by other human beings, or even chimps, otherwise very much like us, is the way to come to that realization.

Gender is a good way to master the 'economic method'

Exploring gender issues is an opportunity to present and master many analytical and empirical tools used in the social sciences. The tools vary from discipline to discipline. This book focuses on tools that are used in all disciplines, but which are most closely associated with economics. Rather presumptuously, some economists call the particular set of analytical tools used here the 'economic method'. This method involves model building and verification. There is first and foremost a narrow, careful, and often mathematical exposition of theories, in the form of models of behavior. These theories typically start with assumptions about individual rather than group behavior. This 'methodological individualism' is then coupled with logic to make inferences about the interactions among people. Assumptions, logic, and inference constitute a model.

Logic is used to distinguish between causes and effects. Logical statements are often cast as syllogisms. An example of syllogistic reasoning that is common in economics goes as follows: People have a propensity to ‘truck and barter’. People also have different tastes and abilities. Therefore, any equal distribution of resources across society will quickly result in an unequal distribution. People are different, and because people like to trade, any initial distribution of resources will lead to situations where people can gain from trade. But trading means the original, equal distribution becomes unequal. The logic is fine. It is the implication of this syllogism that is troublesome. The implication is that redistribution of resources is futile, since inequality will inevitably return. It is important to understand that not every implication that an author mentions does indeed follow from the argument. Students in the social sciences must be alert to model overbite.

A good model tries to explain and predict the essence of some observed behavior. The method then applies statistical techniques to data in order to verify or refute models. The appendix contains more introduction to models, and in particular a discussion of the Nash equilibrium approach to modelling strategic situations, and discussion about the specific statistical technique used in this book— regression analysis. There, the reader will find a non-technical and intuitive explanation of regressions, and hints about how to interpret regression results. There are many fine introductory textbooks on the subject, and the more mathematically inclined are urged to seek them out (Bacon 1988; Pindyck and Rubinfeld 1998).

It is worth reiterating that the tools used in this book do not belong to economics. John Nash, Nobel Laureate and subject of the film, *A Beautiful Mind*, whose work has become very important in the analysis of gender in the household, was a mathematician, not an economist. The tools applied in this book are used in many disciplines (Wilk 1996). Hopefully, seeing the tools ‘in action’ in an unfamiliar and compelling setting may help students apply them to more familiar settings. The analysis in the book will include ‘supply and demand’ analysis, a staple of economics but also common in other disciplines; mathematical formulations of decision-making when subject to budget constraints; modern game theory as pioneered by Nash; and basic regression and statistical analysis. Applications of these tools will be found in many subsequent chapters. No special training is required to understand the main ideas of these tools. That is why they are so powerful.

Women in Kordofan

Gender problems came to me as a topic of study on a dark, moonless night in the village of Bireka in Kordofan province in western Sudan. The year was 1992, and I was doing fieldwork for my dissertation in Economics at the University of California at Berkeley. I had spent a year in the village during 1990, accompanied

by my wife. She was then getting her agronomy degree, but her carefully cultivated cowpea and millet died when the rains failed. We then worked together analyzing the effects of the drought (Gray and Kevane 1993). I also studied credit, land, and labor markets among the mostly male household heads (Kevane 1994; Kevane 1996; Kevane 1997). During our time in Bireka, we lived in a small mud hut, much like anyone else in the village. I returned to the village for six weeks in 1992. Shortly after my arrival, a young woman insisted that I come to her compound to hear the story of what had transpired in the village during my absence. Her story raised the hair on the back of my neck, and changed the way I thought about the village. After thinking about her story for a long time, my research focus shifted to gender issues.

In 1989 the National Islamic Front (NIF) took power in Sudan through a military coup. One of the principal policies of the new regime in Khartoum was to regulate the economic activities of women. The regime restricted women's tea-brewing and beer-brewing activities. The government had few resources with which to implement its strictures, but it turned out that few were needed. In many villages, simmering ethnic, factional, religious and class conflicts were ready, as Carney and Watts (1990) have suggested, to be 'inflected' onto the sphere of gender relations. Norms over women's behavior became the battlefield on which village conflicts were played out. The new ammunition provided by the national-level shift in government power, rhetoric, and policy proved sufficient to bring about new norms of behavior in villages across Sudan.

