Is Global Sisterhood Elusive? A Critical Assessment of the Transnational Women's Rights Movement

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Abstract
The United Nations (UN) women's rights movement has historically ignored differences among women by promoting notions of a unified global sisterhood. In order to rectify the exclusions wrought by equality and difference feminism, intersectional analysis that takes account of group and economic rights becomes crucial. Only then can women's rights be universal.

Résumé
Le mouvement des droits de la femme de l'Organisation des Nations Unies (ONU) a historiquement ignoré les différences entre les femmes en faisant la promotion de la ligne de pensée d'une sororité unifiée globale. Afin de rectifier les exclusions apportées par le féminisme d'égalité et de différence, l'analyse intersectorielle qui prend en considération les droits de groupes et économiques devient cruciale. À ce moment - là seulement, les droits des femmes seront universels.

Introduction

The language of women's rights is so pervasive that it is being utilized by a diverse range of groups, from state actors such as the United States (US), whose invasion of Afghanistan was justified on the grounds of "saving" Afghani women, to non-state actors such as the United Nations (UN), national and transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and grass-roots organizations (Grewal 2005). While such ubiquity is initially promising because this seems to show that gender equality has become a widespread concern, the promotion of universal women's rights loses currency when the motivations behind the use of women's rights based discourse are analyzed.

Women's rights become problematic for several reasons. First, women's rights, though a persuasive, powerful, and valuable catalyzing trope, assumes a common agenda for all women. Second, the overt concentration of women's rights on the identities of women *qua* women fails to consider the effects of class, culture, and geographical positioning, which consequently negates serious analysis of the implications of gender alongside issues of cultural rights, indigenous land claims, and socio-economic issues. In this paper, I ask whether the discourse of women's rights is an effective strategy to promote gender justice within the United Nations human rights system or whether this has promoted an exclusionary framework whereby only certain issues are being disseminated.

This paper attempts to assess the disengagement of women's rights from issues of group/cultural rights and socio-economics. The preceding arguments are developed in two sections. First, I analyze critically the development of a United Nations-based women's rights discourse following the establishment of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights (UDHR), highlighting its strengths and limitations. Second, I assess the difficulties in integrating group rights and economic rights with women's rights.

The Development of Universal Women's Rights in the United Nations: From the Universal Declaration to the Beijing Platform to the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR)

Historically, the international women's rights movement has advocated the twin goals of recognizing women's human rights and representing all women (Ackerley 2000). Both goals are contentious. They are premised on the conception of a coherent female identity and has led to changing tactics in the promotion of women's rights.

According to Jennifer Chan-Tiberghien, the representation of women in the United Nations can be divided in approximately four stages: "Invisible Equality (1945-75), Visible Equality (1975-93), Differences from Men (1993 on) and Differences Among Women (2001 on)" (Chan-Tiberghien 2004). Though this division is a rough timeline, Chan-Tiberghien's breakdown usefully characterizes the shifts in international human rights approaches to gender.

The first stage of invisible equality can be seen in the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although the Universal Declaration asserts that neither race, color, nor sex affects a person's enjoyment of rights and freedoms, the succeeding rights that are named puts a liberal emphasis on "protecting individuals from the abuses of state power" through the entrenchment of civil and political rights (Merry 2001). Thus, the Universal Declaration does not consider the ramifications of gender and cultural discrimination in the private sphere and in economic life. The Universal Declaration was incomplete because it did not systematically deal with gender discrimination.

The emergence of second-wave feminism in certain countries led to the founding of the Women in Development (WID) approach, where gender imbalances in development practices were disseminated, as outlined in Esther Boserup's *Women in Economic Development* (1970). This stage, according to Chan-Tiberghien's analysis, marks the Visible Equality stage, which eventually culminated in the 1975 International Women's Year Conference, the 1975-1985 UN decade for women, and the 1979 establishment of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Popularly seen as an international bill of women's rights, CEDAW has nevertheless faced widespread criticism from state parties themselves, subsequently making CEDAW the United Nations convention with the largest number of country reservations, thereby ensuring that numerous countries have only chosen to abide by some of CEDAW's recommendations. That CEDAW and its optional protocol lack a central enforcement mechanism and an individual complaints procedure, whereby individuals can launch complaints against state and non-state human rights abusers, is a further cause for complaint (Tang 2004).

