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Outsourcing Patriarchy To and Within India: Intersectional and Decolonial Gender Politics Across Scales

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Abstract

Young caste-class privileged gender justice workers in Delhi navigate several relations of power – with Euro-American feminisms, and with less privileged feminisms and recipients of development work within India. Their experiences reveal that decolonial politics in India cannot be conceptualized without consideration of other axes of inequality including caste and religion. There is thus a need to broaden decolonial and intersectional analyses to include multiple spatial scales, from the transnational to the most granular interpretations of the local. By bringing intersectional analyses into greater dialogue with postcolonial feminist theory, this paper demonstrates that patterns of “outsourcing patriarchy” are observable at many scales, and that these patterns at different scales are co-produced, each in turn shaping the other. Such a framework also explains how young caste-class privileged gender justice workers outsource patriarchy and reproduce “mainstream” feminisms even as they seek to avoid doing so.

Keywords

feminism, decolonization, postcolonialism, intersectionality, development, youth

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On 14 February 2015, my research associate, Rashmi, and I met at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, which is famous for its leftist politics. Students were milling around at the designated meeting spot, sipping tea, making posters and singing protest songs. After some time, we boarded buses to travel to the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, the office of a Hindu nationalist organization, which had threatened to marry off any unwed couples they came across on Valentine's Day. Protestors planned to present the Hindu Mahasabha with a number of "struggling" – same-sex and inter-caste – couples, dressed in wedding finery and ready to take up the offer of a free marriage. The police were out in force and they quickly bundled protestors onto buses and off to a nearby police station. The protest – the performance of a wedding – continued there, as the police looked on with amusement.

After running away from the police, I gathered with others who had been at the protest and chatted to Veena. In her late 30s, she was slightly older than the gender justice workers who were the focus of my postdoctoral research. She was a member of a non-funded feminist collective that has worked for decades on domestic violence. I asked Veena if she was going to an event happening nearby later that day, which I will call "Dance Against Violence". I expected the answer would be yes. The event was part of a worldwide campaign to end violence against women. But Veena said no. The event was too corporate and commercial for her. When I got to Dance Against Violence (DAV), I was struck by the contrast between the handmade placards of the previous protest and this event's profusion of pink ribbons, badges, caps and t-shirts.

The day before these events, I had interviewed a young woman who organizes DAV. Pari was aware of the criticisms: "it's been shredded to bits by everybody in Delhi". She talked about the fact that the campaign was founded by an American woman and happens on Valentine's Day. People have said to her, "Why can't we have our local campaigns about Savitribai Phule [a 19th century social reformer] or someone else?". People have also told Pari that the event's use of dance as a form of protest is "some sort of a Western ideology". She points to the long history of dance in India. For her, dancing on the streets is about challenging pressures to be "traditional girls" and "challenging the idea that boys who dance are gay". She complained that although DAV involves weeks of events in "community" (a word used to designate poor and marginalised neighbourhoods), and many people from "community" participate in the final event, the media always choose images of young upper middle-class people such as herself dancing, creating the impression that it is an elite form of feminism. Part of Pari's motivation for organising the first Delhi DAV event was to create opportunities for young people who did not work in NGOs to engage in gender activism. But for other participants, DAV "has become a very NGOized thing" and performs a spectacle of "freedom from tradition" that resonates more with Delhi's urban elite and Euro-American feminists than with the majority of the city's population.

This paper explores how young middle-class gender justice workers in Delhi negotiate complex and intersecting power relations as they think through who the agents and subjects of gender justice work should rightfully be, as well as what form their work should take. I describe these young people as “gender justice workers” rather than as feminists or members of the women’s movement because not all identified as feminists, were women or saw themselves as part of the women’s movement. All were involved in activities that aimed to promote gender equality, however, predominantly as activists or NGO professionals. I argue that their experiences of being privileged within India but marginalized in relation to Euro-American feminisms demonstrate the need to broaden both intersectional and decolonial analyses to include multiple spatial scales, from the transnational to the most granular interpretations of the local.

