

Globalization and International Women's Movement

Mirdamad Yosefy Sadat

Khazar University School of Humanity and Social Sciences Department of Political Sciences and International Organizations Baku, Azerbaijan

Corresponding Author email: sevdafilmsavalan@yahoo.com

Abstract: The principle objective of this paper is to present the results of a literature review over impact of Globalization on women's movements. Traditionalism & patriarchal characteristic of conservative societies and restrictive gender policies of Islamic countries are the main obstacles to feminism. This paper evaluates local, national and global feminism developments and responses to them or as Eschle 2001: says to "Feminist interventions that affect the parameters and direction of globalization processes ". Current finding in this literature shows that globalization process increases women's consciousness on many eras especially on gender related issues and their interest in other nations' feministic struggles and achievements. Global Media enables them to communicate their Ideas, values, believes, feministic goals. It also empowers women to evaluate their situations by compressing & contrasting it with other county's cultural values and norms. Globalization made women to realize that, despite having different ethical, religious, linguistic and cultural background they share similar interests. These new finding compelled activists to find common grounds to evaluate their shared concerns and objectives. The study of women's movement is incomplete without taking global factors in to account. This paper reviews briefly the interplay between local and global factors in shaping the course of women's movements and feminism in particularly conservative nations like as Saudi- Arabia. These countries are threatened by the impact of globalization on their ardent pious Muslim women loyal to Islamism and the ways it shapes public gender views and men's traditional perceptions of women. NGO's have been playing great role in promoting feministic ideals. Despite being threatened by anti-feminist groups, they continued working on programs aimed to increase women's resistance to discrimination and bias behaviors of male authorities. This paper shoes that, feminism is not just western concept and Islamic societies comprised of non-Arab nations clam that, Islamic feminism is competitive to secular feminism. However, Islamic Family Protection Laws based on Sharia is unlikely to be convinced of this claim. There have been a number of earlier competitive studies on this topic, which include highly recognized stimulating books and article such as, Jaggar, "Globalizing Feminist Ethics,"1998. Catherine Eschle, "Global democracy, Social movements, and Feminism," 2001. Eisenstein, Zillah. "Women's Publics and the Search for New Democracies. Nayereh Tohidi. "Introduction." Globalization, Gender, and Religion: a book by Shirin Ahmadniya 'Yek Didgahe Jamea Shenasi' (A Societal Perspective) (In Parisian). To write an article on these kinds of topics is not difficult for someone like me, who live in Iran. All you need to observe and document what you see. That is the first-hand information which I used to right in this essay. In conclusion, I propose a future research agenda to study how women of the undemocratic nations and Islamic countries could benefit from impact of globalization and Social Media help to reinvent and improve the way they pursue their feministic objectives.

Key words: Globalization, Feminism, Transnational Feminism, Feminism & Islam, Gender, Western feminism, Information Technology, Cultural Envisions. Conservatives, Global feminism

Introduction

Many social scientists have frequently used different concept of the globalization, but from our perspective, the globalization is important for numbers of integrated and interrelated developments in international women's movements. To explore some of the major global factors effecting women's life in general and more specifically to evaluate the influence of globalization on gender issues, to display its impact on women's sociopolitical status and attitudes, plus to find out how this new era of world order alters traditional norms and conditions dominating women's

life ,furthermore, to assess how globalization develops and shapes women's gender awareness and how it increases women's presence and participation in political and social realms of society, all of which necessitate to conceptualized globalization from different angles and perspectives. However, for the purpose of this essay, and since the possibility of exploring parameters, full dimensions of globalization and global feminism will not fit in this short essay, there for I have tried to primarily focus on how women have been influenced by global factors in shaping and characterizing their challenges for equality among

which the roll of information technology is considerably critical to this argument.

In globalized world information technology enables individuals to communicate their views and beliefs among each other and with rest of the world, which consequently empowers them to be conscious of their own situation. In this process, women learn to evaluate quality of their living condition by comparing it with other's life styles and cultures. There for I plan to discuss some of the critical components of information technology and how it impacts gender relations and women's movement, more specifically how positively it increases women's motivation to pursue their feministic objectives. And finally, how the interplay of global factors with local realities of women's movement has been opening new venues in feminism studies?