Other criticisms against CEDAW emerged from feminist thinkers such as Charlotte Bunch and Kate Nash, who decry CEDAW's lack of emphasis on violence against women and CEDAW's inconsistencies in attempting to unite different women (Bunch 1990; Nash 2002). The rights proclaimed by CEDAW aimed mainly to promote women as men's equals, thereby precluding all questions on women's difference from men and diversity among women.

Organized in the spirit of CEDAW, the World Women's Conferences in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985 successfully drew attention to women's rights within the United Nations, with a vehement emphasis on women's equality though even during these conferences, charges of "feminist Orientalism" were voiced by some delegates from the South (Chan-Tiberghien 2004). For example, in Mexico, American feminist Betty Friedan and Bolivian grassroots activist Domitilla Barrios de Chungara disagreed vociferously on whether middle-class women in developed countries can establish commonalities with women from developing countries (Kaplan 2001). Interestingly, in this discussion the

needs of women outside middle-class groupings in the developed world did not merit much attention.

The World Conference on Human Rights, hosted in Vienna in 1993, introduced difference feminism in the United Nations. Women's experiences were seen as being unique (for example, domestic violence affects more women than men), thus leading Chan-Tibhergien to describe this as the era where women's differences from men became key. According to feminist theorist Arvonne Fraser, the World Conference was crucial in eliminating the difference between the private and public spheres since the delegates recognized that human rights abuses can be waged by individuals against individuals rather than merely being enacted by the state against its citizens, which effectively brought light to human rights abuses undertaken in the private sphere (Fraser 2001).

Similarly, the Beijing Conference in 1995 highlighted human rights abuses specific to women, and was arguably where the term women's rights as human rights reached widespread resonance (Gaer 2001). During the conference, the language of women's difference was repeatedly employed in discussions surrounding the twelve platforms, underscoring the necessity of promoting gender parity in all twelve areas. Though there were references to diversity among women in the resultant Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, such references were diluted in the final Declaration to stress that gender equality is achieved once women became equal to men.

Feminist activists' differences in opinion on the notion of women's universal difference from men during the Beijing conference highlight continuing tensions within the global women's movement. Some feminists, such as Temma Kaplan, see Beijing as evidence that global sisterhood has been realized: "since Beijing, the worlds converged and the motto of 'women's rights as human rights' has defined the relationship between feminists and members of grassroots movements of women" (2001). Kaplan therefore believed that the barriers between women were dismantled, with women coming together in support of a unified agenda.

Other feminists disagree. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, believes that the Beijing Conference glossed over the stark economic inequities faced by women in the South, who were not provided a platform during the Beijing Conference to address their concerns. She also asserts that the conference ignored how larger structural forces caused gender inequity because of its focus on individual rights violations (Spivak 1996). Others, such as Aruna Rao (1995), echoed Spivak's observations and lamented the lack of prominence given on the agenda for Southern feminists who were lobbying for poverty relief and economic rights. Indigenous feminists felt similarly excluded and took issue with the nominal inclusion of their interests during the conference. The Beijing conference saw the answer to indigenous women's concerns as lying in individual solutions, such as the promotion of indigenous female leaders, the "effective protection and use of indigenous women's knowledge," and "further research on indigenous women's issues," among many suggestions (Espinosa 1997). Such solutions therefore ignored the issues of land rights and economic inequality voiced by indigenous women. Moreover, indigenous women argue that their involvement in Beijing led them to become the "objects of international concern and intervention" post-Beijing, rather than as empowered agents (Espinosa 1997).

While the various World Conferences and the Beijing Conference may have provided diverse groups of feminists a platform to articulate their concerns, the parity of their participation was in question: they were allowed to participate in these conferences, but their involvement was interpreted primarily as a plea for help (for example, indigenous women), or the space they were given was relatively small (for example, women from the Global South). Thus, issues of economic discrepancies, race, and indigeneity are negated in favor of female equality. Much as it is imperative to integrate feminist concerns into the United Nations through conferences, conventions, platforms, and gender-mainstreaming, "the term 'gender' has little significance outside the

traditional category of women: in almost all cases, it signifies non-indigenous, non-migrant, able-bodied and heterosexual women" (Chan-Tiberghien 2004).

Of course, using women's human rights and the language of global sisterhood can in some instances encourage women to establish commonalities as a strategic conceptual, political and policy tool but finding commonalities does not entail the outright denial of women's diversity (Rupp and Taylor 1999). Considering the ramifications of various identity affiliations becomes pivotal. Chan-Tiberghien asserts that the current stage of women's rights promotion in the UN is one that adopts a "gender intersectionality" approach that explicitly recognizes differences among women and that sees the relevance of other identity groupings. Intersectionality, as described in UN women's rights frameworks, scrutinizes gender alongside other vectors of identification - race, class, and sexuality - taking inspiration from feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, who assert that gender cannot be analyzed in exclusion from other identities (Collins 2000; hooks 1981). For Chan-Tiberghien, there is much potential in the use of intersectionality to excise past exclusions and to encourage the formation of new alliances.

