

Women's Movements, Anti-Globalization, and Prefigurative Politics

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Introduction

The phenomenon of globalization has been one the most hotly contested issues of the last ten years. Social scientists have noticed new patterns in economic and social relations within and across nations that have been dubbed a phenomenon of globalization. A variety of theoretical perspectives have arisen in attempts to explain the origins of such a unique pattern in human social development. These paradigms are often grounded in analyses that are either critical or supportive of the process of globalization and its effects upon people, social institutions, and the planet. These effects are all, of course, mediated by the state's role in promoting and supporting globalization or opposing it. As a major social institution, the state holds a great responsibility in its role regarding the processes of globalization. Because of this role, the state often becomes the critical actor in mediating for people in the globalization debate, yet there are some theorists who would critique the importance of the state in the era of globalization and turn instead to what they deem civil society or non-state institutions as the key players in mediating the effects of globalization.

Much of the debate on globalization has often been defined by active criticism of the process and those who wish to implement it, namely corporations, governments, and sympathetic intellectuals (Sklair, 1995). This came to the forefront of the American conscience (and therefore, ironically, the world conscience) in the wake of the successful disruption of the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings held in Seattle (Epstein, 2001; Milstein, 2001; Seoane & Taddei, 2002). The massive protests which drew thousands of activists brought the globalization debate literally to the streets as police clashed with protesters attempting to shut down the meeting. For many in the west, particularly those in the United States, these protests signaled the birth of a new movement oriented toward opposition to the rising phenomenon of globalization. This movement

was seen by many to represent an ideal coalition of oppositional politics which could present a serious challenge to the global economic and social order. Yet, beneath the surface of successful cooperation in Seattle and later protests in across the globe (Washington, Prague, Quebec, and Genoa to name a few) lay a serious rift between two distinct types of organizations within the movement.

Despite the fact that the anti-globalization movement has often been able to put on a united, happy public face, there are serious disagreements among its participants. These are often based around how organizations involved in opposition to globalization actually participate in the movement and what their participation means for both the movement and its members. The split between the two forms of organization can best be summarized as a conflict between Grassroots Organizations (GROs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This split can be generally understood as a conflict of forms of organization (decentralized versus centralized) and tactics (direct vs. indirect action) which is mediated by their relationship to the state and other sources of social power. Ultimately, this conflict rests on a political argument between the two types of organizations. It is my contention that the grassroots organizations focus on what can best be described a prefigurative politics based on creating the changes one ultimately wants in the present rather than addressing problems through reform and regulation (Toft, 2001).

Women have been placed in a particularly interesting location vis-à-vis globalization. The effects of globalization have often been felt by women as their lives are disrupted by new economic activities and global economic processes. It is for these reasons that women often are at the forefront of activism in opposition to globalization. Women are organizing themselves to oppose globalization in new social movements oriented around their social position as women. Because of the growth of women's activism in the anti-globalization movement, women's

organizations (or women's movements against globalization) serve as an ideal unit of analysis of the conflict between GROs and NGOs, providing many case examples of both prefigurative and reformist politics practiced by organizations opposed to globalization.

Globalization and Anti-Globalization

The concept of globalization has been one of the most widely debated issues in modern social science. A variety of opinions have been given on how to define the concept, what the concept means in relation to people's lives, and whether it is a new concept at all. In order to fully appreciate the significance of globalization, one must, to some degree engage in the aforementioned debate. It is also important to discuss the role of the state in the globalized world as it is a crucial player in both formation of the global system and a target of social movements opposed to globalization.

Globalization can best be defined as "the inter-dependence of nations, the shared nature of their economies, the mutuality of their interests, the shared benefits of their exchanges" (Petras, 1999: 6). This concept is juxtaposed against a past practice of imperialism where nations conquered parts of the globe in order to incorporate them into their national economies (Bina, 1997). Globalization implies a much more amorphous form of capitalist expansion which incorporates both economies and states into a world system of trade and governance. It is often characterized by a liberalization of internal state economic policies through means of privatization, tax abatement, tariff reduction, infrastructure spending, and other programs designed to encourage investment. Globalization has produced a global division of labor defined largely by a search for reductions in the cost of production through reduced labor costs where "[t]he process of exporting labor intensive industrial work to the Third World (sic) and retaining a mass of low

paid service workers and an elite of high paid executives in the imperial sectors (sic) has advanced” (Petras, 1999: 13).

