

CAN WE SPEAK OF GLOBAL FEMINISM?

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Abstract

This paper attempts to answer the question whether globalization that blurs the state's boundaries can unite feminist movement to be a global feminism. The goal is to eliminate all the differences and diversities that obstruct women in the West and women in the South, such as the wealth issue, the western women perspective, the commonality and the colonialism in the third/ south/ countries. Used post-colonialism feminism approach, this paper argues the attempt to unite all the differences and diversities that lie between women in the West and women in the South obstructed by the sharp of live differentiations and history that influenced them.

Key words: *globalization, global feminism, wealth issue, western women perspective, commonality, colonialism, post-colonialism.*

Abstrak

Tulisan ini mencoba menjawab pertanyaan apakah globalisasi yang mengaburkan batas-batas teritory negara mampu mempersatukan gerakan feminis menjadi sebuah gerakan global yang menghilangkan semua perbedaan-perbedaan yang menghambat seperti isu kesejahteraan, isu, bekas tanah jajahan dan pandangan barat terhadap perempuan di negara bekas jajahan/ dunia ketiga/ selatan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan feminism post-colonial, tulisan ini berargumen bahwa upaya untuk menyatukan semua perbedaan yang ada terutama yang berkaitan dengan perempuan yang berada di negara bekas jajahan menimbulkan beberapa hambatan yang berkaitan dengan kehidupan perempuan dinegara jajahan dan kehidupan perempuan yang berada di negara maju/ barat.

Kata kunci: *activist feminist, feminist global, negara berkembang, negara maju, perbedaan dan persamaan.*

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, feminism has shaped its movement to be a global dimension where the goal to form single movement become the target.¹ It is because the influence of the globalization that gave immense effect to feminism activists to reformulate its action in

which it could unite all the differences and the similarity that women have whether they are in developing countries or developed countries. Further, they said that both men and women do the practice of feminism both in the wider institutional context both governmental and non-governmental organizations. As Moghadam argues that the changing orientation and nature of feminism from national context to international context started in the mid of 1980s, this indicated by the UN world women conference which was held in Nairobi, Kenya. UN has a significant role in promoting women activities throughout the

¹ M. M. Feree and A. M. Tripp, 'Global feminism: transnational women's activism, organizing, and human rights', New York University Press, New York and London, 2006, pp. vii-ix.

world in the early inception. It was due to the connection between UN programs and women's issues, for instance, poverty, illiteracy, and famine. Those issues at the same time promoted women's problems, particularly in the developing world.² During the preparation of this conference, the issues of how to bridge the difference in ideology and make consensus on the issues had emerged. These issues are questioned by new types of women's organization.³ She also maintains that there were three situations in which influence the shift of feminism movement to global; first is the development of economic-political issues within countries and regional; second is the transition of economic practice from Keynesian to neoliberal economic, and the last is the emerging of many fundamentalist women's movements. These all development according to Moghaddam has significantly influenced and contributed to the different thoughts in how to re-organize the movement considering the issue of women in the developing and developed world.

As a result of this global dimension is the formation of few women's transnational feminists' networks in which united women from developing and developed countries to take action on problems relating to social-economic and patriarchal issues. Those networks included Development Alternatives with Women for a new Era (DAWN), Women in Development Europe (WIDE), Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML), and the Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI).⁴ The lists of global networks are multiply when in the 1990s the Women's environment and development Organization (WEDO) and the Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region (AWMR) joined the global feminist network.⁵

Furthermore, Feminist, as a movement, always attached to the idea of conformity and rights. On the other hand, feminist not a monolithic discourse that considers historical and ideological differences. The relationship between the feminists based on economic politics conditions that different in the identity, the workload and the value of feminists themselves in the community in

which it resides. Term such as "third world women" in the study of women represents homogeneous racial and sexual differences. Model transnational shifted from an analysis of differences and post colonialism homogeneous figures, encouraging the interdisciplinary studies are not even and make it more complicated in relation between women in different part of the world. It highlights different needs and different agendas in many cultures and communities that make it even more complicated in the context of state.⁶