Globalization & gender

Rapid expansion of globalization began with collapse of Russia. The concept of globalization is reflecting the complex version of the conceptual and theoretical perceptions of international movement and global developments. The discourse of globalization includes many distinct economic, political and cultural concepts as it also includes proliferation of new information technologies. Another word, the end of cold war and collapse of Russia marked the beginning of the rapid and accelerated process of globalization, leading to increased global knowledge on many areas especially in gender related issues that distinctively resulted in emergence of additional crises for the third world countries in terms of women's movements.

Beside the increased public knowledge due to globalization, some of gender components are also challenged. Therefore, it must be identified whether gender relations change upon the increase of public knowledge or not. It is presumed in this essay that globalization is one of the most important factors in the growth of gender claims worldwide and more visibly in developing countries. It is believed that, easy accesses to information have provided more opportunity for women to challenge the prevalent patriarchal characteristic of society and have also increased their demand for gender equality. additionally, the new concept of gender issue weakened traditional structures especially in less developed societies .We also have witnessed the increase of women's nongovernmental organizations and their local and international activities and finally it is fair to conclude that, In globalization era, nations with mixed and multiple identities faced with new unprecedented gender conflicts, gender movements and even fundamentalism particularly in deeply corrupted societies.

Definitely, there are varieties of influential factors effecting women's movements which cannot be dealt in depth here. The emphasis here is to identify roles of communications tools and worldwide mass media changing the nature of certain behaviors and the influences of these changes on gender awareness and gender developments.

All forms of Media helped to facilitate women's communicating systems. Even though women did not have easy and equal access to global media, but they have used facilities such as computers for advancing their education along with many others things, they have actively moved to establish an affective network system providing them occupational and economic opportunities. Global media accelerated the exchange of knowledge and experiences among different parts of the world. In addition, these instruments made communication possible to isolated societies as well as groups such as women, consequently, widening the scope of gender awareness and feminism consciousness.

Furthermore, communication networks allow flow of information about developing situations such as women's movement anywhere in the world. Satellites, Cable News Network (CNN) British Broadcasting Company (BBC) and other global network coverage of issues ranging from small events taking place in the remote part of the world to major socio-political developments in urban districts, all of which effectively increase our global knowledge on many issues including women's condition. Communication tools increased women's self-confidence and empowered them to advance their socio-political status consciously. As Sherwin Ahmadniya stated, "In today's world of technology, women use information technology in the direction of achieving their objectives and advancing women's movements." (1)

Moreover, one of the most important impacts of global communication systems is the increased women's consciousness which exacerbated the prevailing gender crises in Islamic nations. Satellites and Cables programs brought western cultural values and democratic ideas to other nations and homes around the world often distresses the parents and governments of mostly Islamic countries to worry about presumed destructive effects of foreign cultural values.

Communication system has tremendously alters women's perception on gender policies of their native countries; accelerate women's resistance to prevalent inferior social statues as citizen. Additionally, it provides activists with information and sources beyond their geographical borders and enables them to access their desired information with blink of an eye. Communication educates and empowers women and

education increases women's collective power and determination to confront local and global anti-feminism behaviors.

Gender equality would emerge in the process of the establishing universal human rights. However, this process is already started and the current international developments are in favor of women. Women's socio-political status are gradually gaining visible momentum and their issues are getting more attention in non-democratic nation as international pressure are growing over their government's anti-feministic behaviors and its institutionalized unjust gender policies.

Women's increased awareness of their own issues and flow of information around the world has given feminism new perspective and vision. The matters related to women's condition in any given nations are affecting other country's gender identity. Women of third world are bombarded by flow of the more civilized country's gender policies. Jaggar, 1998 "Even those who never physically leave their communities of origin are more likely now to evaluate their own lives by placing their rights, options, and restrictions in a comparative and global perspective. (2)

Women from different origins are in search of ways to overcome obstacles and complications facing them in extremely anti-feminism environments and to optimize the effectiveness of possible solutions, they mostly rely on experiences and challenges of global feminism.