Many theorists have argued that under globalization, the state becomes an actor among many in a global world populated by multiple interest groups. It is an actor in a world increasingly populated by “the institutions of state, intergovernmental cooperation and so on – but also all those organizations and pressure groups – from MNCs, transnational social movements to the plethora of non-governmental organizations – which pursue goals and objectives which have a bearing on transnational rule and authority systems” (Held, McGrew, et. al., 1999: 50).

Therefore, the power of the state is mediated by other organizations which are competing for influence in global civil society. Still others theorize that the state has relevance as “the local authorities of the global system” (Hirst & Thompson, 1999: 262) because its main role is to provide a climate that is favorable for to the demands of global economic interest. Finally, the role of the state may be seen as being completely irrelevant as it is subsumed by international trade agreements which some criticize as reducing state sovereignty. The formation of supra-national organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or economic blocks such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) or European Union (EU) alter the role of the state in world affairs (Karlner, 1997; Hirst & Thompson, 1999; Held, McGrew, et. Al., 1999). It is clear that regardless of which perspective one takes, the role of the state has been significantly affected by globalization.

Reactions to globalization have been characterized as taking three primary forms: advocates, adversaries, and ambivalents (Petras, 1999). Advocates, as the name implies, support globalization in its current form for a variety of reasons. On the world stage advocates take the form of states which have positions of power in the global economy or states who see their

position in the world economy as being tied directly to processes of globalization, commonly referred to as “developing nations.” Within these states are a variety of actors who also actively support globalization, namely “high level state functionaries (self-styled technocrats), academics and publicists linked to international circuits” (Petras, 1999: 7). These individuals achieve their status through direct support of globalization because they are directly or indirectly rewarded from the global expansion of capital. The second group in advocate states are business interests directly involved in the export or import of goods because they stand to make the largest gains under globalized economies. Adversaries stand in direct opposition to globalization and are composed of groups which generally find themselves victims of global economic policies. These include peasant movements in Latin America, Asia, and some parts of Africa; workers in private industry across the globe, public employees in nations forced to make cuts in social spending, and small businesses which suffer under increased competition with transnational corporations (TNCs). Adversaries of globalization are likely to “challenge the TNCs in the economic sphere, oppose the transnational capitalist class and its local affiliates in the political sphere, and promote cultures and ideologies antagonistic to capitalist consumerism” (Sklair, 1995: 499). Finally, the ambivalent category is composed of groups who could benefit or suffer due to the promotion of globalization. These could include “non-competitive or industrializing nations..., industries who have difficulty competing in the global market and yet benefit from the reduction of social payments and declining wage levels..., [m]anufacturers who are bankrupted by overseas competition and “convert” to importing and other commercial activities..., [and] low paid wage workers who are consumers of imported, cheap consumer goods” (Petras, 1999: 8). These groups could easily side with either advocates or adversaries depending on which group has social influence due to the legitimacy of its arguments.

The Two Faces of Anti-Globalization: Case Studies

The anti-globalization movement is a diverse amalgamation of groups which would likely be categorized as adversaries in the typology described above. There is a tendency to view the movement as a monolithic entity for two critical reasons. First, much of the public perception of the anti-globalization movement is based on media exposure at large demonstrations in opposition to meetings where global trade agreements and other economic issues are discussed. From a distance, these protests provide a united front of groups organized against globalization. Large contingents of activists on the streets, if affiliated with any organization, could easily be categorized as members of GROs. While, at the same time members and supporters of NGOs mobilized in opposition to these meetings help to reinforce the more militant activists and add greater numbers to the protesters. As the protests build, media, the state, and even corporations turn to “leaders” which are often representatives of leaders of NGOs to speak on behalf of the movement. The interplay between the groups in the public sphere often hides serious conflicts which occur behind the scenes.