This call for a multi-scalar approach to decolonial politics resonates with Nishant Upadhyay’s (2020: 476) recent assertion that due to the intersections of colonialism and Brahmanical (upper caste Hindu) supremacy, “decolonization can only be imagined if anti-caste praxis is centred in all liberation struggles”. Upadhyay describes how members of the Hindu Right celebrate the 2018 decriminalization of homosexuality in India as an act of decolonization in a manner that propagates casteist, Islamophobic, and nationalist agendas. Like Upadhyay, I argue that decolonial politics in India cannot be conceptualized without consideration of other axes of inequality including caste and religion. However, the politics of the young people who participated in my research were very different to those described by Upadhyay. Some young people I spoke to openly espoused decolonial politics whereas others did not, and while a few did uncritically reproduce casteist and Islamophobic logics in their assumptions about the locus of patriarchy, most aspired to forms of gender justice work that challenged caste, religious and other hierarchies. My aim in this paper, then, is not to expose the decolonial critiques of young gender justice workers in Delhi as limited in some way, but rather to demonstrate that viewing decolonial politics through the lens of a single scalar frame (a relation between India and Euro-America) obscures the ways in which individuals have to navigate different geographies of power, sometimes from a position of the colonized and sometimes from a position of privilege.

Just as a decolonial analysis is incomplete without consideration of dimensions of inequality within the nation, so too intersectional analysis is incomplete without consideration of the transnational. The relevance of the concept of intersectionality within India is contested, however. The term was first used by critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw (2013) in 1989 but described something that women of colour activists in the United States had been talking about for many years – the intersecting and co-constructing nature of different systems of inequality and oppression. Nivedita Menon (2015: 13) argues that the use of the concept in India reflects a “tendency when studying the ‘non-West’ ... to test the

applicability of theory developed through ‘Western’ experience, rather than entering into the unfamiliar conceptual field opened up by thinkers and activists in the former”. According to Menon, “woman” was never understood in India as a monolithic pre-existing category uncomplicated by caste, class and religion. Deploying “intersectionality” in this context obscures this history of thought, and can be depoliticizing, particularly within internationally funded development work.

Mary John (2015) disagrees. She argues that single-axis thinking, that is, thinking in terms of a single axis of oppression such as gender or caste or religion alone, rather than in terms of how these structures of oppression intersect, has been a problem in the Indian context too, and the intersectionality frame is useful in highlighting this. Arya and Rathore (2019) make similar arguments, asserting the relevance of intersectionality for understanding the patriarchal practices of Dalit (communities against whom untouchability has been practiced) politics, and the ways India’s feminist movement has perpetuated the dominance of Brahmins (the highest caste or varna in Hinduism) and the oppression of Dalits and Bahujans (marginalised castes who are not Dalit). Sharmila Rege (2000: 495) describes intersectionality as a “powerful resource” in a paper on the meaning of a Dalit feminist standpoint, and Anandhi S (2013) uses the term to describe caste patriarchy among Dalits in rural Tamil Nadu. The work of these scholars is situated within anti-caste feminisms that critique a discourse of liberal feminism that emerged in late-colonial India and constructs “woman” as a neutral and unmarked universal citizen (Sinha 2000). Further, their uses of “intersectionality” are consistent with a long history of dialogue between Dalit and Black communities (Slate 2012).

The need for intersectional approaches to feminism is also advocated by a number of young Bahujan activists online (Dhanraj et al. 2015; Kandukuri 2019). Intersectionality was central to the way many young people I spoke to conceptualized their work. Indeed, one of the founding members of a feminist student movement that I call Azaadi went so far as to declare, “Intersectionality is my fall back for everything”. Many participants were aware of the origins of the concept of intersectionality among women of colour feminists in the United States and saw parallels between marginalization vis-à-vis White feminisms in both contexts. Accordingly, this paper describes how young people in Delhi put this theory into practice.