Chan-Tiberghien cites the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban as an example of the United Nation's growing receptivity to intersectionality discourse. Intersectionality was widely addressed by academic and activist communities during WCAR, subsequently ensuring that the resultant declaration following the conference is the only UN document that recognizes how gender, race, class, and other identities structure people's experiences (Kerr 2005). Though WCAR neglected the inclusion of caste as part of racial discrimination and did not identify measures to recompense victims of slavery, it nevertheless influenced other UN bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and CEDAW to integrate intersectionality, arguably giving transnational feminists espousing diversity among women more leverage in the international system.

Still, though intersectionality is important, it is not sufficient. Its adherents within the UN risk assuming that power-relations can be simply and neatly depicted as monolithically oppressive, and not complicated and multi-varied. Despite the pioneering work undertaken by feminists theorists such as Ange Marie Hancock (2007), who argued that intersectionality is not additive and needs to consider the impacts of political and economic institutions on groups experiences, and Margo Okazawa-Rey (2002), who saw how larger political processes such as militarism and regionalism complicate issues of gender equality, the promotion of intersectionality within the UN human rights system still gives solutions for individuals. Applying intersectionality to UN women's rights discourse fails to truly account for transnational oppression and activism and does not solve the problem of a human rights system still reliant on the state, both in terms of allocating blame and seeking redress. For instance, the United Nations human rights treaty body system may recognize intersectional forms of discrimination, as can be seen in all of the conventions associated with each treaty body, but nevertheless it still limits the application of its treaties to states, ignoring transnational power structures.

Moreover, the lack of coordination between various components of the United Nations makes it difficult to apply intersectionality. Parallels can be drawn in the application of intersectionality and the use of gender mainstreaming within the UN. The inchoate organizations that make up the UN have different definitions of gender mainstreaming (Riley 2004), with some organizations seeing mainstreaming as a way to promote a gendered perspective in all policies and programs and other organizations interpreting it as the inclusion of more female staff members within its bureaus. Similarly, intersectionality risks losing its critical edge when operationalized by UN agencies.

An example of the problematic usage of intersectionality in the UN is posed by Nira Yuval-Davis in her criticism of women's rights activist Charlotte Bunch's presentation of intersectionality during the WCAR. Bunch

drew attention to 16 intersecting identities affecting the lives of women, ultimately concluding that neglecting the rights associated with any one of the 16 types of identities leads to widespread human rights abuse (Bunch 1990). In response, Yuval-Davis argues that Bunch's use of intersectionality "constructs difference per se as automatic grounds for both discrimination and entitlement for defense from discrimination [and] does not attend to the differential positionings of power in which different identity groups can be located in different historical contexts let alone the dynamics of power relations within these groups [nor does it recognize] the potentially contested boundaries of these identity groupings and the possibly contested political claims for representation" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 203-04). In short, while the normative conception of intersectionality potently shows how power structures and institutions affect individuals and groups, its practical application within the UN still problematically holds the individual as the unit of analysis and the state as the source of oppression.

Can Women's Rights Encompass Group and Economic Rights?

ASSESSING FEMINIST DISENGAGEMENT

The previous section underscores the historical shifts in the approaches undertaken by the UN women's rights movement. Explaining the dominance of certain agendas in UN women's rights discourse becomes key. Certainly, it makes sense for feminists to organize on the basis of providing equal opportunities and outcomes during the equality era and to campaign for better legislation targeting violence against women during the difference stage, but it is difficult to ascertain the agendas that feminists will promote during the intersectionality period. Since intersectionality normatively presumes an awareness of the inequities resulting from intersecting identity affiliations and the larger power dynamics exacerbating these, the campaigns waged by UN-based transnational feminists would have to be more varied and multi-faceted. Despite the aforementioned problems associated with the practical application of intersectionality, one needs to

ask whether intersectional analysis encourages the concurrent promotion of group and economic rights with women's rights. In short, can there be acknowledgment of these issues, or will discussions among feminists concentrate on the same issues of equality and difference, with only tokenistic references to intersectionality?