Second, there is a relationship between GROs and NGOs that can best be summed up by the concept of Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs). These are “voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange” where “advocates plead the causes of other or defend a cause or proposition” (Keck & Sikkink, 1998: 10). These groups often rely on what has been called a *boomerang pattern* where NGOs will rely on pressure from actors outside of the state (such as intergovernmental agencies or other states) to put pressure on their state to make social change (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). This principle can be applied at times to the relationship between GROs and NGOs. When GROs find their demands blocked by states who do not wish to

acquiesce to what they may perceive as a “special interest” or “minority” group, they may find themselves turning to NGOs for help in placing pressure upon the state. The relationship of the NGO to the state and its mass style of organization (both concepts will be developed later in this paper) allow it to put pressure on a state that the GRO cannot.

In the previous two examples, we begin to understand the complex relationship between GROs and NGOs. Despite the best efforts of theorists to present a crucial interplay between the two types of organizations, one finds a great deal of conflict between the two. This conflict stems from basic disagreements in terms of the way each form of organization functions. This is often defined by the ultimate goals of the organization. It may be argued that the NGOs wish to be players on the field of globalization and that their form of organization and activities reflects this desire. Conversely, GROs are more likely to engage in what has been termed prefigurative politics; and therefore take on radically different structures and approaches. Women’s movements or the “organizing of women explicitly as women to make any sort of social change” (Ferree & Mueller: 2) can serve as perfect examples of the difference between GROs and NGOs in the anti-globalization movement.

NGOs involved in the anti-globalization movement have been at the forefront of public discourse in recent years. This has brought them much praise and criticism. It is interesting to note the sources of both in understanding the role that NGOs play in the anti-globalization movement. GROs are often most likely to criticize NGOs for stealing the spotlight in the anti-globalization struggle. However; politicians, business leaders, and the media are likely to shower praise upon NGOs as proper members of “civil society.” It is this notion of “civil society” that has brought much of the controversy upon the NGO. Members of NGOs are quick to praise the development of a sphere of discourse which exists outside of official state circles because it gives

them leverage in bringing their demands to dominant actors in globalization. However the recognition by some of a “civil society” has served to create a category which incorporates a variety of interests ranging from NGOs to corporate interests into a space which has been idealized as existing outside of state interests (Petras, 1999). Peruvian politician Virginia Vargas makes just such an argument when she discusses the concept of a “policy ‘triangle’ – closer ties between sympathetic bureaucrats, legislators, and independent women’s groups to bring about policy changes in line with women’s demands” (Jaquette, 2001: 115). This plan of action necessitates that NGOs engage in dialogue with the state and corporations on terms which they hope will benefit them. However, critics are quick to point out that the discourse of those in power limit the possibilities for change (Sklair, 1995). It has also been argued that cooperation between NGOs and the state leads to co-optation of the NGO by the state. “States strapped for funds easily fall into patterns of using “self-help” women’s groups to distribute resources and mend holes in their badly torn social safety nets” (Jaquette, 2001: 115).

Engagement with the state has been a primary policy of the Mujeres de Yucatan por la Democracia (MYD). This group began as a movement for political democracy in Mexico which had experienced one party rule since its revolution in 1910, but has expanded its agenda to include issues of social justice including opposition to some elements of globalization. Its operations demonstrate many of the criticisms made of NGOs. The MYD is mostly composed of middle class women with a general interest in social reform, but many members have pointed to poverty as the main concern for their organization. In order to address issues that are a result of globalization, the MYD does not advocate economic reform which would present a direct challenge to the Mexican political system, instead preferring to look to democratic reforms of the political system which can incorporate more of the Mexican population. Because the MYD is

organized as a political organization, it is limited in the demands it can make for social change. Its activities often include lobbying the state for political reforms and electing candidates to office which will reflect their concerns (Morgan, 1998). Essentially, the MYD cannot affect the changes necessary to truly mediate globalization's negative effects on Mexico because it is willing to engage the state and cannot push for the radical changes necessary to confront globalization in Mexican society.