Recently, scholars have pointed out that intersectional analyses have primarily focused on dimensions of inequality *within* the nation-state. Such an approach does not adequately account for the fact that people may experience very different intersections of power and oppression as they move between nations or engage with others beyond their national borders (Mahler et al. 2015; Purkayastha 2010). An approach to intersectionality focused within the nation-state also does not adequately account for the role of transnational processes (such as European colonialism and neoliberal globalisation) in mutually

constituting and transforming categories of race, ethnicity, sexuality, culture, nation, and gender (Patil 2013: 848). There is therefore a need for an approach to intersectionality that considers relations of power and oppression across multiple spatial scales.

Conceptual tools for a multi-scalar approach to intersectionality and decoloniality can be found in the work of feminist geographers and postcolonial feminists. They call for grounded, particularized, contextual studies at the local scale “that do not assume that explanation lies only at this level” and instead link with global economic and political frameworks (Nagar et al. 2002: 280, see also Hyndman 2004; Mohanty 2003). Such studies are relational – they attend to the connections and interdependencies between spatial scales rather than constructing binaries between them (Nagar et al. 2002: 259). These studies are also useful in explaining that scale is not something that empirically exists – there are no purely local, national or transnational spaces – but rather an analytical frame that is useful to understanding power dynamics.

In developing an argument for intersectional and decolonial analyses that cut across scales, I draw particularly on the postcolonial feminist concept of “outsourcing patriarchy”. The concerns of this body of work are, first, that women in the Global South are portrayed as a homogeneously passive and victimised group in need of saving (Mohanty 1988), and, second, that violence against women is explained in terms of patriarchal culture and social structures in the Global South but in terms of individual social deviants when perpetrated by middle-class White Western men (Narayan 2013). It is this that leads Inderpal Grewal (2013: 2) to argue that “the concept of patriarchy has been outsourced from the USA and Europe to do its messy work elsewhere”. Scholars have also considered how these gendered Orientalisms are being reworked in the context of the increasing focus on girls as the solution in development initiatives, exemplified in a prominent Nike campaign “The Girl Effect”. In these campaigns, the construction of girls in the Global South as “girls to be empowered” enables girls in the Global North to express their “girl power” (Sensoy and Marshall 2010; Switzer 2013). Although the label intersectionality is not often used in this body of literature, these outsourcings are clearly examples of gender politics intersecting with transborder constructions of racial and cultural hierarchy (Patil 2013: 849). Similar patterns of outsourcing patriarchy are evident in some aspects of gender justice work in Delhi when upper middle-class agents of development attach greatest legitimacy to work with the poor, rural and otherwise marginalised subjects of development.

What do we learn when we consider the decolonial politics of young gender justice workers in Delhi alongside their efforts to address intra-national relations of power and oppression? This multi-scalar approach to intersectional and decolonial analysis reveals that: (1) patterns of outsourcing at transnational and intra-national scales are intricately intertwined and co-produced; (2) the dynamics of outsourcing patriarchy can be produced at infinitely

finer or more granular “local” scales; and (3) avoiding outsourcing patriarchy can, paradoxically, result in forms of gender justice work that reproduce “mainstream” feminisms. In the following section, I provide a history of issues of intersectionality and decoloniality within the Indian women’s movement and outline my research methods. Thereafter, this paper is divided into three ethnographic sections, each of which illustrates one of my three arguments: the first a critique of outsourcing patriarchy to Delhi, the second examples of outsourcing patriarchy within Delhi, and the third reflections on efforts to avoid outsourcing patriarchy in Delhi.

Context

The most popular narrative of the post-Independence Indian women’s movement is one of distinct decades: the 1970s and 1980s as a golden age of grassroots consciousness-raising and political activism; the 1990s as a decade of institutionalization as autonomous women’s organizations morphed into NGOs, universities embraced Women’s Studies, and governments created Women and Child Development departments; and the 2000s as a time of neoliberalism in which governments colluded with a development industry dominated by Western donors to “empower” women to find their own solutions to patriarchy and poverty. According to this narrative, young people have become “gender professionals”, devoid of the radicalism and feminist politics that motivated generations before them (Menon 2007; Tharu and Niranjana 1994).

