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Transnational Women's Movements as Counter-Hegemonic Globalization

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation has two faces: one of democratisation and one of inequalities. The new economic environment has given rise to a new consciousness, myriad ways of transmitting ideas and mobilising support, aiding creation of transnational social movements. On the other hand, global economic restructuring, in the forms of structural adjustment programs, has created an entire population that is deprived the benefits of globalisation. Counter-hegemonic globalisation, also termed as 'globalisation from below', then provides an alternative discourse to reorganise global finance and production. This paper seeks to understand the contribution of transnational women's movements in challenging globalisation by comparing women's movements from the Global North and Global South. Academic literature at the intersection of feminist movements and globalisation choose to focus on how globalisation has been utilised by feminist networks to further their cause and how transnational women's movements positively impact political structures and institutions. But this research concludes that for women in the Third World, the content of social reforms remains class-determined and freedom of mobility and choice is still in keeping with strategies of capitalist forms of economic production. Therefore, transnational feminist movements have failed to break through the bonds of domination and structures that reproduce female subordination.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has two faces: one of democratisation and one of inequalities. One the one hand, the new economic environment has given rise to a new consciousness, myriad ways of transmitting ideas and mobilising support. The rise of Information of Computer Technologies has aided the emergence of transnational social movements. On the other hand, global economic restructuring, particularly in the form of structural adjustment programs, has created an entire population that is deprived of the benefits of globalisation. Counter-hegemonic globalisation, also termed as 'globalisation from below', then refers to movements led by ordinary citizens and propagated by transnationally organised political, economic and cultural

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networks as an alternative discourse to global finance and production. Counter-hegemonic globalisation, its emergence and implications, need to be understood in the context of hegemonic globalisation and what constitutes this hegemony. This paper seeks to analyse the academic literature available on these counter-hegemonic globalisation processes, with a particular focus on the contribution of transnational women's movements. As Moghadam notes, "neither globalisation literature nor the social movements literature examines feminism as a transnational social movement with transnational organisations linking women in developing and developed regions and addressing social, economic and foreign policy issues in supra-national terms".[2]

This part seeks to understand how transnational women's movements emerged, in part due to the globalisation process, and how they in turn impact the global structure. This work will then critically analyse the conceptualisation of transnational women's movements as creators and promoters of an alternative narrative to globalisation, as well as their ineffectiveness in producing material change for women in developing countries and sometimes even reversing the positive effects of globalisation.

II. CONCEPTUALISING COUNTER-HEGEMONIC GLOBALISATION

In order to understand the emergence of the concept of counter hegemonic globalisation, it is necessary to first explore how the term globalisation has been historically applied to varied contexts. Stiglitz views globalisation as a natural process emerging from exogenously determined generic changes in transportation and communication.[3] Globalisation, with its construction around the interests of transnational corporations is considered hegemonic due to two reasons. Firstly, due to its ability to provide material rewards and impose sanctions clearly witnessed by the growing inequality in the world, and secondly due to its ideological domination resulting in certain concepts being considered to represent the general interest of all citizens.[4] This ideological domination also means that any opposition to this ideology is considered to be at the expense of the general good. Different from this essentially capitalist form, some global studies scholars conceptualise globalization from a more grassroots approach, distinguishing between globalization from above and globalization from below, or transnational grassroots politics.[5] Social movements, operating locally and globally, have been

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[2] Valentine M. Moghadam, *Transnational Feminist Networks: Collective Action in an Era of Globalization*, Globalization and Social Movements 111–139 (2001).

[3] JOSEPH E STIGLITZ, GLOBALIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS § 500 9 (New York Norton. 2002).

[4] Peter Evans, *Fighting marginalization with transnational networks: Counter-hegemonic globalization*, 29 CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGY 230 (2000).

[5] NANCY A NAPLES & MANISHA DESAI, WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND GLOBALIZATION: LINKING LOCAL STRUGGLES AND GLOBAL POLITICS 3 (Routledge. 2004).

instrumental in resisting the homogenisation of globalisation.[6]

Evans uses Polanyi's double movement and his theory of failure of the market as an institutional foundation for social organisation, to understand the need for movements for social protection.[7] Construction of a counter-hegemonic globalisation movement necessitates the occurrence of four general requisites which are: transcending national boundaries and North-South divide, moving beyond singular issues, integrating different levels and scales of contestation and communicating a project that captures collective imagination.

