Women and Social Movements Against Globalization

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Broadly defined, globalization is the worldwide expansion and integration of economic, political, cultural, and social relations driven by capital accumulation. The term “against globalization” is misleading because it only partially describes what most social movements involved in struggles arising from global integration are about. What these social movements are against is capitalist economic globalization characterized by the expansion of corporate power and a lack of accountability and transparency in how global trade and aid arrangements are decided. This type of globalization is also referred to as corporate-driven globalization or globalization from above.

Most groups that reject this type of globalization, however, promote a grassroots-driven globalization from below that champions the rights of marginalized groups, respects diversity, and supports equality through democratic processes. Resistance to corporate-driven globalization has come from a wide variety of the political spectrum, from anarchists to democrats to right-wing nationalists. Many of the organizations within these movements at least mention the fact that the current model of economic globalization disproportionately hurts women, people of color, the poor, the elderly, and children. Concentration of land ownership, privatization of essential goods like water, creation of export processing zones (areas that are tax havens for corporations but where workers face unregulated working conditions), and the growth of informal, unprotected labor sectors are all processes associated with the concentration of economic power and the flexibility of capital—and they all disproportionately impact women. Although women bear the brunt of economic globalization and thus stand to gain the most from social movements against it, their visibility in some of these movements has been muted because issues associated with economic globalization are not always presented through a gender perspective, even though many movements against corporate-driven globalization acknowledge that poor women are the most vulnerable in the current global economy. Despite this recognition, “women’s issues” are sometimes articulated as adjuncts to the primary problems. This is not due to a lack of participation and initiative by women in these movements, however. It is because of women finding new spaces of resistance and survival in the global economy that we know women’s issues are inseparable from globalization.

How Globalization Affects Women

![Graphical representation of how globalization affects women in the global economy and informal sector.]

*Compiled from Athreya, WEED, and Buenaventura

How Social Movements Against Economic Globalization Have Helped Women

- The Women’s Edge Coalition started a letter-writing campaign to the United States Trade Representative in 2003, recommending a study of how trade agreements affect poor women before solidifying any trade agreement. Shortly thereafter, the USTR agreed to study women’s employment as a condition of the Central American Free Trade Agreement negotiations (http://www.womensedge.org/documents/whytakeaction.pdf)
After major demonstrations against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Congress passed a law in 2000 requiring the U.S. government to oppose World Bank and IMF loans that promote user fees for health care and primary education. That opposition facilitated a reversal in the World Bank's policy on school fees, improving children's access to education. Tanzania, for instance, removed primary education fees, and as a result, 1.5 million children (the majority of whom were girls) were enabled to attend school (Mokhiber and Weissman, 2002). Perhaps more far-reaching victories for women are the global networks and resources that have come out of movements against corporate-driven globalization, such as the following examples:

- Women's groups started a seed exchange and farming cooperative in Bangladesh that spread to over 60,000 farming households and reintroduced local varieties of crops (Akhletter, 2001).
- Kenyan women initiated a boycott on coffee production (using their land for subsistence farming instead) and the reappropriation of land taken by settlers and the government (Turner and Brownhill, 2001).
- The Grameen micro credit system started in Bangladesh as a small-scale operation, and has now reached over 3.7 million borrowers (96% are women) and serves as a model on which other micro-lending alternatives have been built (http://www.grameen-info.org/bank/index.html).
- WIEGO is connected to the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) movement and considers the dearth of research on women in the informal economy a barrier to accurately assessing women's economic contributions. WIEGO promotes data-gathering that will help correct this and serves as a resource for researchers and activists working to improve the condition of women in the global economy (http://www.wiego.org/main/about.shtml).

Responses to Globalization

While the following movements often overlap (for example, movements focused on organizing labor are also usually concerned with trade and the economy), they are categorized by their primary concern.

1. Localization

Readings:


Websites:

- Green Belt http://www.greenbelt.org
- Growing for Market http://www.growingformarket.com/
- Grassroots International http://www.grassrootsonline.org/brazil_partners.html

2. Human Rights

Readings:

3. Fair Economic and Trade Practices

Readings:

Websites:
- Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC) http://www.attac.org/indexen/index.html
- Global Exchange http://www.globalsentials.org/campaigns/fairtrade/
- Grameen Bank http://www.gdrc.org/ics/grameensinfo.html
- Jubilee USA Network http://www.jubileeusa.org/

4. Mobilizing Workers

Readings:

Websites:
- United Food and Commercial Workers Women's Network http://www.ufcw.org/get_a_union/ufcw_works_for_you/equal_pay/whatthenetworkdoes.cfm
- (Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) http://www.sewa.org/
- STICIE: Women Organizing for Worker Justice http://www.stitchonline.org/whowhat.asp
5. Anti-Corporate/Anti-International Financial Institutions

Readings:

Websites:
- 50 Years is Enough: U.S. Network for Global Economic Justice [http://www.50years.org/about/]
- Bank Information Center [http://www.bicusa.org/bicusa/index.php]
- Corp Watch [http://www.corpwatch.org/]
- Mobilization for Global Justice [http://www.globalizethis.org/]
- Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network [http://www.saprin.org/]

6. Anti-neoliberalism

Readings:

Websites:
- Colours of Resistance [http://www.tao.ca/~colours/index.html]
- Zapatista Women [http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~geneve/zapwomen/enter.html]
- World Social Forum website for the annual global justice summit [http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/]

7. Reactionary/Right Wing

Readings:
- “Deceptive Website Attempts to Lure Anti-Globalization Activists to Neo-Nazi Movement.” [http://www.adl.org/PresRele/Internet_75/4139_72.htm]

Websites:
- Concerned Women for America [http://www.cwfa.org/main.asp]
- Independent Women’s Forum [http://www.iwf.org/issues/default.asp]

8. Cultural Resistance

Readings:
http://www.films.com/Films_Home/Item.cfm/1/10687/ixs. Discusses the struggles of Arab women against repression within their own societies as well as against foreign penetration.


4. Las companeras tienen grado (Zapatista Women). One of the few films about the Zapatista struggle in which the role of women is the main focus. Interviews women about why they chose to become fighters in the struggle for rights and autonomy in Chiapas.


7. Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) has produced several videos on Indian women’s work (including home-based employment and other work women do that is not recognized), organizing, struggles to get basic necessities, and the story of SEWA itself and how it has changed women’s lives.


References