Globalization and Global Feminism

Globalization process expended with widening of world's economic interdependency. US had invested heavily in Europe to revive its economy which was completely destroyed during WW2. Historically it marked the beginning of liberalization of economies, the global expansion of trade, growing economic interdependence of countries, the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions, the development of global financial centers, increased global capital flows and the growth of multinational corporations. Gradually this newly emerged trend has continued to affect other developing countries. Big industrial countries currently known as G7 have increased their financial activities in politically stable regions that were privileged with great economic potentials. Globalization of the economy opened the door for socio-cultural interactions leading to multiculturalism and ultimately to globalization of cultural and social values. Jaggar, 1998; Appadurai 1996; "The increasing globalization and integration of the world through international trade, migration, faster and less expensive transportation, and new electronic

communication and information technology, have led to a situation in which a growing number of women and men belong to more than one community. Communities and group identities are overlapping and de-territorializing, and an escalating number of individuals who become multicultural and multilingual are adopting more fluid and multiple identities". (3)

Empirical studies on women indicates that, Local women learn from global strategies and tactics to confront the systematic violation of their rights by anti-feminists individuals, groups, organizations, and authorities backed by dictatorial regimes. According to Catherine Eschle, "Because of increasing globalization, no gender regime and therefore no women's movement in any locality (country or community) can be studied and understood without taking global influences into account. Globalization processes, especially since the 1970s, have affected feminist mobilization for change in many different societies. Feminist interventions, in turn, have aimed to affect the parameters and direction of globalization processes". (4)

Global consciousness on women's inferior conditions had increased women's resistance to men's domination of the society. Robertson, 1996 and Anthony Giddens 1988 "Globalization is accompanied by intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole". (5) This and other effects of globalization have important implications for gender relations and women's status in all societies. Anthony Giddens, for example, points to the indirect impact of global processes on social pressure for democratization in the form of "the expansion of social reflexivity and de-traditionalization". (6) As they become better informed about new and varied political alternatives in the world, populations become less likely to accept traditional models of political and gender regimes and more visibly family laws based on Sharia in Islamic countries.

Eisenstein, Zillah 1997, "Globalization allows for the subversive possibility of women seeing beyond the local to the global". (7) Evidently, feminism development and challenges aren't just local issues; it transcends national boundaries of different ethnical, religious and political origin.

The impact of globalization on women's movement in non-democratic nations has become a problem for government and an opportunity for women. Incompetent government's officials are concerned with their inability to stop the flow of democratic values that inspires women to challenge patriarchal system and rigid religious and traditional views on women, particularly in Islamic world. Vast majority of feminist's scholars devoted good part of their feminism studies to the globalization and

international women's movement in Islamic nations and how globalizations affected them on feministic struggles in extremely closed and conservative societies such as Afghanistan during Taliban regime.

Contemporary advocators of women's right have been discussing wide range of issues on traditional perception of women and western culture. The prevailing social interactions and cultural exchanges between citizens of Islamic world and democratic countries created an unprecedented dilemma and uncertainty for indigenous women loyal to their local traditions and religious values. The discourse of localized reaction to homogenization of cultures and Islamist's resistance to expansion of Western culture and democracy are pivotal to feminism studies.

According to recent studies, in the center of contemporary globalization processes, women activists in Islamic countries have created their own feminism by reforming non-friendly gender policies without moving away from basic principles of their rituals and other cultural and religious practices. Ethnicity and nationalism to most of the people in non-western countries are overriding factors in determining the nature and direction of women's movements. Usually Muslim pious women have an ambivalent feeling about the positive impact of globalization because they consider western life style as poisonous to noble Islamic values. According to Eschle 2001 and Jaggar 1988, "In Islamic nations, women are considered as primary holder of cultural integrity and religious values which hold them responsible for preserving traditional forms of femininity in their private and social life. Women as a wife and mother in the family are expected to have moral and ethical responsibility to raise good citizens. Women of this generation faced with global pressure to meet high expectations of future generations and in response to these global challenges and practical concerns (such as violence, democracy, universal human rights, morality, and ethics), a global discourse community is emerging among feminists". (8) This emerging global feminism is an outgrowth of globalization and at the same time a critical response to it. Jaggar 1998 has stated that, "Culturally and politically, women are situated in the vortex of contending social forces: centripetal tendencies toward increasing globalization and integration and centrifugal tendencies toward nationalism and fragmentation.(9) These factors have facilitated the development of new global actors and networks, and have reordered the global system to create generalized principles of conduct in gender approaches.