Domestic and transnational social movements "combine to bring pressure from 'above' and 'below' to compel governments to abide by human rights standards. Domestic NGOs, social movements and national opposition groups ally with members of transnational networks consisting of NGOs, churches etc. and convince powerful external actors such as international organizations, foreign donor institutions and other states to put pressure on the domestic government to alter its norm-violating behaviour".[8]

ATTFAC or Association pour la Taxation des Transactions Financières pour l'Aide aux Citoyens" (The Association for the Taxation of Financial Transaction for the Aid of Citizens) is considered to be the institutional manifestation of "transnational networks aimed at transforming neo-liberal globalization into a social protection-oriented, market-subordinating, difference-respecting mirror image".[9] Evans considers three types of transnational social movements: labour movements, women's movements and environmental movements, to explore how common strategies and possibilities for alliances produced counter-hegemonic globalisation by magnifying the power of local movements, transcending boundaries, and leveraging already existing institutional structures. One of the fastest expanding transnational networks has been the global environmental movement, owing to its effectiveness in changing both global discursive and regulatory environments. This movement has had to bridge the North-South gap, between the South's environmentalism of the poor and the conservationist agenda of traditional Northern environmental groups.[10] But, they have been successful in utilising the governance structures that are emerged as a part of globalisation, like the UN system, to solidify transnational networks and diffuse counter hegemonic discourses

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[6] Leslie Sklair, Social movements and global capitalism, 29 SOCIOLOGY (1995).

[7] Peter Evans, Is an alternative globalization possible?, 36 POLITICS & SOCIETY 274 (2008).

[8] Thomas Risse, The power of norms versus the norms of power: transnational civil society and human rights, THE THIRD FORCE: THE RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY 139 (2000).

[9] Peter Evans, Counter-hegemonic globalization, THE WILEY-BLACKWELL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GLOBALIZATION 10 (2012).

[10] JOHN FRIEDMANN & HARIPRIYA RANGAN, IN DEFENSE OF LIVELIHOOD: COMPARATIVE STUDIES ON ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION (Kumarian Press West Hartford, CT. 1993).

Nevertheless, there is a distinction to be made between the roles of transnational governance structures like the UN and domestic structures like the judiciary in this case. In the context of the Narmada Valley project in India, it is found that the "judges tend to be at loggerheads with social movements which typically use media criticism as part of their repertoire of political activity" and therefore "domestic laws and institutions matter, and the constitutional texts – the literal and the social –matter too, in determining when counter-hegemonic globalization would be successful locally".[11]

III. TRANSNATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AS COUNTER-HEGEMONIC GLOBALI-SATION

In her book, Jayawardena studies the rise of early feminism and women's movements in Third World countries to draw out patterns and similarities in experiences and strategies based on a common historical background of imperial domination.[12] She points out that it is necessary to understand that women's movements do not take place in a vacuum and usually correspond to, and are determined by, the larger social movements they are a part of. "The general consensus of society about itself, its future, its structure and the role of men and women, entails limitations for the women's movement; its goals and its methods of struggle are usually determined by those limits".[13] According to her, women's movements in these countries arose as a result of the forceful opening of these countries to capitalist penetration which had resulted in creation of unequal trading relations, leaving behind those who did not fall into the bourgeoisie category. Although these women's movements were, for the most part, domestic in nature, they shared the strategy of modernising, reforming and strengthening internal structures which were essential to oppose imperialism. This work demonstrates how women's movements, even when they were not transnational in nature, have always been used to introduce and propagate counter hegemonic debates and dialogues, be it against the backdrop of imperialism, capitalism or globalisation. Yet these movements became more powerful in their impact and reach when they transcended borders and became truly transnational in nature.