The organization of the MYD also presents a problem for sustained challenges to globalization. As an offshoot of a larger national political network, it is organized in a hierarchical manner based on commitment levels to the organization. At the core is a small group of founders which guide the groups activities, activists engage in much of the work, and a periphery of supporters gives the organization a certain amount of power. This structure can prove to be somewhat problematic for organizing beyond the modest goals of lobbying and political reform. The group has suffered set backs when founders active in the core left for differing reasons. This centralization of authority means that policy may often be set based on the concerns of those at the center rather than women on the periphery. In interview research, Morgan (1998) found that despite the best attempts at liberal concerns over economic and social issues, some members and even leaders expressed racial biases against "Indians and Blacks." Although these could be reduced to racial biases, they also reflect a serious hindrance to effective organizing because race and class are so intimately connected in Latin American society. Therefore, expressions of racial bias ultimately demonstrate a disconnect from many of the people their activism seeks to help. This racial disconnection can best be summarized by the following statement, "[a]nother [founder/leader] stated, after having heard of the accomplishments of a statewide Yucatan Maya woman leader, 'who could think a Maya could do such things?'"

(Morgan, 1998: 521). These kinds of racially biased statements demonstrate the type of elitism that can occur when class biases are allowed to be interjected into social activism.

Many critics of globalization have argued that rather than engaging the state to push for reform, crucial challenges to globalization can only occur through disruptions of the economic system (Epstein, 2001; Petras, 1999; Seoane & Taddei, 2002; Sklair, 1995). Given that NGOs are placed in a position where they can negotiate with the state and TNCs, they are not in a position to create effective disruptions to globalization. By negotiating with the “advocates” of globalization, NGOs must temper their demands to make demands upon states, corporations, and transnational bodies that are viewed as attainable. These demands limit the ability of NGOs to create effective disruptions in the flow of global capital and the processes of globalization. In addition, by negotiating with the primary advocates of globalization, NGOs find themselves in a position of privilege by being granted a “seat at the table” the elite discussion on globalization. “As a result [of state co-optation of revolutionary groups who enter electoral politics], all the groups adversely affected by globalization have turned toward extra-parliamentary activities and organization” (Petras, 1999: 48). Because GROs often operate outside of the bounds of “civil society” they are given more freedom to engage in such disruptions. This is especially true of GROs which have developed a sense of prefigurative politics. By engaging in direct demands for social change, these groups are presenting clear challenges to the dominant thesis of the advocates of globalization. Their tactics and organization often reflect the type of society they wish to create and this plays an important role in their choice to remain outside of the political system. By operating outside of the limits of “civil society,” many GROs give themselves greater autonomy in terms of their approach to alleviating the problems caused by globalization. They are able to engage in activities that can best be labeled “direct action” because they either present a crucial

alternative to global capitalism or directly confront the agents of globalization which effect their lives (Sklair, 1995). Some have also argued that many GROs which directly confront globalization and envision alternatives are also influenced by political theories which are either post-Marxist or leftist alternatives to Marxism, particularly anarchism which explicitly reject taking state power and instead envision developing counter-institutions (Epstein, 2001; Milstein, 2001, Petras, 1999; Seoane & Taddei, 2002; Sklair, 1995; Toft, 2001). Whether consciously chosen or simply played out as part of an overall strategy that reacts against dominant forms of political behavior, these “newer” politics help inform a movement organized to explicitly challenge globalization.

The crucial distinction between GROs and NGOs often lies in organization. As the name implies, the GRO is based on a less formal, more decentralized method of organization. At times, GROs are completely informal networks of individuals who come together around a specific concern or issue. Through their mutual exploitation in the garment industry, women workers in Bangladesh have been able to find common ground which has allowed them to organize to challenge the effects of globalization in their lives. Instead of relying on NGOs to represent them many women “engage in daily struggles on a personal or collective level to improve their lives” (Tiano in Zaman, 2001: 147). The women workers often come together for reasons beyond issues of work. For example, many women walk to work together to provide both protection and company for each other. These networks of women walking to work have been transformed into forms of resistance through the formation of labor unions which exist outside of the formal unions and massive strikes (at times numbering in the tens of thousands) against the practices of various employers (Zaman, 2001). This type of organizing leads to specifically the type of disruptions alluded to by Sklair (1995) where challenges are made to the everyday practices of TNCs which

force them to make concessions; and therefore reduces their ability to generate profit. These disruptions also have the consequence of empowering the women engaging in them to take further action against their employers and global capitalism, in general (Zaman, 2001). Thus, a global movement is born out of the ability of some to organize at the grassroots.

