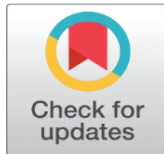
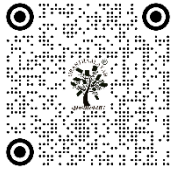


BEYOND WESTERN NARRATIVES: HOW GLOBAL SOUTH WOMEN DEFINE THEIR OWN FEMINISM

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ABSTRACT

Western liberal ideologies that universalise the experiences of white, middle-class women have historically dominated mainstream feminist discourse. This paper highlights the various, situated feminist articulations that originate out of the Global South and criticise the philosophical limitations of such narratives. This paper emphasizes the need to center the indigenous voices and methodologies within the feminist discourse by challenging the mainstream discourse. It advocates for an inclusive approach that recognises the vibrant diversity of women's issues by analysing case studies. It takes the theoretical foundations of constructivity (as an idea to construct distinctive feminist realities and disparities based movements. The Gulabi Gang in India, the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, and Ni Una Menos in Latin America are three popular feminist movements that are examined in this research as case studies that redefine feminism beyond Eurocentric presumptions, using postcolonial and de-colonial feminist theory as its central framework. The results highlight how pluralistic, inter-sectional, and deeply ingrained Global South feminism are in their cultural, ecological, and spiritual contexts. This essay promotes plural feminist genealogies that value diversity without putting it below others, as well as epistemic disobedience.

Keywords: Global South, Women, Feminism, Movements

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite being an influential and revolutionary movement, global feminism continually comes under ablaze for its inherent injustices, most notably the predominance of Western liberal paradigms that define the terminology, tactics, and objectives of gender justice. The feminist movement that arose in Euro-American societies has traditionally concentrated on discourses based on rights, such as political representation, workplace equality, reproductive rights, and suffrage. These objectives are still crucial, but they fall short of capturing the realities of women in the Global South,

whose lives are influenced by a variety of intersecting oppressions, including colonial legacies, cultural destruction, the caste and ethnic pyramids, and economic precarity.

The purpose of the paper is to move the focus of feminist discussion. Through collective memory, cultural reclamation, and grassroots action, it examines how women in the Global South define feminism. These feminisms are independent reactions to structural injustice rather than Western-style feminisms. They reflect continuous processes of de-colonisation, survival, and renewal and are rooted in regional epistemologies.

To challenge Western liberal feminism's hegemony in the global gender discourse. To investigate different feminist frameworks that are based on the realities of the Global South and also to examine feminist practicality case studies as epistemic resistance manifestations in the Global south

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

In contrast to Western models, how do women in the Global South express their feminist identities? What cultural and sociopolitical elements influence these regional feminist movements? What insights can be extracted from these movements for a future feminist movement that is more inclusive and decolonial? Employing case study methodology and a literature review, a qualitative, interpretivist approach is used. The following are some of the stages in the research process thorough analysis of scholarly works in the fields of postcolonial studies, feminist theory, and Global South scholarship. discourse analysis of feminist movements using documentary evidence, public speeches, interviews, manifestos, and reports from nonprofit organisations.

Three geographically and culturally different feminist movements—the Gulabi Gang in India, the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, and Ni Una Menos in Latin America—are the subject of this case study comparison. The above methodology highlights the voices, practices, and narratives of marginalised women as legitimate sources of feminist theory and permits in-depth engagement with cultural context.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To comprehend the various axes of power that influence women's lives in the Global South, this study draws on intersectionality, postcolonial feminism, and decolonial theory.

Postcolonial Feminism (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1988), criticises the coloniality of feminist knowledge, particularly the way that Western feminism has historically portrayed Third World women as helpless, oppressed, and lacking in agency. These academics contend that the specificity of language, history, and power needs to be given contemplation by feminism.

Decolonial Theory (Lugones, 2010; Mignolo, 2007) expands this critique to encompass the interconnected systems of race, gender, knowledge, and capitalism, which constitute the colonial matrix of power. Epistemic disobedience—the rejection of Western classifications and the restoration of indigenous, spiritual, and embodied modes of knowing—is an essential principle of decolonial feminism.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) aids in recognising that oppression is multifaceted and influenced by the interplay of caste, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality.

Feminists from the Global South frequently work within this framework and create intricate, situation-specific tactics. When combined, these frameworks create a pluriversal lens, which rejects homogenization under a single feminist ideology and embraces several, coexisting truths.