Bireka was a village ripe for conflict. The fifty households of the village were divided into three ethnic groups. About one fourth of the residents called themselves Arabs, and maintained control over formal political structures and claimed ownership over most of the agricultural land in the area. This was their village. The chief traditional leader for the region, the *omda*, belonged to the Arab group, and in 1991 was given police and judicial powers as part of a program of devolution of authority. Another fourth of the residents were Burgo immigrants from Chad, who settled the village at roughly the same time as the Arabs at the beginning of the century. The majority of villagers were Hausa immigrants from Nigeria, who had settled over the years, some as late as the 1970s or 1980s. Most of the Hausa rented their land on an annual basis, paying a token sum of cash in advance and then a ten percent share after harvest.

In Bireka, as elsewhere in Sudan, the very dramatic deterioration of the national macroeconomy may have intensified local struggles over power. After the 1980s in Sudan there was a general and unambiguous decline in income and welfare (Ali 1985). Stagnating urban and industrial activity, traditionally a safety net for the rural poor, combined with climatic fluctuations to render the poor increasingly vulnerable. The inter-seasonal patterns of prices of sorghum and millet turned against poor, credit-constrained farmers, who sold in the months after harvest and then had to purchase grain at inflated prices during the 'hungry

season'. The grain-livestock terms of trade also exacerbated rural incomes, as livestock prices plummeted during years of scarce pastures. Young men increasingly migrated to towns to try to eke out a living. They left to join the army, or were conscripted into militias, or sought the limited educational opportunities available as the government abandoned (in the face of military costs associated with the civil war) its commitment to rural education. They left their wives, sisters and mothers behind, often in precarious economic situations (Rielly 1993)(Gray 1993).

Many of the younger unmarried women from Bireka operated tea stands and restaurants, *gahawi*, in the neighboring village of Um Belda. These *gahawi* straddled a newly asphalted 'highway' that ran from El Obeid, the regional capital, into the Nuba Mountains. The road was seeing increased traffic, partly the result of an intensification of fighting in the ongoing civil war between north and south.

Young Burgo women from Um Belda were the most visible beneficiaries of the new road traffic. The income that they earned was quite high by local standards. Some reported, in 1990, making large profits, from LS 30 on a bad day up to LS 100 on a good day. At that time the average daily wage for agricultural labor was around LS 30. Most of the women participated in a revolving savings fund with the other tea women. One woman with three shares in the fund took home LS 3600 in savings every two months. There were other beneficiaries of the roadside market. Two older and very poor Arab women had stands. Young Hausa girls sold sesame candies, roasted groundnuts, and cowpea falafel, known as *ta'miya*.

The incomes earned by the women were larger and more visibly 'new' compared with incomes earned by men. There were only two male *gahawi* owners, and neither were Arab men from Bireka. Other men did benefit, even though they did not own *gahwa*. Two Hausa men from a neighboring village sold kebab at night. Young men often set up small stands in front of the *gahawi* and sold vegetables and cigarettes brought from El Obeid. Farmers sold watermelons. The stands were supplied by a Hausa man from Bireka who operated a fairly large store (also selling black market cigarettes and gasoline to lorry drivers and travellers), and an Um Belda man with a small tin shack, a *kushk*. A Hausa butcher slaughtered sheep, goats and occasionally cows every morning. An Arab from Bireka owned a small firewood bakery and supplied the stands with bread. A Burgo man with a donkey cart transported water from a well (about two kilometers away). Young men from all ethnic groups were hired to build straw shelters, *rakuba*, and larger mud structures.

In 1990 the roadside was probably the most dynamic sector of the local economy. But not everyone was happy with the incomes being earned by the young women. The national government, as noted above, was frowning on the public selling of tea, by women, in these roadside markets. It was in this context that a letter was received, on 13 October 1991, by the sheikh of Bireka:

To the Sheikh of the village of Bireka: With regard to the decision issued by the security committee of the district administration, number 46/1/1/1, on 1/8/91, it is declared to the owners (male and female) of coffeehouses (*gahawi*) in Um Belda that they must destroy their buildings and structures by 19/10/91, in order to make it feasible for us to prepare a plan for that area in the future, after the complete clearing of the present structures. We will compel the owners who have not destroyed their buildings by confiscating their furnishings and opening a police complaint against them, so we urge them to complete the clearing of their buildings in the period available. Thank you.