Post-colonial feminist approach

This paper uses postcolonial feminism approach in international relations. This approach is used to show the difference between feminism relations in the west and feminism in the south and to argue whether global feminism can eliminate all the differences and diversity between them. The base principle of this approach is the way western feminism constructed knowledge about non-western women. Postcolonial Feminism sees the false generalization of knowledge which based on the privileged live of Western white women. Moreover, post-colonialism feminism emphasized on the assumption of western feminism that said all women have a similar need of emancipation whereas it is very different. Postcolonialism feminism challenges the portrayal of western women on women who live in the south that is poor, uneducated, victimized. About the issue, the writer will use this approach to see if it can unite all the differences and the similarity of women in the developing world and developed world. Postcolonialism feminism approach can explain why talking about global feminism is impossible. Chandra Mohanty, the postcolonial feminist activist, criticized Western feminism that treating women as a homogenous which does not recognize the differences based on their culture, geographical location, race and social class.⁷

This paper will answer research questions that have raised that are questioning the ability of this global feminism to exist, and it could be the single medium to formulate women gender problems worldwide, including eliminating all the differences and diversities they have.

² J. Steans, 'Gender and international relation', Polity, United Kingdom, 2006, p. 93.

³ V. M. Moghaddam, 'Globalizing women: transnational feminist networks', The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 2005, pp. 6-7

⁴ V. M. Moghaddam, p. 8

⁵ V. M. Moghaddam, p. 8

⁶ E. H. Chowdhury, 'Locating global feminism: Braiding US women of colour and transnational feminists', Cultural Dynamics, 21(1), p. 55.

⁷ J.A. Tickner and L. Sjoberg, Postcolonial Feminism, in T. Dunn, M. Kurki, and S. Smith, International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity, 3 edn, p. 205-206.

Feminism and Women Movement: a way to understand global feminism

There are some authors separating between feminists and women movement. This different meaning is important to know because to continue making an argument about global feminism; it seems important to know whether both of words above have the same meaning and connotation. As Ferree argues that women movement should not put at the same definition as feminist, it is because, implicitly, it has slightly different meaning. Women movement, according to her, is formed by the constituency of the organization in which it consists of women gender, including mother, sister, and daughters, and because of this reason, it formed distinctive social movement group. On the other hand, this women movement is also not significantly having a gendered goal but rather focus on the issue of peace, or social justice. Similarly, Antrobus argues that many women's organization particularly which focus on the traditional problems and have a strong advocacy towards women's issues is not necessarily identified themselves as feminists.⁸ Only these recent years, the goal and issue that is fought by these kinds of organizations changed to more gendered issues.⁹ Furthermore, Basu categorized women's movement into three broad tendencies;¹⁰ first is regarding silence and omission. It can be seen that most of the story about women merely talking about women in the western countries and ignoring women issue in the third world; second is that there is an opinion which categorized women movements as a result/ product of development/ modernization. Some scholars such as Anthony Dworkin and Diane Margolis argues that women movements have a correlation with the modernization in which they form themselves into the middle class. This condition according to them becomes important to women movements, but all part of places where women movement exists had experienced the middle-class condition. For example in India women movements is characterized by the emerging of poor women; the third is there is a tendency to say that women worldwide has experienced the same thing. This condition negated the difference that

⁸ P. Antrobus, 'The global women's movement: origins, issues and strategies', Zed Book Ltd, London, New York, 2004, p. 13.

⁹ M. M. Ferree and A. M. Tripp, p. 6.

¹⁰ A. Basu, 'The challenge of local feminism: women movements in global perspective (ed.)', Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1995, pp. 1-2.

happened between women in the industrialized countries and women in the developing countries. This condition is also impossible to unity those difference.