The literature on transnational social movements as related to globalisation varies in terms of how scholars conceptualise social movements. One of the most influential works done on contemporary transnational social movements is by Keck and Sikkink in Activists Beyond

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[11] Balakrishnan Rajagopal, The role of law in counter-hegemonic globalization and global legal pluralism: lessons from the Narmada Valley struggle in India, 18 LJIL 355 (2005).
[12] KUMARI JAYAWARDENA, FEMINISM AND NATIONALISM IN THE THIRD WORLD (Verso Books. 2016).
[13] *Id.* at 10.

Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics.[14] Defining transnational advocacy networks as "including those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services", they position non-traditional actors as important players in policy debates at the regional and international level.[15] They explore the work of transnational advocacy networks in domestic and international politics through studying human rights advocacy networks, environmental advocacy networks and women's networks and their work in the following areas:

> "(a) *information politics,* or the ability to move politically usable information quickly and credibly to where it will have the most impact;
>
> (b) *symbolic politics,* or the ability to call upon symbols, actions or stories that make sense of a situation or claim for an audience that is frequently far away;
>
> (c) *leverage politics*, or the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence; and
>
> (d) *accountability politics,* or the effort to oblige more powerful actors to act on vaguer policies or principles they formally endorsed".[16]

These transnational advocacy networks are considered to be major actors in response to globalisation, in part due to their influence in various policy arenas such as environment, labor standards, trade, gender equality and social policy. The transnationalisation process of social movements adopted different paths and methodologies in different contexts. The extent of globalization can be overestimated and remains highly uneven, with countries integrated into global networks to different extents. While the impact of globalisation took a while to reach Third World countries, networks based in Europe and North America were in the position to take advantage of shrinking borders to scale their work. In order to understand the emergence of transnational women's movements, it is essential to study these movements in specific contexts of geography, political climate and culture.

European integration in the early 90s fuelled a shift towards a rights-based approach creating windows of opportunities for transnational women's networks to form and mobilise all across Europe. This was a period when "regular institutional spaces, through Commission-sponsored groups and parallel NGO conferences" were leveraged by women's movements. The success

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[14] MARGARET E KECK & KATHRYN SIKKINK, ACTIVISTS BEYOND BORDERS: ADVOCACY NETWORKS IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS (Cornell University Press. 1998).
[15] *Id.* at 89
[16] *Id.* at 95

of these networks depended largely on their ability to navigate partnerships within "velvet triangles of political institutions, femocrats within institutions, and feminist activists in civil society".[17] Feminist transnational advocacy networks and their expertise has been crucial in providing a common language for legitimising an alternative discourse to hegemonic movements.[18] The internet has been instrumental in spreading ideas and concepts, both from the bottoms up and top down, where "discourses (such as women's rights are human rights) and strategies (such as parliamentary list quotas for electing women) spread from the bottom up" and "gender mainstreaming, violence against women, and women's empowerment that are institutionally endorsed in documents, such as the Beijing Platform for Action" have diffused into local discourses through a top down approach".[19]

Women's movements have been able to achieve transnationalisation through various processes of globalisation that have facilitated new spaces, institutions and rhetoric where the notion of universal human rights is a powerful justificatory principle embedded in specific institutions. At the same time, these transnational feminist networks of organisations have been successful in "challenging ideas, attitudes, policies and decisions of large sophisticated organisation, including international financial institutions" which are a manifestation of globalisation.[20] It is important to note that Moghadam considers these transnational feminist networks to be anti-neoliberal capitalist, but not necessarily anti-globalist. In her book, she uses a feminist political economy perspective to highlight the impact of globalisation on women and connects the growing inequality, particularly for women, to implementation of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in developing countries in the 1980s.

EWL (European Women's Lobby), a transnational feminist organisation in Europe, provides a counter hegemonic discourse to issues of integration that have become central to debates about the meaning of citizenship in Europe, especially for marginalized groups, such as women, immigrants, or ethnic minorities.[21] Even as a supranational regulatory body, market-based economic understanding of the EU has dominated literature as a result of which employment and social welfare issues have been neglected. Nevertheless, EWL has been able

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[17] Sabine Lang, Assessing advocacy: European transnational women's networks and gender mainstreaming, 16 SOCIAL POLITICS 251 (2009).