The letter was signed by the inspector of local government of Sheikan, and was sent to the administrative officer (*dabit tanfizi*) for the district, the police chief of Kazgeil, the *omda* of Kazgeil, *shiekh* of Um Belda, and the *gahwa* owners.

The story behind this letter, and its consequences, was one of the most important events in Bireka during 1991 and 1992. During the course of informal interviews in Bireka in November of 1992 a number of individuals related the events that had passed. Because of the great sensitivity of the subject, I rarely raised the issue myself, or if I did I was always careful not to ask leading questions or probe people too deeply. There is always the danger of being seen as a troublemaker, rather than an interested researcher. In some ways, my persona in the village, as a kind of agricultural economist rather than as anthropologist, helped me in learning about these incidents. Villagers did not think I particularly cared about these issues, in the sense that I would take action upon perceived injustices, or that I was extremely curious about them out of desire to benefit my own research. The sequence of these stories is the chronological order they were told to me over the course of two weeks in November. At that time, a year after the letter had been received, the thriving village roadside had a look of utter desolation. All the stands were closed and overgrown. The two stores were open, but with few customers. Lorries drove past the roadside without stopping. I have changed all the names and many small details, to protect the identities of those involved.

The first person who explained to me what had happened was the Hausa butcher: "People in the village and in Kazgeil started writing letters to the government, complaining about the *gahawi*, about the women working there. When the complaints became too many, the government told the women they could not work there; they told the women they had to go. The women refused, and went to El Obeid but the government stood firm, and said they had to stop working."

A wealthy Hausa merchant who had been listening to the explanation said: "After the government closed the *gahawi*, they saw that it was 'good for their own mouth'; the government could 'eat from it' by ordering an official survey

of the area, making the *gahawi* owners build more solid and permanent buildings, giving them official ownership rights, and charging them taxes.”

The next day a poor Arab man who often worked as a laborer told me: “At first the women refused to stop working, and the government whipped them, *jaladohum*. Who were whipped? The girls. Fatima and Miriam? Yes. Who else? Many. The daughter of Kaltooma? No. Who else from Bireka? Nobody else. Lots of girls from Um Belda.”

Later that day, a Hausa laborer confirmed that girls had been whipped for refusing to stop working. In another conversation with several men from Bireka, I asked who it was that had ordered them *gahawi* closed. One man who worked as a policeman in Kazgeil (and who later furnished me with the letter reproduced above) said, “the government.” I asked, “But isn't the *omda* the government? Doesn't he have his court in Kazgeil?” He responded, “Yes, the government.” A young Hausa man in the conversation mumbled a name, “Jibril Ali Abdalla...” They all laughed. Jibril Ali Abdalla was a wealthy man in the village. His brothers had gone to Saudi Arabia as teachers and returned quite wealthy. They had handed all of the money over to him. He was one of two men in the village who openly allied themselves with the National Islamic Front (NIF) and supported the military regime.

A man in a neighboring village, also an NIF man, expressed a widespread but rarely articulated sentiment: “Young women, married and unmarried, should not work in the *gahawi*. There is prostitution.” The next day I was talking with Birema Ibrahim, an Arab who was involved in local politics.

The *gahawi* girls were taken to the court in El Obeid after refusing to obey the orders of the People's Committee from Kazgeil for them to stop working. The girls said, “We do not know the *omda*, nor the Committee, nor the court; we are just working.” And so ten or twelve were taken to El Obeid by the Kazgeil police and given light sentences, LS 100 or so.