This narrative misrepresents the feminisms and politics of young people. Srila Roy (2011: 598) has shown that young people working in feminist NGOs in India challenge the dichotomy between passion and professionalism implied in the above narrative. Their work is “activist *and* institutionalized ... professionalized but not corporatized”. The gender work of young people is also far from monolithic. Some young people are engaged in forms of gender justice work that are, consistent with the dominant narrative, explicitly depoliticized and individualized (Gupta 2016), but others express commitments to collective, grassroots feminist politics and methods not dissimilar to their forebears, while still others sit somewhere between (Gilbertson 2018). Similarly, this paper demonstrates that rather than sharing characteristics as a distinct generation or wave of feminism, Delhi’s young gender justice workers had diverse approaches to decolonial and intersectional politics.

A second issue with the dominant narrative of the Indian movement is its suggestion of a single movement. Seldom included in accounts of *the* Indian women’s movement are the struggles of rural women, for example in the fight for ownership rights by landless labour households in the Bodhgaya district of Bihar (Agarwal 1989), and the movement against alcoholism in Andhra Pradesh known as the anti-arrack movement (Tharu and Niranjana 1994). While the 1990s may have been a decade of depoliticization from the perspective of

the metropolitan middle-class and upper-caste leadership of the Indian women's movement (Roy 2018), this decade was also when women from formerly untouchable castes, known today as "Dalit", formed autonomous Dalit women's organizations. They asserted that the Dalit movement was patriarchal and the feminist movement Brahmanical, that is, dominated by Brahmin and other upper-caste women. Dalit feminists called for greater recognition of the intersection of caste and gender in the form of Brahmanical patriarchy (Rege 1998). Far from being a single movement, the work of the Sangtin Writers shows that the concerns of the metropolitan middle-class upper-caste leadership of feminist organizations are very different from the poor and mostly lower-caste women they seek to "empower" (Sangtin Writers 2009).

Nevertheless, in the 2000s many Indian feminists were mourning the lost radicalism of the 1970s and 1980s (Roy 2009). In Delhi, home to more than 76,000 NGOs (Anand 2015), there is certainly much evidence that feminism had become a very NGOized endeavour, at least for the metropolitan middle-class. However, in December 2012, the gang rape and murder of Jyothi Singh Pandey in Delhi brought unprecedented numbers of protestors to the streets, prompting reappraisals of the health of feminisms in India. Some saw the protests as a reflection of the legacy and contemporary strength of the women's movement, while others declared this an "improper" feminism, indicated by the conservative impulse of calls for capital punishment for rapists, the protectionist rhetoric around women's safety, and the selective concern for a metropolitan aspiring middle-class young woman rather than, for example, a rural lower-caste/class woman (e.g. Dutta and Sircar 2013; Tellis 2012). In the wake of these anti-rape protests, many new initiatives to promote gender equality emerged, many of which were led by metropolitan youth. My research was a very much a "post-December 2012" project and sought to understand the feminisms and politics of young gender justice workers in this context.

In 2015-16, I spent seven months in Delhi and interviewed 42 young people (aged 19-32) involved in a wide range of efforts to promote gender equality in the city. One aim of this research project was to explore the implications of young people's gender justice work for widespread understandings of India's middle class as politically apathetic (e.g. Fernandes and Heller 2006: 510-516). Accordingly, the key selection criteria were youth and class-privilege, rather than the kinds of gender justice work these young people were engaged in or their feminist politics. Some of these young people did not identify as feminists, asserting that feminism was too focused on women whereas they were focused on gender *equality*, or that they were still educating themselves about gender and were not yet worthy of the label "feminist". Concerns with the label "feminist" are not new in the Indian context, although the reasons have changed over time (Narayan 2013). The category "Indian Women's Movement" has long been a means of including the non-feminist identifiers among those working towards

gender equality. I, however, use the phrase “gender justice work(er)” to reflect the significant growth in the involvement of men and boys. This is my label rather than one that participants used to self-identify. I switch between writing of “feminism” and writing of “gender justice work” to include the non-feminist identifiers when appropriate.