Jyotsna Gupta concisely articulates the difficulties of global sisterhood in addressing issues outside the purview of equality and difference feminists:

Global feminist solidarity and alliances for future campaigns may not be difficult on issues such as violence against women, the global trafficking in women and children, gender justice in terms of equal opportunities in education and employment, health, food and shelter, security and environmental concerns. However, other issues including translocation and the outsourcing of jobs and services to the Global South, or religious fundamentalist prescriptions on dress codes, may pitch women on different sides of the fence and could form a testing ground for feminist solidarity.

(Gupta 2006, 26)

Gupta aptly highlights the difficulties posed by forming alliances on issues that are too contentious. While her particular discussion refers specifically to European and North American women's purchase of Third World women's bodies for surrogacy, her assessment of the ways in which economic and structural imbalances prevent alliance-building between both groups of women can easily be extended to other issues, such as migrant domestic labour or indigenous land claims. The reluctance felt by national feminist organizations such as Canada's National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) (Thobani 2008) and Australia's Women and Labour Conferences (Murdolo 1996) to campaign on behalf of immigrant and Aboriginal women suggests that universal women's movements can be unwilling to question notions of sisterhood and to interrogate power dynamics between women, a dynamic that could very well be transposed onto the UN-based international women's movement.

Of course, the lack of engagement between Western and non-Western feminists

in UN forums is partly a result of Western feminists' more abundant infrastructural resources and greater experience in UN-based lobbying. The superficial attention given to feminists calling for group and economic rights, however, can also be understood as being caused by transnational feminists having little experience in applying intersectionality, in expanding women's rights discourse and in tackling uncomfortable, incriminating issues that highlight power imbalances between women. Again, references to the inability of Canadian and Australian national women's movements to sufficiently address immigrant and indigenous women's concerns usefully illustrate the difficulties that large social movements face when addressing diversity, a problem that can be transposed to the transnational UN-based women's rights movement. The issues of group and economic rights, in particular, show the tensions between equality/difference feminism and intersectional feminism.

GROUP RIGHTS

Women's rights as promoted by the UN are premised on the notion of liberal individual rights grounded on women's common identity at the expense of other identities. If women are seen as a cohesive entity, what happens when some women affiliate with other cultural and national groups? The UN has broadly addressed the issue of group rights through the vacillating frameworks of multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, minority rights, and indigeneity, to varying success and multiple failures. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to address all UN-based initiatives, the UN women's rights regime views group rights in two ways.

First, the depiction of cultural rights within the UN have parallels with the writings of Western liberal multicultural scholars (Gutman 1994; Kymlicka 1995; Williams 1998; Young 1996), who indict certain cultural rights for violating women's rights. The UDHR, CEDAW, the Beijing Platform, and the Vienna Declaration, among many other UN documents, argue that "all Member States have a legal obligation to promote and protect human rights, regardless of particular cultural perspectives," emphasizing the primacy of human rights above other (less important) considerations (Ayton-Shenker 1995). Such claims are misleading for cultures are neither fixed nor homogenous and, more importantly, make the assumption that the only relationship between women's rights and culture rests on women's protection from the latter.

Furthermore, portrayals by state actors of a static culture needs to be examined. In other words, powerful elites might present a reductionist perspective for their own political gain: heads of state decrying the abhorrence of misogynous cultural practices of minority groups may be trying to circumvent claims for recognition by these groups (Rao 1995, 170). Cultural practices are undertaken in a variety of ways, for a variety of reasons, and misrepresenting the context of these cultural practices may serve the purposes of the state. Rao therefore encourages interrogating the "politics of [cultural] claims" (Rao 1995, 170). Hence, because the UN human rights system still consists of diverse state actors who are interested in preserving state interests above other considerations, their indictment of the neglect of women's rights by sub-national groups and other countries may serve a larger political purpose.

Second, though the relationship between indigenous rights and women's rights have been enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People initiatives, which explicitly espouses indigenous women's rights, and in UN initiatives, such as the International Indigenous Women's Forum, the effectiveness of these attempts is questionable. For instance, the refusal of countries with significant numbers of indigenous groups to sign the Declaration puts the enforcement of indigenous rights and of indigenous women's rights in these countries on shaky grounds. Moreover, support for indigenous women's rights within the UN appears superficial. For example, the book, *Indigenous Women and the United Nations System: Good Practices and Lessons Learned* - which is the only substantial UN publication on indigenous women - does not use intersectional analysis to highlight the effects of power structures on indigenous

women's situations but instead merely lists the local projects various UN agencies have funded in support of indigenous women's rights (United Nations 2007). Both of these, coupled with tokenistic references to indigenous women's situations in CEDAW reports, make the linkages between indigenous and women's rights unclear.