During a *karama* lunch marking the forty days after the death of the sheikh of Bireka, I sat with the *omda*, his brother and another senior Arab man, in a separate area away from the rest of the villagers. They started talking about the issue; it seemed that a certain Hassan Mohamed, the *reis al mantiga*, or 'president' of the People's Committees of the area, had said to wait one month and the government would start the surveying of the sites, but the Hausa storekeeper was refusing to wait, and wanted to open his *gahwa* right away. The Arab man said that he also wanted to open his *gahwa* (that previously he had rented to a woman from Um Belda), but he and the Hausa storekeeper and the other brother of the *omda*, who also owned a *gahwa*, wanted it to be official. They wanted the government to enforce the collection of LS 3000 as a land tax and LS 3000 for a license to operate a *gahwa*. I asked him whether the women could afford to pay those fees. He shot back: “And who cares about the poor? When you go to the doctor, don't you have

to pay?"

The men started to attribute the trouble to a senior Hausa man, the father of the butcher. At that moment, a policeman from Kazgeil came in with a letter from the administrative officer, the *dabit*. There was much confusion as he and another young man tried to read the handwritten note. The essence was that anyone who owned or operated an old *gahwa*, and who had a valid license, should or could build a mud structure and reopen and work. There was no mention of whether only men could work, or that women could not work. The men interpreted it as meaning that women could work. One of the men said, "The government of Beshir (the military dictator in Khartoum) will never let the women work." The discussion turned to whether Hassan Mohamed would fight the order. The *omda* was adamantly opposed to letting the women work.

Later that day a young Hausa man told me the only reason they closed the *gahawi* was because of greed. Another Hausa man concurred. The reason they closed them was because a man from a neighboring town was greedy: "The Sudanese are greedy and envious; just look at the difference between Sudan and Nigeria. Nigeria is in front by a thousand times. The *omda* is just stupid, nothing more." Another Hausa man told me a story:

The *gahawi* were closed because last year they had a big celebration for the opening of the grain storehouse project in Kazgeil. They invited lots of officials from El Obeid and Khartoum, and foreigners too. They drove here in a big Safina bus [a bus company known for its air conditioned buses]. But the bus could not drive from the road to Kazgeil because it was a dirt road. So the driver stayed with the bus, and everyone else went on. When they came back, the driver was drunk. And he drove off to El Obeid weaving. So we heard on the radio that the *gahawi* should close. After a long time the *Shabab al watun* said to open them, but the girls were only to work until 5:00 p.m. Two or three months passed, the girls refused to listen, and stayed open until 12:00 midnight. Again they closed them.

The next day Fatima, one of the young women who had been whipped (I did not know it at the time) told me her version of the story. She said it was important to tell me, so that I would know the truth:

The *gahawi* were first closed by the government in late 1991, it was the people of the People's Committee. They opened again in Ramadan (the spring of 1992). About ten girls were taken to Kazgeil, and spent the whole day in the 'prison' yard next to the police station. They were taken to El Obeid, and held outside the court. The police did not take them in, because they knew that they had no reason to close the *gahawi* in the first place. They brought the girls back. Later the girls opened them again for three months. As soon as the *omda* got power he closed them. And they kept them closed out of respect for the

omda. The people who opened them before were the *Shabab al watun*, the 'Youth of the Nation' organization, that was formed by Nuur el Din Mohamed from Kazgeil. He held a big meeting with a microphone with about thirteen girls and thirteen boys. A lot of the Burgo girls were there. The *Shabab* opened the *gahawi* and said they would knock the police if they tried to stop them. Those people are greedy.

Her mother quietly grumbled, clearly not pleased with the candor of her daughter, "Some benefit, and we don't benefit. It's better just to sit here quiet." But she did not keep quiet, and named a few people who were against the *gahawi* opening, namely the Hausa storekeeper and a wealthy Arab. Fatima continued:

Until now they have no reason to close. Why don't they close the *gahawi* in ElIbnoya (a road stop a few kilometers down the road)? Why not close them in Kazgeil? They are all in the same administrative area. After the *omda* closed them people said they would go and make a formal complaint before the commissioner of the whole region of Kordofan, or go to the court. Anyway, when the *Shabab* reopened the stands the police came and wanted to hit them, but the *Shabab* said they were the government and they would hit the police. We had I.D. cards, we ourselves were the government. When they closed the *gahawi* I and others went and complained that we were oppressed because we had borrowed in the morning and when they closed we could not pay back the loans, and some had debts of LS 5000 to the storekeeper, butcher, and baker. And the People's Committee said we had to swear on the Koran that this was true- which we did- and the government would repay all the outstanding loans- which they did not.