While feminism is well known with its practice to eliminate the subordination happens between men and women. The issue of inequality and power in social, political structure, it also defines by its knowledge, beliefs, and theory that constructed its movement in which it may take place inside in any kinds of organizations forms, including women movements. The fundamental issue that may make it different is the aim of feminism to challenge all forms of unequal gender relation between men and women.¹¹ To reach those goals, feminists argue that gender perspective is useful in three ways that are conceptually for understanding what global politics means; second is empirically for identifying realities, knowing causes, and predicting outcomes; and the third is normatively for disseminating positive change and value.¹² A similar definition wrote by Hannam; she defines feminism as a set of ideas which challenges the social and political structure in which put women in unlucky condition.¹³ According to Hannam, that condition caused by the social construction that gives more benefit to men, this is because of the strong influence of patriarchal, particularly in the developing world. Furthermore, Clough argues that feminism phenomenon nowadays is more complex. It is because the issues are more about public discourse such as the issue of freedom, sexual abuse, domestic violence, health care, education, crime, environment, and children.¹⁴

Global Feminism: the challenge to moving to a new space

When the question of can we speak of global feminism is asked, the good answer is probably no for the following reasons. This based on the history of global feminism in which can be obtained through review the long struggle and

¹¹ M. M. Ferree and A. M. Tripp, p. 7.

¹² L. Sjoberg and J. A. Tickner, 'International relation through feminist lenses', in *Feminism and international relation; conversation about the past, present, and future* (ed), Routledge, London and New York, 2011, p. 11.

¹³ J. Hannam, 'Feminism', Pearson Education Limited, Great Britain, London, 2012, p. 7.

¹⁴ P. T. Clough, 'Feminist thought', Blackwell, Oxford UK and Cambridge USA, 1994, p. viiii

stories from a different part of this world since the 1940s.¹⁵ As Smith maintains, in the past fifty years the activity of feminism should be considered as global. There are collections of histories of women in various contexts from different countries like the issue of imperialism and nationalism in Asia and Africa region. The issue of working condition in Korea, the issue of masculinity domination in democracy life in Eastern Europe, and the issue of how to get better life for their family life and prevent adverse effect of abuse on women.¹⁶ Relating to the term 'global,' Tong argues that that is a term that expressed the life condition of women who lived in the developing world are much worse than women who lived in the developed world.¹⁷ Further, she maintains that this has challenged the privilege of women in the developed world to think that what they experienced in their life at this moment is so different with women in the third world. On the other words, women in the third world should sacrifice their life to get the privilege. Also, the result of post-industrial development was uneven in the most countries such as South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Thailand. Women in these countries were promised by the manufacturing to give a high salary but the reality they should work harder and sweated than they thought. In the recent decade, most of the manufacturing firms that are operating in host countries had provided an unequal opportunity for women. It was because they only recruited men not women as their workers; this happens in African, particularly in agricultural sectors. Antrobus defines Another meaning of 'global'; she explains that the term of global is an effort to minimize the cultural difference that women in worldwide have regarding the difference in race, national boundaries, cultural, religion, race, ethnicity, and political affiliation which led to sharp differentiation.¹⁸ As a consequence, women position was undermined by this condition.¹⁹

Wealth Issue

Despite those conditions above, the important issue that has significantly emphasized in which putting more gap on global feminism

¹⁵ B. G. Smith, 'Global feminism since 1945: rewriting histories (ed.)', Routledge, London and New York, 2000, pp. 1-8.

¹⁶ B. G. Smith, p. 2

¹⁷ R. Tong, 'Feminist thought 3 ed.', Westview Press, America, 2009, p. 8

¹⁸ P. Antrobus, p. 1

¹⁹ B. G. Smith, p. 5

issue was the issue of wealth. It is a reality that women are in poor condition whether they live in "south" or "north." However, the term of poor is very different when it confronted by the women who lived in the South including Africa, the Asian countries, Latin America. This condition is because women in the South received the adverse effect of male domination on agricultural sectors; women also have less access to advanced medical treatment which could save their lives; they were also prone to the epidemic and dangerous disease. For example in Bangladesh women generally, lives in poor condition. it happens because the social structure put Bangladeshi women in a disadvantaged position where women are very dependent on men in term of living hood.²⁰ Similar condition happened in Africa, particularly towards women in the rural area. Most of them depend on their life on a farm in which their work as a farmer. However, their position as a farmer undermined by the development project which they excluded from being as workers.²¹ Conversely, women in the North have very different issues with those in the south. They asked more of getting a greater opportunity to public spaces and economic, issue of lesbian and bisexual, an environmental issue and freedom of sexual harassment.²² Women in the west particularly from United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand had their power to control their right to their reproduction and freedom from sexual assault or any violence because men will get punish for it.²³ This different side of issues which derived from two sides of the world is indicating that global feminism is not an easy movement to uniting all the difference that they have.