Moreover, the complete absence of attention given to the situation of women from other sub-national groups seeking recognition, such as Palestinian women and Tibetan women, is further illustrative of the international women's movement's shortcoming. Indeed, in some cases, activists cannot conceive of making the link between national women's rights struggles and larger feminist movements, as in the case of Mali, where Susanna Wing reports feminist activists argue that their interests are reflected not by international women's conferences such as Beijing but rather by local women's NGOs tied to nationalist and/or democratic groups (Wing 2002). Thus, through tokenistic inclusion and silencing, the UN-based women's rights movements have on balance failed to address group rights claims.

Answering the question of why group rights is so integral to the fulfillment of women's (and indeed men's) needs becomes difficult when one adopts the perspective of group rights as being either harmful (for example, through the condemnation of certain cultural rights) or unimportant (for example, through the tokenistic inclusion of indigenous rights). By relying on an additive interpretation of intersectionality, the UN neglects "social power axes" which locate groups and individuals within the "grid of [overlapping, conflicting, sometimes contradictory] power relations" (Yuval-Davis 2006). Locating rights abuses within a grid of power relations will allow for a more robust protection of group rights beyond simple calls for cultural protection.

Hence, for certain groups of women, women's rights can only be promoted as group rights. The UN-based international women's rights movement has yet to adequately address the question of group rights, for questions surrounding cultural practices and national sovereignty are bracketed from the purportedly more important individualist concerns. The onus is therefore on women's rights activists to see group rights as being part of women's rights.

ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Group rights and economic rights are closely intertwined. The UN-based women's rights movement, through CEDAW and the Beijing Platform, endorse the rights of women to equal economic participation, but both do not sufficiently address the need for groups to access economic rights, from which women's well-being stems.

In some cases, women's economic well-being is closely intertwined with their community, and it becomes impossible to separate women's economic rights from community needs. For example, R.S. Khare examines the rights envisaged by women belonging to the untouchable caste in Lucknow, India; in her interviews and observations, she sees that for these women, access to an economically secure life should be accompanied by the promotion of personal and community honor (Khare 1998). Similarly, indigenous women's groups in the Philippines have asserted that they associate human rights with civil and political rights, but see economic needs as being part of *batayang karapatan*, roughly translated as a set of basic rights (distinct from civil and political human rights) that are community-based (Lambert *et al.* 2003). The example of female Thai factory workers campaigning for their labor rights through strikes also shows that they are motivated not by an individualistic desire for economic rights-recognition but by kin-based concerns (Mills 2005).

Hence, the UN-based women's rights movement should realize that simply adding (non-Western) women into the economic marketplace and mixing, as endorsed in all of Chan-Tiberghien's stages, is insufficient. Analyzing the unequal structures embedded in international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in transnational labor, and in development projects such as micro-lending, will show the inadequacies of such a solution, for as much as women around the world seek inclusion into the

economic sphere, inclusion does not nullify the gender, class, and cultural oppressions they face as a result of transnational financial arrangements, Third World debt, land dispossession, etc. Interrogating the purported inevitability of economic globalization and trade liberalization, and its effects on individual and group rights, becomes necessary. In fact, economic imbalances are a form of violence continually being enacted on the bodies of women, a form of violence that is difficult to conceptualize in real terms, thereby making it a challenge to seek redress. Although in many cases such violence occurs blatantly, as seen in the high incidences of violence against *maquiladoras* in Mexico, in other cases, the violence enacted against women has less conspicuous, but no less onerous, ramifications (Nash 2005). Indeed, it is almost impossible to seek accountability from the global financial and trade systems that create inequality because the UN human rights system relies mainly on state-based actions, with little opportunity to govern the actions of transnational non-state actors. Consequently, economic violence enacted on Third World women usually becomes invisible.

More importantly, the promotion of economic rights must go beyond general analyses of the inadequacies of financial institutions and international labor structures and should also be made relevant to the needs of women at the local level, for much as the language of women's rights is useful in framing policy responses and political strategies, "at the ground level, [it was] not helpful as a means of identifying the scope of the problem or even suggesting possible solutions" (Lambert *et al.* 2003). The disjunction between grass-roots activism and human rights movements, particularly in economic campaigns, stems from the inability of traditional women's rights' and human rights' language to be relevant to the needs of local groups, whose economic concerns are usually more pressing and require recourse beyond the traditional legal and state-based channels utilized by human rights activists. For example, grassroots activists in the Philippines who are campaigning for the economic rights of urban slum dwellers find

that rights-based language is too abstract to have practical application and lacks immediacy and responsiveness to the situation of women's lives. In fact, one activist asserts that resorting to rights-based language to justify access to resources such as water and food and economic security is seen as superfluous (Lambert *et al.* 2003).