India’s middle class is notoriously difficult to define (Donner and De Neve 2011), and I employ a loose definition of middle class here. Interviewees’ parents had undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, worked in white collar occupations or in business and had combined incomes of at least INR50,000 per month. The young people themselves had all completed high school, had either completed or were enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate degrees and spoke English fluently. They chose to be interviewed in air-conditioned cafes in fairly exclusive markets and malls in the affluent neighbourhoods of South Delhi, close to where they lived, worked and studied. These characteristics make them significantly more affluent than the majority of the Indian population, but in alignment with definitions of a “global middle class” (Meyer and Birdsall 2012).

While some of the young people in this study were, consistent with the stereotype of their generation, working for NGOs of both the established and the new youth-led variety, many were not. They were undergraduate students learning about feminism for the first time in their college gender forums, they were doing unpaid work writing blogs and running social media campaigns, they were activists participating in student movements and “citizens collectives”, and they were artists producing music, theatre and spoken word. Most political parties in India have affiliated women’s organizations, but these did not form part of my research as they were not popular with middle-class youth. My participants were very critical of party politics and referred to politically-affiliated organizations as “mass” organizations, both because of their focus on “mobilizing” large numbers of women and also because in Indian English “mass” can be a word for “poor”.

Amongst my research participants, 15 identified as male, 23 identified as female, three were assigned female at birth but preferred not to identify with any gender, and one was assigned male at birth but identified as genderqueer. Participants were predominantly from upper-caste Hindu backgrounds, with two from Sikh families and four from Muslim families. However, within each of these categories there were interviewees who identified as non-practising or atheist.

I also conducted key informant interviews with eight older feminist activists, academics and development professionals, and with an additional five people aged between 35 and 39, including Veena, who saw themselves as located between, and perhaps bridging the gap between, the youth and the matriarchs. All interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms are used for all individuals and organizations in this paper. In addition to interviews, I attended a number of gender related events in the city –

protests, meetings to plan Women's Day events, campaign events on streets and on campuses, film festivals, and college debates. I interviewed most participants only once, but I interviewed some a second time, a year after our original interview, and I interacted with some also at protests and other events. In addition, I spent two months "interning" with one NGO that I call "Samaanta".

At the time of my research, intergenerational and caste conflict were not "hot" issues. Until the 1990s, the middle-class upper-caste leadership in both women's studies and women's organisations were confident of their ability to stand for all women, and speak in their name and on their behalf. This confidence was disrupted by caste-based critiques of gender, Dalit feminists' demands for a separate political space, and the failures of the women's movement to support the queer movement and struggles for sex workers' rights (John 2014: 128). Consistent with Srila Roy's (2016) observations of contemporary youth activism around gender in India, many of the young people I spoke to alluded to these past failures of the Indian women's movement and framed their own efforts to adopt a more intersectional approach as emerging in response.

Intergenerational conflict, whether around approaches to intersectionality or more broadly, was muted, however. The younger generation felt that the older generation sometimes did not recognise their work, particularly social media, as feminist work, but were largely supportive. While a few actively distanced themselves from established women's organizations, many worked in these very organizations and many spoke with great admiration of the leaders who had emerged during the 1970s and 1980s. The older women I spoke to said that they sometimes struggled to appreciate newer forms of activism, but many also spoke positively about young people, especially a new student movement, Pinjra Tod, which I discuss below.