One of the positive side to these global impacts on women's movement, is the establishment of more

women NGO's. Despite conservative and patriarchal pressures, women NGOs continue their creative and courageous activities and gender debates. These gender debates and intellectual confrontation between feminists and leading intellectuals and conservative authorities, is the newly emerged feminism discourse attributed to globalization process. The roll of Local NGO's in matters related to women's issues has been outstanding; they have become an agent of changes by engaging in constructive dialog with global organizations promoting women's rights, Such as UN sponsored conferences on women issues. Women NGOs primarily involved with programs aimed to educate impoverished women in un-developed countries.

Feminism is not just Western

Western feministic ideas are not the only determining criteria in evaluating global women's movements. Women of the free world that are pioneers in feminism struggles, have been proportionally affected by norms, values and behaviors of women from non-western societies and in some rare cases they have become to believe that, pursuing western feminism is not the only way to equality and justice for all women. Because, many researchers have confidently concluded that, global feminism emerged through interactions and intervening of variable feminism ideas with completely different religious, ethnical and cultural backgrounds throughout the world. For example, the scope of contemporary feminism discourses is widening as it include deferent interpretation of Islamic views on women.

In a broad sense, feminism as western concept is not well received in conservative Islamic societies and conceptualization of it as "Just Western Concept" undermines the purpose of having inclusive approach to women's global struggle for equality. Western feminism is no longer the only criteria characterizing global women's movements, most recent developments indicate that, the roll of the local feminism in shaping and defining global women's movements can't be overlooked. Nowadays intellectual western women, despite their criticism of Islamic perspective on women, fully respect Muslim women who are trying to preserve their own Islamic identity and ethnic values. As it is indicated earlier, the core objective of women of non-western nations is to obtain equality by reforming and redefining their own culture and gender policies. In most cases, local feminism resists the forceful influence of the western values and secular feminism. These kinds of resistances along with propagation of Islamism pave the way for emerging alternative to secular feminism so called Islamic feminism. However, Islamic gender views disputed by many feminism

scholars whether it is good for women or not. Feminists in Muslim societies encounter variety of ideological and traditional obstacles. Due to space limitation here in this short essay, the further discussion of what women encounter in their challenges "local" or "global" isn't possible.

First, to alter men's inferior perception of the women in general, whether it is religiously motivated or traditionally promoted has been a difficult challenge for local feminists in conservative societies. Women's life will not be improved in the nations that have given obsolete power to men for making all the decision on almost everything in the family and social matters and men's superiority can't be legally or morally challenged. In Islamic countries like Afghanistan (during Taliban period women were not allowed for education) the situation gets even worst. Given the fact that, the economic hardship and powers struggle among different political factions of corrupt society has been also worsened women's already devastated condition.

Needless to admit that, outside pressure and foreign intervention positively changes the situation in favorer of women in these kinds of situations. For example, no local improvement in women's status can take place without a global action to alter present political and economic devastation in Afghanistan.

Second, women in patriarchal societies are prone to multiple systems of subordination, oppression and social stigmas. Indisputable domination of male supremacy in Islamic societies backed by conservative Islamic scholars has been addressed at multiple levels around the world. The multiplicity of women's systematic oppression in some of the Islamic countries is not just an attribute of Islamic ideology but also it has root in legal, social and economic conditions of women. As Uma Narayan 1997 puts it, "we need to articulate the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, 'authentic' forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-juridical oppression on multiple levels." (10)

Third, even though, the gender laws based on Sharia seems undemocratic and do not provide legal base for some of the women's basic rights but a large numbers of pious women perceive sharia laws as their own and they refuse secularism ideas regulating gender behaviors in their part of the world. As it is discussed in previous pages, these women consider preserving traditional and religious values as their primary responsibility and they firmly resist any foreign ideas to challenge them in these eras. Islamic feminism is trying to introduce a modern interpretation of Islamic ideologies on women, acceptable to those who reject secularism. However,

the real effectiveness of it yet to unleashed and remains to be seen in the future. It will be difficult to assume that Islamic feminism is the answer for Muslim women in the face of growing inclination toward democracy and democratic version of women's right.