[18] Kathrin Zippel, Transnational advocacy networks and policy cycles in the European Union: The case of sexual harassment, 11 SOCIAL POLITICS: INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN GENDER, STATE & SOCIETY 79 (2004).

[19] Tetyana Pudrovska & Myra Marx Ferree, Global activism in "virtual space": the European Women's Lobby in the network of transnational women's NGOs on the Web, 11 SOCIAL POLITICS: INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN GENDER, STATE & SOCIETY 119 (2004).

[20] Moghadam, *supra* note 1, at 79.

[21] Pudrovska, *supra* note 18, at 121.

to leverage various EU political institutions to further its cause of economic and political integration of marginalised groups, particularly women.

It is interesting to note that while transnational women's networks are lauded for restructuring globalisation in the European context, academic literature dealing with developing countries highlights the inability of these movements in changing the existing inequalities. Activism of these transnational women's networks "poses challenges to the scattered hegemonies associated with the global expansion of capitalism".[22] Desai argues that "given the spaces within which transnational feminists operate and the modalities of transnational activism, the strategic focus of movements shift from redistribution to policy and discursive changes"[23], which supports Rai's conclusion that policy and discursive changes highlight process over outcomes and emphasise empowerment without shift in material resources.[24]

Transnational women's movements have been observed to facilitate a "recoiling process", which in effect reverses the process of globalisation. In their work on quota adoption in 149 countries between 1989 to 2008, Hughes, Krook and Paxton measured the impact of global pressure towards gender equity on domestic politics. Transnational women's movements provide a global script for modern states that influences state discourses and practices.[25] But in some cases, when these scripts are highly contested, transnational activism and global pressure "could produce recoiling effects which would make them less successful at generating change by leading governments to react negatively to these pressures". In her case study research, Krook documents "numerous cases of resistance to quotas by male party elites, who may see quotas as a challenge to their power and position".[26] When there is pressure coming from multiple sources, elites perceive a higher degree of threat, forcing them to withdraw from the process of globalisation and push for protectionism. These regressive movements for social protection can in turn undermine the process of counter-hegemonic globalisation.

IV. CONCLUSION

There this no doubt that globalization has contributed to the development of feminist transnational networks along which ideas and political practices can spread. Advancements in technology and modes of communication have been effectively utilised by networks to increase

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[22] Naples and Desai, *supra* note 4, at 3.

[23] Manisha Desai, Transnationalism: the face of feminist politics post-Beijing, 57 INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL (2005).

[24] Shirin Rai, Gendering global governance, 6 INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST JOURNAL OF POLITICS (2004).

[25] Melanie M Hughes, et al., Transnational women's activism and the global diffusion of gender quotas, 59 INTERNATIONAL STUDIES QUARTERLY 359 (2015).

[26] *Id.*

their reach, spread ideas and mobilise people who might otherwise have been on the fringes of these social movements. Localised social movements have travelled far and wide due to the processes of globalisation, yet these same processes have also been the cause of marginalisation of a large section of the world's population. Globalisation has had contradictory impact, since in some places the rhetoric of globalization has been used to legitimate the erosion of dimensions of welfare provisions by countries that perceive themselves as under threat from global economic competition. In such a situation, these transnational women's networks have restructured their goals to propagate an alternative to neo-liberal globalisation which would give primacy to the needs of the marginalised. These counter-hegemonic movements, be it in the form of labor movements, women's movements or environmental movements, cannot be dismissed.

Women's movements, initially local and then transnational, have been successful in countering the hegemony of globalisation and providing an alternative discourse built around social protection. Rescuing traditional social democratic agendas of social protection, which are otherwise in danger of disappearing below the tide of globalization, has been adopted as a task by transnational social justice movements. Therefore, dismissing these movements of counter hegemonic globalization as simply 'old wine in new bottles', would be a mistake because dissemination of organisation forms and ideological propositions of these movements is heavily dependent on the current force of globalisation. One of the most interesting features of counter hegemonic globalization is this blend of novelty and persistence which gives new prospects of success to local mobilisation towards reconstructing the governance of the global political economy. Globalisation has been utilised by feminist networks to further their cause and demands and how transnational women's movements have impacted political structures and institutions.

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