The organizational form of GROs have been critical in contrasting them against NGOs, but it is not merely a matter of centralized versus decentralized organization that defines the two types of organizations. There is also the issue of prefigurative politics. Since a critique of globalization is often accompanied by a critique of capitalism, it may be argued that an effective anti-globalization movement must be consciously or unconsciously anti-capitalist in its orientation (Epstein, 2001; Milstein, 2001, Petras, 1999; Seoane & Taddei, 2002; Sklair, 1995; Toft, 2001). Given NGOs willingness to engage in the discourse of “civil society” where the economic system is rarely challenged and often taken for granted as normative, GROs are often the only groups that can raise a critique of capitalism within the context of the anti-globalization movement. Many critics of globalization have turned to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN, the Spanish acronym) as an ideal type of resistance movement to globalization.

The EZLN began to organize in the Mexican state of Chiapas in 1983 in response to drastic changes made to laws regarding the ownership of communal lands (Bayes & Kelly, 2001; Collier & Lowery Quaratiello, 1994; Veltmeyer, 2000). Changes in the state economy had displaced thousands of indigenous peasants from their traditional lands and brought them into cities in search of work (Collier & Lowery Quaratiello, 1994; Veltmeyer, 2000). Due to the radical transformations brought on by displacement, Chiapas became what has been termed a “strategic site of contestation” based on the “nexus between subsistence economies and capitalist enterprise” (Sassen in Bayes & Kelly, 2001: 157). As such, the state became fertile ground for an

armed uprising which was timed to begin January 1, 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement was set to go into effect. Since the uprising, the Zapatistas have engaged in a variety of negotiations with the state which have yielded little in the way of results (Bayes & Kelly, 2001; Veltmeyer, 2000). As a result of continued failed negotiations, the Zapatistas have chosen to continue their uprising in Chiapas. Minor clashes between the Mexican military and the EZLN are common, yet the most effective campaign on the part of the Zapatistas has been a focus on propaganda among the peasants of Chiapas (Veltmeyer, 2000). These campaigns have been used to build support for the uprising through appeals to the daily needs of the peasants. By addressing the issues affecting peasants daily lives through campaigns for regional autonomy, the Zapatistas effectively present a popular form of resistance to the localized effects of globalization. The EZLN demonstrates how a GRO can serve to embody prefigurative politics by examining the role of women within the organization.

Changes in the economy of Chiapas forced massive changes in the daily lives of women and have permanently altered gender relations within the region to the extent that women now find themselves both victims of globalization and empowered to resist it (Bayes & Kelly, 2001; Collier & Lowery Quaratiello, 1994; Veltmeyer, 2000). As the popular movement of resistance to the demands of globalization upon Chiapas, the EZLN has incorporated women as activists and leaders which is reflected in its platform. “The Zapatista platform...includes several planks that concern helping women in their role as mothers: demands for gynecological and obstetric care, child care centers, and public funds to feed children” (Bayes & Kelly, 2001: 160). Although these demands are made on maternalistic grounds, it is important to understand their appeal to women whose traditional roles and security have been undermined by social changes due to the demands of globalization. In such cases, demands focusing on bringing support to women as mothers,

specifically ones that make economic demands of the state and capital, can serve as disruptions to globalization. However, the Zapatistas are not solely concerned with making maternalistic demands and have moved to define women's equality in ten principles codified as the "Revolutionary Laws of Women" which state:

Women, regardless of their race, creed, color or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in any way that their desire and capacity determine.

Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.

Women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for.

Women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected.

Women and their children have the right to Primary Attention in their health and nutrition.

Women have the right to education.

Women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage.

Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.

Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.