4. LITERARY EVIDENCES

Western liberal values, such as individualism, secularism, legal equality, and rational agency, are deeply valued by feminism in its most prevalent form. The pioneers of Western feminism, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Mary Wollstonecraft, cleared the path for gender equality, but they did so in a Eurocentric framework that frequently overlooked the experiences of non-Western women.

According to Chandra Mohanty, this "colonial feminism" homogenises and constructs women from the Global South as victims rather than political agents. She promotes "feminism without borders," a philosophy based on unity rather than similarity.

Gayatri Spivak presents the idea of "subalternity," highlighting the ways in which colonial knowledge structures obstruct the actual expression of the voices of the oppressed. Her thought-provoking query, "Can the subaltern speak?" is still essential to decolonial feminist research. María Lugones broadens on the concept of the "coloniality of gender," which refers to how societies that had previously had more flexible conceptions of gender and power were colonialism-induced adherence to inflexible binary gender structures.

African and Latin American indigenous and ecofeminist thinkers like Wangari Maathai, Gloria Anzaldúa, and María Lugones contend that feminism needs to address issues of land, spirituality, culture, and ancestry in alongside political rights.

The literature indicates there is more than one feminist path. Rather, there are numerous feminist genealogies that are driven by resistance, culture, and geography.

5. FEMINISM AND RELIGION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Religion and Feminism in the Global South: Regaining Sacred Authority. Religion has traditionally been framed in Western feminist discourse as fundamentally patriarchal, a force that should be opposed or disregarded in the fight for women's liberation. Despite being influenced by particular European experiences with institutional religion, this secular position has not been very applicable in the Global South, where women's lives, communities, and worldviews frequently revolve around their spiritual and religious identities. Many feminist movements in the Global South reclaim religious texts, rituals, and cosmologies as sources of agency, ethics, and empowerment, in contrast to the idea that religion is a place of oppression.

6. SPIRITUALITY OF HINDUS AND DALITS: OPPOSITION FROM BELOW

Caste hierarchies ingrained in Hinduism further complicate the relationship between feminism and religion in India. Dalit feminists like Bama Faustina, Gail Omvedt, and Cynthia Stephen use Dalit theology and Ambedkarite Buddhism to express a kind of spiritual resistance, whereas upper-caste women's movements have frequently stayed secular. This spirituality embraces the moral and philosophical principles of Buddhism and anti-caste radicalism, while rejecting Brahmanical patriarchy and focussing on dignity, justice, and collective liberation.

By taking part in festivals, rituals, and oral storytelling, Dalit women are reclaiming religious space and defying the exclusionary structures that have traditionally kept them out of temples, texts, and positions of authority. Religion is not abandoned here; rather, it is dismantled and reconstructed from the ground up.

7. ISLAMIC FEMINISM: REVISITING THE SACRED

Islamic feminists use the Qur'an and Hadith to directly advocate for women's rights within an Islamic framework in South Asia, West Asia, and North Africa. Scholars like Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Asma Barlas support *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) as a way to reinterpret Islamic texts rather than secularising feminism. They contend that rather than reflecting divine will, patriarchal interpretations are historically contingent and reflect male-dominated power structures.

Islamic feminism is especially important in nations where religion and social norms are closely entwined. For example, while negotiating authoritarian governments and conservative backlash, women's rights activists in Iran, Egypt, and Indonesia deliberately employ religious terminology to legitimise gender equality.

This type of feminism offers an effective contradiction to Western secular paradigms by emphasising spiritual authority, academic rigour, and in-depth contextual knowledge of Islam.

8. AFRO-INDEGINOUS WORLDVIEWS: THE DIVINE FEMININE

The feminine is regarded as sacred rather than inferior in many indigenous cultures in Africa and Latin America. Cosmologies that honour female deities, earth goddesses, and ancestral spirits include the Andean Pachamama cosmology in Peru and Bolivia, the Yoruba religion in Nigeria, and the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé. These traditions provide a relational, non-dualistic worldview that emphasises balance, reciprocity, and regeneration—values that are reminiscent of post-humanist and ecofeminist ideas.

In these societies, women frequently serve in spiritual capacities as ritual leaders, midwives, and healers. Although it is rarely referred to as such, their feminism is manifested through ancestral wisdom, land stewardship, and care practices. It asserts that liberation can be simultaneously spiritual, ecological, and cultural, challenging both colonial Christianity and Western feminism.