The next day Musa Adam, the young local director of the *Shabab al watun*, explained his involvement in the organization:

I joined in 1991 and went to Chad on a long trip. We started groups in all of the districts of Darfur and had many meetings in Chad. When I came back I went through training, we are the organizers of the *mujahiddin*, the holy warriors. About 175 of us went to the Nuba mountains to fight in the war. The *gahawi* were closed when the governor came to open the storehouse in Kazgeil and his driver got drunk. That was the last straw.

He showed me his machine gun, the first in the area.

The Hausa butcher told me he was owed over LS 1000 from the women who worked. But he would not try to collect it. Nor had the government given him any compensation. His father talked about the conflict, saying it arose because the Arabs could not stand other people making so much money: "How could *ghariib*, people from outside, be getting so much power? They tried to close the store (owned by a Hausa) for a long time but could not, so finally they closed the

gahawi, and now the store has no business.” Why did the Hausa not do anything? He answered with a Hausa proverb: "When with dwarves it does not hurt you to stay on your knees."

Fatima called me back the next evening, dark and moonless. She said she had more to tell me.

You can go talk to the health officer in Kazgeil. He was there, and knows what happened. After the *Shabab al watun* opened them and they were closed again about ten of the girls went to work under the trees near the road in Um Belda. But Kazgeil again ordered them to stop. They took the girls to court and said they would fine them LS 300 or one month in prison. How could people pay that much? A delegation of women went to Kazgeil and made a lot of noise. The girls said they would not pay, they would go to prison. But the police brought them out. They were afraid to take them to the court in El Obeid. They gave twenty-five lashes to five girls. “They whipped me. Me. In front of everyone. For making tea under a tree.”

Later that day I heard two Arab men conversing about one of the *gahwa* women. One asked whether she still had her capital left. The other said her brother and father had taken the money. I went to talk with the woman. She lamented, “I have no money left. It is all gone. And I owe the butcher LS 1000. We reopened them to find out the reason why they closed them. They had no reason. I had my license for nine years. Nine years. And they don't have a reason?”

Organization of the book

On the topic of how gender relates to economic activity, the book adopts an approach that emphasizes the interactions between the choices that individuals make, and the social environment that structures those choices. Men and women make different choices, and these choices constitute part of the gendering of economic activity. But men and women make different choices, in part, because they are offered different opportunities. The structure of an economy—rights over property and persons, organization of market transfers of property and persons, and rules regarding non-market transfers of rights—is itself gendered.

The first part of the book concentrates on three examples of economic structures. First comes the most basic structure of an agrarian economy, the system of land tenure. Tenure rules determine the allocation of rights to use and transfer land. Most African societies give women far fewer land use rights than are given to men. Second comes labor control. Evidence is provided on the gendering of labor markets, principally in the form of norms that enforce occupational segregation by gender. Many societies classify certain activities as ‘male’ and others as ‘female’. Rare is the man or woman who will cross these occupational boundaries. Women may also have limited rights to choose how much time to spend in permissible occupations. They may be subordinate to the instructions of

their husbands or fathers. With this basic understanding of land and labor markets, the third chapter investigates marriage markets, which for many societies are major economic structures determining the lives of women.

The second part of the book looks at important choices that men and women make in the context of the structures that they find themselves in as they enter adulthood. Many choices are taken in the context of households, and the section begins with an exploration of various theories about the choices made within households. The structures of households are constituted by the choices that people in households make. One important choice that people in households make concerns investments to be made in children. If those investment choices are themselves gendered, then right away there is a feedback mechanism between structure and choice. Parents make investments in girls that are different from investments in boys. That means that girls become adults with different skills, outlooks, and rights. Because of this, young women make choices that will be different from those of young men. The social patterns that emerge from these choices become viewed as part of the economic structure of a given society. Parents expect these structures to endure, and so they make choices shaped by the structures, which were generated by the choices of previous parents.

There is a pithy saying that economics is all about how people make choices, while sociology is all about how people don't actually have any choices to make. There is no need to reduce the social sciences to such gross stereotypes, but the saying does capture the essence of how to think about the relationship between structure and agency (Giddens 1984).