Essentially, rights-based language is deemed too distant from everyday needs, with human needs oftentimes deemed more pertinent than human rights. Making this distinction and promoting human rights education at this level, although important, oftentimes requires the use of time and resources, which grass-roots organizations may not have in abundance. Thus, although the utilization of women's rights is useful in identifying lapses in the allocation of resources and in highlighting discrimination, as well as in providing a set of moral principles such as good, bad, far, unfair, equal and unequal, everyday responses at the grassroots level hardly consider rights-discourse prior to acting since urgent situations necessitate immediate action. In other words, debating the right to food and the unjust barriers in being denied access to this right is useless when the need for it is unavoidable. Holistic statements claiming that the UN-based international women's rights movement has provided women in the developing world with instantaneous rights protection are not only misleading, but ultimately miss the point.

The disconnect between grass roots movements and UN women's rights advocates does not mean, of course, that the two are not intertwined. Some individuals are also part of both camps and encourage greater coordination between the two; as well, actors from both camps have influenced each other through dialogue. For example, Sonia E. Alvarez's (2000) article on the effects of transnational feminist organizing in Latin America delineates how transnational efforts have given certain Latin American feminist groups greater leverage in negotiating with local policymakers. Another example can be found in Barbara Schulman's (2004) article on how human rights concern complements the activities of social movements, showing the

interactive effects of local activists and women's rights advocates.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the limitations of women's rights' discourse within the UN, particularly with reference to group and economic rights. The issue of the next step thereby arises. Although the UN has been attempting to be more responsive to different rights claims, bracketing group rights, women's rights, and economic rights in separate categories dilutes them. Exactly how the UN can be made more responsive to related, overlapping, and reinforcing types of oppressions, enacted by actors within and outside states, becomes more pressing. One way of simultaneously responding to intersecting oppressions wrought by individuals' diverse identities and by overlapping power structures is to seriously consider former Human Rights High Commissioner Louise Arbour's proposal to integrate all of the human rights treaty bodies into one unit, thereby ensuring that the interconnections between different types of rights are recognized (United Nations 2006 a & b). The creation of one unified treaty body will ensure the effective application of intersectionality within the UN. Another suggestion is to conceive of ways to hold non-state actors such as corporations and financial institutions accountable for their rights abuses, specifically women's rights abuses. Efforts to do so are already being undertaken in the UN. The Business and Human Rights' component of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, which is in the preliminary stages of making multinational corporations accountable to the international community through initiatives that bind corporations to a Global Compact of human rights standards, is a good starting point (United Nations 2009). Nonetheless, the disconnect between international financial agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF from UN human rights procedures make it impossible to alter the deleterious (gendered) effects of global financial processes.

As for the more pertinent question of the women's rights movement, does intersectional feminism rectify the exclusions promoted by equality and difference feminism? Though the terms of engagement within the women's rights movement have shifted from global sisterhood to intersectional feminism, one must ask whether the latter has truly ameliorated the shortcomings of global sisterhood.

Perhaps the encompassing notion of women's rights will always breed exclusions. Perhaps the project of applying labels and concepts as solutions is limiting, and various frameworks and strategies should be employed depending on the context. The strategic universality approach is an example of context-based solutions, for this approach recognizes diversity while critically claiming universality.

The challenge now is to see how feminism can promote the interests of diverse individuals and groups of women in a way that is cognizant of power dynamics. From the standpoint of transnational feminists within the UN, understanding group rights and economic rights is imperative . Rights-based language remains powerful and effective. In fact, though some grass-roots movements decry the overly academic nature of women's rights language, they still frequently resort to an appeal to a higher body of rights in their campaigns. Therefore, we need to expand the language of women's rights to appeal to group and economic concerns, and to promote both individual and community-based frameworks. Rights-based language can and should be used strategically to mobilize support for various causes and must also be used to strategically complement pressing human needs. Because the notion of rights remains so powerful, women's rights should be used not to create exclusions and only promote certain agendas. They should add leverage and legitimacy to a diverse range of causes that affect various groups of women worldwide.

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