Colonialism

The deeply analyzing of condition on women in the south is described succinctly by Mohanty.²⁴ She argues that the condition of

²⁰ A. Basu, pp. 89-90.

²¹ B. O'Laughin, 'A bigger piece of a very small pie: intrahousehold resource allocation and poverty reduction in Africa', in *Gender Myths & Feminist Fable: the struggle for interpretative power in gender and development*, Blackwell Publishing, Australia, 2008, pp. 21-22.

²² B. G. Smith, pp. 6-7

²³ C. Bulbeck, 'Re-orienting western feminisms: women's diversity in a postcolonial world', Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, Australia, 1998, p. 20.

²⁴ C. T. Mohanty, 'Feminist without boarder', Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, pp. 17-18.

women in the South based on its knowledge of colonialism. This term has created varieties of a phenomenon which caused the construction of domination relating to suppression towards women. The Marxist theory could explain the why this happened; colonialism and imperialism in classic means opening and expand trade overseas for gaining much profit by reducing expenses. For example purchase cheaper slaves from South countries. In the modern era colonialism implicitly means the existence of multinational cooperation that operated in the third world where in practice they hired a worker and then pay them with very low salary. Colonialism itself is a part of the domination of military forces and political arrogance.²⁵

Furthermore, Mohanty maintains that colonial states had relation with the knowledge and organization that connected it with class/caste, racial, and sexual. There are three aspects that had been used by imperial powers to rule their colonies. First is white masculine became the centre of ideological construction in which corresponding it to the concept of racism and sexual towards the colonized people. Second is colonial institutions and politics had influenced the middle-class culture towards colonized people, and the third is National liberation movements caused the rise of feminism political movement on historical context of colonist.²⁶ As Syed and Ali argue that there is such mistrust of women in the developing countries towards women from the West regarding gender equality and changing issues that offered by them. It relates to the role that alleged by Western women in colonial agenda.²⁷ Also, Rajan explains that colonialism may be only a history of post-colonial countries in which it had affected severely on social, politics, economy, and cultural of ex-colonized people at present.²⁸ Rajan gives an example of the colonial legacy that had happened in India. The legacy that is known as a parliamentary system, the railways, and English language, often becomes a causal

to fix the problems that caused by the colonist such as communalism, environmental effects, and the unrepresentative bureaucracy where the system of personal law still refers to colonial administration.²⁹

Under western eye

Colonialism, on the other hand, has simultaneously emerged the issue of 'under the western eye.' This term is used to describe the situation on how women in the South/ the third world see women from the western. This perspective based on of being colonized for been long time; the image that comes to mind is those western women who come to them are also representative or at least having relation with the colonists. As Smith argues that imperialism had given privilege to the 'whiteness' just as 'maleness,'³⁰ non-western women from the West, for instance, India, and Egypt have identified their selves as feminists that have knowledge of democracy, individual freedom, and the free market. However, they are preferred not to imitate what feminist in the West did; they choose to be more authentic against the imperialist power. Because of that, women in the developing world connected feminism from the west as women who are only fighting for middle-class interest, and they believe that those issues do not fix them well. This situation may well describe as feminist and myth in the developing countries.³¹ It is because it seems that feminists knowledge become fragmentized when facing issues in the developing world. As Mohanty argues that feminists theory and political interest should not ignore the complex connection between developed and developing world economy; it is because it ties all the women around the world. Further, she maintains that it is important to draw international feminists' link to break the silence that happened towards women in the third world by giving more attention to significant explanation and analysis in their writing. By doing this, it could minimize the hegemony of western feminist perspective upon women in the developing countries.³² Also, western feminists discourse constituted women into categories that are kinship, legal, and other

²⁵ C. Bulbeck, 'Re-orienting western feminisms: women's diversity in a postcolonial world', Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, Australia, 1998, pp. 18-19.