Women will have all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give. (Bayes & Kelly, 2001: 161)

These principles are important not only because they serve as a guideline for the type of society the EZLN wishes to establish in Chiapas, but because of the method by which they were achieved. The "laws" were established as a result of "hundreds of community assemblies and a great deal of political education that women Zapatista leaders like Comandante Ramona and Comandante Anna Maria conducted in the communities" (Rodriguez in Bayes & Kelly, 2001: 161). Therefore, the laws stem directly from the demands of women and are a result of communication between active members of the Zapatista army and local women in the community. Although the laws are not legally binding, it is important to note that they may be considered in effect in territories where the EZLN has influence. With thirty percent of the Zapatista army being made up of women (Bayes & Kelly, 2001), it may be safe to assume that the "laws" are being enforced to some degree;

although there is no empirical evidence to prove or discount this assertion. By granting women formal rights as individuals, the Zapatistas are attempting to mediate the negative effects of globalization on Chiapas without attacking the newly developed sense of autonomy many women have received through participation in labor as a result of globalization. These laws are also based on cultural traditions which gave women control of communal lands that have been taken away by privatization which has been a major demand of advocates of globalization (Bayes & Kelly, 2001; Collier & Lowery Quaratiello, 1994). One can see that by directly resisting the structure and function of NGO work through direct engagement of the state, the Zapatistas present a challenge to globalization that has often served as a model or inspiration to others (Epstein, 2001; Veltmeyer, 2000).

Conclusion

Globalization has been a widely contested phenomenon. As a transnational interconnected of economies, institutions, and people, globalization has transformed much of the world. Great debates have taken place over the nature of globalization and its effects upon the world. Some have argued that globalization is a new stage in human development and the logical outgrowth of capitalist economic systems. Others have countered with critiques of the impact of globalization on their economies, environment, and people. Still others find themselves unsure of their place in the globalization debate siding with one side or the other depending on which is more beneficial to them (Petras, 1999).

The role of the state has also been transformed under globalization. One perspective views the state as no longer relevant under a new global system. It has become either a local administrator of global capitalism (Hirst & Thompson, 1999), a minor player in a pluralist world

occupied by multiple actors making demands on global capitalism such as TNCs and NGOs (Held, McGrew, et. al., 1999), or it is subsumed by supra-national organizations and agreements (Karlner, 1997; Hirst & Thompson, 1999; Held, McGrew, et. Al., 1999). The ambivalence around the role of the state in a globalizing society has led to a variety of theoretical approaches to challenging globalization. Some have focused on attempting to bring pressure on the state to assert some control over their national economies and mediate globalization while others have focused on rejecting the state as a viable means of resisting globalization, choosing to resist both the state and globalization (Epstein, 2001; Petras, 1999; Sklair, 1995). This split can be seen in the differences between non-governmental organizations and grassroots organizations.

NGOs have often defined themselves as the voices of the people in relation to the state. This has been due to their relatively strong position in terms of wielding influence upon governments. Using what Keck & Sikkink (1998) label the *boomerang effect*, NGOs are able to put pressure on governments by circumventing traditional lobbying appeals and relying on non-governmental institutions or other states to make demands upon nations. This power has led to a certain legitimacy of the NGO as a voice of dissent. Some have criticized this relationship between NGOs and the state as being one of ultimate co-optation (Epstein, 2001; Jaquette, 2001; Petras, 1999; Seoane & Taddei, 2002; Sklair; 1995; Toft, 2001). These critics have pointed out that such a relationship ultimately cannot lead to resistance of globalization.

GROs are in a better position to actively resist globalization. Although they risk the possibility of state co-optation, GROs are often organized in a manner that precludes such a process. By being based on less hierarchical relations between members, GROs have some autonomy in developing their struggles (Epstein, 2001; Toft, 2001; Veltmeyer, 2000; Zaman, 2001). By relying on prefigurative politics in developing strategies of resistance which place

visions of a future society at the forefront, many GROs are able to function independently of the state because the state is often unwilling or unable to meet their demands (Bayes & Kelly, 2001; Jaquette, 2001, Petras, 1999; Seoane & Taddei, 2002; Sklair, 1995; Toft, 2001). Therefore, GROs are placed in a better position to actually resist globalization rather than merely alleviating its effects upon vulnerable populations.

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