Socialscientists used to think of economic structures as being 'sticky' and persisting through time, and only experiencing rapid change upon deliberate, intentional, political action. A more recent line of thinking, however, emphasizes the 'tipping point' property of many economic structures (Gladwell 2000). If just enough people change their behavior, then through their spontaneous choices a new economic structure comes to quickly replace the old. Examples of this kind of structural change will be developed where appropriate. By contrast, the third and final part of the book takes a look at the politics and practice of deliberate structural change. One chapter examines how non-governmental organizations are transforming credit markets through microfinance programs targeted towards women. The most intentional and political change of all is the fundamental, constitutional change that is being brought about by adherence to the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Experience with this convention is discussed in the final chapter.

If Africans were rich, the analysis of the economic dimensions to gender would be less urgent. Unfortunately, most African countries are getting poorer. The next chapter offers a broad overview of the problem of declining economic performance in Africa. That sets the context for the real discussion matter of the book, the gendered choices and structures in the economies of sub-Saharan Africa.

What will be left out

A book about gender in the economies of Africa does not imply economic imperialism. There are many other ways to understand and debate gender in Africa, ranging from critical readings of cultural constructions of the body, dress and other 'signs' of ascribed meaning and status, to semiotic analysis of literature and film. The methods used in cultural analysis are different from those emphasized here; that does not make them less valid or interesting. The method of analysis of this book typically assumes that the basic preferences, desires, emotions, logic, thinking, and personality of humans are fixed and universal. The method downplays the role of status in motivating people, and the importance of a sense of identity in motivating particular behavior. These biases in subject matter and method are neither necessary nor laudable, they are just part of the academic division of labor. Students and researchers who approach gender studies from cultural or psychological vantage points should not feel threatened by social scientific analysis, but rather welcome it as another tool in the toolbox- for some it will be a little-used Allen wrench, for others a very large hammer.

Keeping the book short means leaving out interesting topics. The book concentrates on rural areas. That is my own research interest, and I can build on a large body of research from anthropology and history (Guyer 1984; Koopman 1984). To redress the comparative neglect of urban areas, the reader is referred to Robertson's nice introductory pieces on the subject (1976; 1984).

Sexual activity is not usually thought of as economic behavior, but the grave threat of transmission of diseases such as AIDS and syphilis, and consequent economic costs for individuals and societies, has placed sexual practices at center-stage in some debates about economic development in Africa. Biology makes for obvious common sexual practices: penises will be inserted into vaginas around the world. But the passive voice of that statement is already a clue to the enormous variety of sexual activity that may take place among humans. Does the *man* insert his penis into the woman's vagina, or does the *woman* insert his penis into her vagina? What sexual activities precede and follow insertion and withdrawal? How much sexual activity is produced by same-sex couples? As these questions suggest, sexuality, as we all know, is gendered, complex, and very much about political economy. There are lengthier treatments on this topic (Baylies and Bujra 2000; Kuate Defo 1998; Le Coeur and Khlat 2000; Renne 2001; Tuck 1994).

The book will likewise bypass an interesting and controversial examination of the gendering of religious activities. In Europe, the gendering of religion has undergone dramatic change over the millennia, from traditions that placed women in powerful positions in the production of religious knowledge and services, to being primarily consumers or 'middle-level managers'. In Africa there is much more diversity. In central and southern Africa are found many instances of women occupying central positions as prophets and spiritualists. The late Alice Lakwena,

founder of a cult that wreaked havoc on much of northern Uganda, was a case in point (Behrend 1999). In Sahelian Africa areas, men seem to dominate most religious affairs. But there are important secondary and less public ritual roles for women. In general, though, women produce religious services for women rather than for men, whereas men produce for both genders.

Finally, this book will primarily address gendering of social and economic activity by focusing on male and female. Gender roles for men and women differ widely across the continent, but that variety does not preclude thinking about more than two gender roles, particularly gender roles associated with same-sex and transsexual sexual orientation. The issue of gay and lesbian rights will soon explode across the African landscape, as many African dictators continue to take the very public position advocated by Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe, that lesbians and homosexuals have no rights and can be incarcerated for their sexuality.

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