²⁶ C. T. Mohanty, p. 58

²⁷ J. Syed and F. Ali, 'The white women's burden: from colonial civilization to third world development', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2011, pp. 349-351.

²⁸ R. S. Rajan, 'Real and imagined women: Gender, culture, and postcolonial', Routledge, London and New York, 1993, pp. 6-7.

²⁹ R. S. Rajan, p. 7.

³⁰ B. G. Smith, p. 7

³¹ A. Cornwall, E. Harrison, and A. Whitehead, 'Gender Myths and feminist fables: the struggle for interpretive power in gender and development', Blackwell Publishing, Australia, 2008, pp. 4-5.

³² C. T. Mohanty, pp. 19-21.

structures, this defining woman in the third world are outside of the social structure. It based on the way they constituted the structures that experienced by them which categorized women position into 'developed' and 'developing' countries.³³ One reason why women in the third world consider feminist as bourgeois and Western is because of the belief, inspiration, origins, and the irrelevance issues that they bring to the third world. This situation made women in the developing countries considered that feminism associated with an ideology, strategy, and approach.³⁴ To show their opposition towards feminist, women in the third world found symbols as a women's power in post-colonial context. For example, women in Kenya singing and dancing to share their experience, women in India found women symbol of power in the cycle of rituals, and in the Philippines, women found their symbol of power through the story of the *baby* which women are told that they were born separately to men. It means that they symbolically have right on their body so to their destiny.

Commonality

Another problem is relating to commonality. It may be true to say that global feminism success to organize women's organization by building up transnational networking to achieve feminists' goal in gender equality particularly relating to power relation. However, it seems that it is hard to be true when looking at the complexity issues that women in the third world have comparing to issues of women in the first world. As Basu argues, the division among women is so massive and cannot be categorized as a commonality. The difference based on nationality, race, class, religion, region, language and sexual orientation.³⁵ These divisions, according to Basu are the basis of the sameness of feminist movement which reflected the bias of ethnocentric and middle-class women in the first world. This condition caused resentment among women in the third world and caused deep division ever. Further, Basu maintains that a better relationship could happen between them when this global feminist movement abandoned the idea of sameness and commonality, when this happen it could lead to respecting each other. This situation once happened in UN conference in Mexico City in 1975 and Copenhagen in 1980.³⁶

³³ C. T. Mohanty, p. 40.

³⁴ A. Basu, p. 7

³⁵ A. Basu, p. 3.

³⁶ A. Basu, p. 3.

Another argument from Tong says that it is a major challenge for a feminist to unify all of the difference and diversity that exists in the women's world from a different part of the world.³⁷ This argument supported by Postmodern Feminists which says that women cannot be one that reflected the feminists' knowledge and thoughts. It is because it is difficult to fight women oppression if there are no classes, groups, and collectivity. Furthermore, Rajan maintains that the difficult part for a feminist is to enter the literary as a way to get trust from women situation. First showed by Rose (cited on Rajan's book) that the wider connection with literacy would open the possibility to enter the historical and political critics relating to class, religion, race, language, sexual difference.³⁸ The challenge also comes from fundamentalist groups such ' jihad' and ' Mc World' which related to tribal, religious and national groups. These groups have the intention to do hegemony on capital and western norms. It said that such groups have highly patriarchal agendas.³⁹ These issues have been trying to overcome by transnational feminist through two ways. First is action against neoliberal cooperation and second is against patriarchal nationalism and fundamentalist movements.

Moreover, global feminism recognized the difference that all women around the world have. It is indicated by they claim that women indeed cannot work together *as true equals* as long as they understand the difference that they have. Audre Lorde gives an example that if a woman enters one room which consisted of many women from worldwide, she would probably try hard to lower the difference intensity that she has towards other women. This example according to Lorde is treating the idea of sisterhood and commonality and show the inability of feminists to deal with all the difference that women have. For example; in Islam women wearing hijab which makes them having a different perspective regarding people who do not wear it;⁴⁰ the issue of women in poverty in Latin America reported more than men;⁴¹ which is stated in the Beijing Platform for Action in

³⁷ R. Tong, p. 9

³⁸ R. S. Rajan, p. 118

³⁹ V. M. Moghadam, pp. 142-143

⁴⁰ See T. F. Ruby, ' Listening to the voices of hijab', Women's Studies International Forum, Elsevier, 29, 2006, pp. 1-5

⁴¹ M. Medelros and J. Costa, ' Is there a feminization of poverty in Latin America?', World Development, Elsevier, 2008, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 115-127.