Generations of information age in non-democratic countries are struggling for freedom and justice for all and global women's movements are intertwined with increased demand for democracy which was not possible during cold war era and interplay of these newly emerged social developments as result of globalization process compelled women to carefully evaluate the importance of global factors and global influences in pursuing their feministic goals at local levels.

The impact of local feminism on global feminism

Despite having tactical differences between various feminist factions, the core objective of women from different ethnical, national and religious background is to obtain equal rights for all women. These developments led to stress the importance of interplay of global and local factors effecting gender relations. It is difficult to draw a distinct line between local and global feminism and the way both factors affecting each other.

According to Abu-Lughod, Janet 1991 "Intensified globalization has made conventional demarcation between the "internal" and the "external," or the "local" and the "global" or the core-periphery model somewhat artificial as it is becoming more difficult to determine where the local stops and the global begins. The "cultural flow" of globalization is not simply from the global to the local, but also the reverse, (11) and Appadurai, A.1996 claims that, forces from various metropolises that are brought into new societies tend to become indigenized in one way or another.(12) or as Caplan, Alarcon, and Moallem (1999) indicated that, many feminists feel compelled to "think globally and act locally," (13) some actions have to be carried out globally if certain changes are to take place locally.

Locally developed gender ideas have values for women and in most cases women prefer traditionalism or integrated version of modernism and traditionalism in which case the interplay of local and global factors are considerably important in evaluating women's movements. Obviously, as it is also suggested by Eschle, Catherine,2001 "while stressing local origins, characters, and concerns of women's movements, we should also account for universal commonalities and the significant role of the global factors that interplay with the local in shaping the objectives, priorities, and strategies of the women's movement and feminism in any given context. While theorization of the feminist

movements has tended toward the poles of universalization or particularism, in practice, various movements have followed a path between these poles, thus continually undermining this dichotomy. (14)

Local values, traditions and beliefs are being challenged by multiple alternatives presented through globalization process. Obviously the interplay of global and local feminism can't and will not be stopped by authoritative local powers. Globalization has always faced with by Conservative fundamentalist in mostly undeveloped and Muslim nations. It is true that, there are individuals who prefer their local values over others which should be respected but not necessarily accepted. The resistance to modernity and liberal democracy has been fundamental characteristic of many loyalists to their native culture. However the growing tendency for adopting multiple and fluid identity among new generation of closed society such as Saudi-Arabia forced authorities to accept globalization as mother of social evolution giving birth to Information Technology. Even though it is a big challenge to the nation's restrictive and rigid norms and laws they have no choice but to reform and change most of their old local traditions and customs to cope with new demands of generation of information century that are gradually moving away from old ideas and religious practices .

Conclusion

The global feminism has led to advancement of marginalized women to become more conscious of their own issues and factors creating gender inequality in the different sectors of society. A global interaction provides opportunities for women to learn the particular social practices other cultures. Global feminism has the potential to be a powerful contributor to gender equality, and creator of new opportunities for women to become more organized and demanding.

Global feminism evidently effected women's general perception on feminism more positively leading to transformation of feminism traditional forms and conditions to relatively modest concept, capable of being responsive to the new challenges facing them. International women organization has stimulating and facilitating role in feminism discourse. Global participation of women in women's movements enabled them to engage in constructive discussions with women's organizations and feminist discourses, through which as Nayereh Tohidy put it, "they became more open-minded, pragmatic, and more conscious of women's rights. They also experience a shift toward de-idealization, de-radicalization, and pragmatism, despite the fact that, this new trend of feminism never supported by predominantly, influential conservative male politicians."(15)

The continuing global pressure over patriarchal society provided an unprecedented opportunity for women to become aware of their own issues, leading to numerous debates about feminist movement at different levels. As women's rights and movements expand their activities beyond its present parameters, it becomes increasingly clear that, as long as the global feminism remains a driving force for feminist development around the globe, the women's movement will continue to achieve political and socio-economical results.

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