9. RELIGION AS FEMINIST PRACTICE

Faith is not always oppressive; it can be liberating, communal, and revolutionary, as demonstrated by the intersection of religion and feminism in the Global South. In these situations, feminist spirituality rejects the divisions of tradition/progress, rational/emotional, and sacred/secular. Rather, it affirms that cultural and spiritual identity can serve as a place of resistance, healing, and epistemic sovereignty.

Ignoring this aspect of feminist theory runs the risk of erasing millions of women's understandings and experiences of their struggles, a phenomenon known as epistemic erasure. Therefore, diversity in ways of knowing the divine, oneself, and the world must be accommodated by global feminist solidarity, in addition to differences in race and class.

10. CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Gulabi Gang (India)

The Gulabi Gang was created in 2006 by Sampat Pal Devi in the patriarchal hinterland of India as a radical reaction against caste oppression, gender violence, and government indifference. The movement's name comes from its members' symbolic use of lathis, or sticks, to confront corrupt officials, unresponsive police forces, and domestic abusers while wearing pink sarees. The Gulabi Gang's refusal to distinguish gender from caste and class is what sets them apart. The majority of its members are women from Dalit or lower caste backgrounds, who have traditionally been shut out of mainstream feminist groups. Their tactics, which include physical confrontation, legal pressure, and public humiliation, reveal a grassroots militancy closely linked to local knowledge, honour codes, and community ethics. The feminism of the Gang is both practical and religious. It subverts the victimising narrative and promotes a new, resilient, and strong perception of rural womanhood.

Case Study 2: Green Belt Movement (Kenya)

The Green Belt Movement, started by Wangari Maathai in 1977, is frequently used as an example of African ecofeminism. Originally intended as a reforestation initiative to counteract desertification, it swiftly transformed into a multifaceted feminist practice that addressed issues of ecological destruction, poverty, governance, and land rights.

Environmental justice and female economic empowerment were linked by Maathai's insistence that "you cannot protect the environment unless you empower people." In the process of developing the ability to manage natural resources, grow nurseries, and plant trees, women gained visibility and autonomy. Kikuyu cosmology, which regards the feminine and the land as sacred, serves as the foundation for the movement. This spiritual ecology opposes the neoliberal commodification of nature and colonial extractivism. Her symbolic role as a woman who challenges authority was further reinforced by her arrest and state persecution. In addition to restoring forests, the Green Belt Movement gave African women their political and moral voice back.

Case Study 3: Ni Una Menos (Latin America)

The song Ni Una Menos, or "Not One Less," was born in Argentina after 14-year-old Chiara Páez was brutally murdered in 2015. It quickly spread throughout Latin America as a regional movement against state neglect, gender violence, and femicide.

This movement stands out for its multimodal activism, which integrates legal reform campaigns, art activism, transnational coalitions, digital organising, and street protests. It encompasses Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and working-class communities and is intersectional and cross-generational. Ni Una Menos criticises neoliberal economic systems that marginalise women and feminised labour, as well as patriarchal violence. It takes a decolonial feminist stance, acknowledging the ways in which the region's history of colonialism and tyranny has influenced gendered violence. Grief is reframed into political action by the movement's insistence on visibility, mourning, and rage as feminist tactics. It reclaims the public square as a site of collective defiance and feminist memory rather than fear.

11. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The three case studies show that Global South feminist practice is both coming together and going apart:

All three advocate against the main ideas of Western feminism by focussing on how different types of oppression, like caste, colonisation, ecology, and economic injustice, affect people in different ways. Gulabi Gang is based on direct action and being aware of caste when you fight. Feminism, environmental conservation, and indigenous spirituality are all incorporated into the Green Belt Movement. Ni Una Menos uses art, media, and large groups of people to fight structural violence. Individuals believe in empowering people as a group, epistemic sovereignty, and changing the way things are set up. They change the definition of feminism to mean a movement that is alive and breathing, with local effects and global effects.

12. CONCLUSION

Feminism serves as an echo nevertheless a force in the Global South. A force moulded by factories and forests, by borderlines and bloodlines, by generational hope and ancestral wrath. It is creating its own paradigms rather than attempting to fit into Western ones. This study advocates for a radical epistemic change: to engage without erasing, to learn without translating, and to listen without framing. Only then can global feminism transform into a polyphony that is fierce, plural, and just rather than a hierarchy of voices.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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