1995. The issue of marriage law in Kenya⁴² where culture determines with whom a Kenya woman should marry. And another example of early marriage in the region of Sub African Sahara, a girl should marry early after menstruation as a symbol of family honor because if she does not marry, she may dishonor her family. It causes a big social effect.⁴³ Similarly, as Barungi argues, since 20 years of the beginning of the international commitment to globalizing the issue of reducing gender equality, the hard effort has been made by a feminist to against the inequality towards women. Further, she maintains that one urgent thing that should not be forgotten is that the polarization between women in the south and women in the west. This situation has been increasingly true in the international level, particularly in the case of Uganda.⁴⁴ .As a result, this could lead to a problem to build up an alliance for a better world.⁴⁵

Recommendations

Responding to all the challenges regarding global feminism, some recommendations have been offered to deal with the diversification of international women's movements. The gap between women in the south/ the third world/ developing countries and women in the west/ north/ the first countries are significantly build up international linkage among women. As Tripp argues that when international support gained, it is not always reflected the deeper understanding of other women movements, local contexts, and needs.⁴⁶ Tripp suggests four recommendations regarding global feminism. Firstly, outside actors should consider local actors sensitive issue relating they condition, local laws, religious practice, and cultural sensitivities. It is because local actors have much legitimate power than outsiders, consulting any action to them is important.⁴⁷ Secondly, outside actors should consider and select an issue

to which it reflects local need. In reality, outsiders tend to choose an issue that is sensational which is not reflecting local priority.⁴⁸ Thirdly, it cannot be denied that women advocates who live in the north have the power to influence the governments' decision makers that affect women worldwide. They can influence their government policy through foreign affairs, immigration, military intervention, UN policy makers, foreign aids, and another opportunity that they have which affects women globally.⁴⁹ And the final is international actors, particularly in the north, should engage more with an international issue regarding women gender equality around the world but should not put behind their needs too.⁵⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, to uniting all women worldwide through the idea of global feminism seems facing some obstacles regarding the sharp differentiation among women in the developing countries and developed countries. As this essay has argued that there are four aspects which still need to study more, first is the issue of wealth. Most women worldwide, particularly who live in the developing countries have lived in this unequal division of wealth. Second is the issue of colonial. This issue has shaped the perspective of women in the south towards women in the developed countries. The third is the issue of white westerners. It relates with the privilege to women who have white skin compared to women who have other colors. And the last is a commonality. It is difficult for women worldwide to be generalized common in all aspects, it is because women are different depends on where they lived, what they religion are, in what culture they lived, and in what part of the world they lived. Regarding those issues above, Tripp suggests four recommendations. First, outsiders should consider local sensitive issue. Second, outsiders should select issues that reflect local needs. Third, women feminists who lived in developed countries have an opportunity to influence their government policy which affects women worldwide, and fourth, women feminists from developed countries should not put behind their priority while improving other women interest.

⁴² See B. L. Shadle, 'Bridewealth and female consent: marriage dispute in African courts, Gusiland, Kenya,' *Journal of African History*, vol. 44, 2003, pp. 241-262.

⁴³ See B. S. Mensch, M. J. Grant and A. K. Blanc, 'The changing context of sexual initiation in Sub- Sahara Africa', *Population and Development Review*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2006, pp. 699-702.

⁴⁴ B. M. Barungi, 'Uganda feminism: political rhetoric or reality', *Women's Studies International*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1999, pp. 435-437.

⁴⁵ R. Tong, p. 217

⁴⁶ A. M. Tripp,

⁴⁷ A. M. Tripp, p. 306

⁴⁸ A. M. Tripp, p. 308

⁴⁹ A. M. Tripp, p. 310

⁵⁰ A. M. Tripp, pp. 310-311

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