Intergenerational and caste conflict came to the fore in late 2017 in a moment referred to as "The List". Raya Sarkar, a graduate student of Indian descent at the University of California, Davis, posted first on Facebook and then as an open Google document a list of men in Indian academia accused of repeated sexual harassment. The List went viral and within hours was followed by a statement published on the political blog Kafilā (Menon 2017). "The Statement" condemned the "unsubstantiated accusations", called for due process, and asserted that "This manner of naming can delegitimize the long struggle against sexual harassment, and make our task as feminists more difficult". The Statement was signed by 14 well-known feminists. In the weeks that followed, many saw the pro-List / anti-List split as generational. Although many older feminists wrote more positively about the List (Chadha 2017; Vohra 2017), the signatories to the Statement were seen as representative of an older generation dismissive of young feminists.

Further, almost all signatories of the Statement and many of the accused belong to upper castes whereas Sarkar, the curator of the List, is Dalit. The Statement was therefore also seen as an example of influential women protecting their class-caste peers, and further evidence that the Indian women's movement is dominated by Savarna (upper-caste) interests, sidelining and suppressing the concerns of Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi (indigenous) women (Kappal 2017; Shukla and Kundu 2017). Intra-generational rifts within the movement became even more salient in February 2019 when a group of Bahujan, Adivasi and Muslim women wrote publicly about their decision to leave the student movement Pinjra Tod, which they felt was dominated by upper-caste Hindus, had an exclusionary structure, and sidelined issues faced by marginalised communities (LiveWire 2019; Maharaj et al. 2019). My research is situated in the two years before these events when these tensions were simmering below the surface.

Outsourcing to India

The work of the young people I spoke to in Delhi was infused with influences from elsewhere. One group had started a campaign against menstrual taboos at their university after seeing a similar campaign in Germany, some of them had participated in a SlutWalk, a transnational movement of protest marches that started in Canada, many of them produced digital content that included stories from abroad, and several of them had discussed their work at international conferences and summits. As we saw in the opening vignette, some like Pari did not see foreign funding as an issue; others were critical of well-funded events like “Dance against Violence” and the extent to which foreign funders dictated the kinds of gender work that could be done. Many noted that since the events of December 2012, there was much more funding for violence prevention work and less for work focused on education and livelihoods. In this section, I present one example of the decolonial politics of young gender justice workers in Delhi – an article written by members of Delhi-based student movement Pinjra Tod in response to a video about gender-based violence in India produced by *The Guardian* – while acknowledging that decolonizing feminism was not an explicit priority for all.

In early 2018, *The Guardian* released a video asking what had changed for women in India in the five years since the rape and murder of Jyothi Singh Pandey. The video opens with the line “You could ask this question to any woman in Delhi and she would have the same answer – that nobody feels safe”. The video cuts between shots of women, marked by their clothing and English language as middle-class, and men, marked by their clothing and their occupations – autorickshaw driver, street-side vendor – as working-class. The women shown provide the voice-over. One of them says “the mentality and the perception is so backward”.

In an article published on the online news site *Raiot*, Pinjra Tod respond to *The Guardian*'s video. Pinjra Tod, meaning "break the cage" was established in 2015 and has campaigned *against* curfews, moral policing and high fees in women's hostels, and *for* proper mechanisms for dealing with sexual misconduct on college and university campuses. Their activism includes marching the streets of Delhi to assert women's right to public space, but also less spectacular strategies such as petitioning leaders for institutional change. In their article, Pinjra Tod denounce the civilizational narratives in the video and the framing of low caste-class men as the assumed perpetrators. They state: "The visuals of this video can make you believe that the only thing obstructing the aspirations of middle and upper-class women is the 'backward mentality of society' embodied by working class and 'lower' caste lives, who are the relics of the 'past' coming in the way of the 'forward' march to 'modernity'".

Here, Pinjra Tod evoke postcolonial feminists' critiques of representations of gender in the Global South. As Uma Narayan (2013) and Inderpal Grewal (2013) note, there is a tendency in the Global North to focus on particularly exotic forms of violence against women in the Global South such as dowry murder and honour killings. This serves to transmute violence against women in India "into some sort of bizarre 'Indian ritual', a form of violence against women that surely must be 'caused by Indian culture'" (Narayan 2013: 103). When it is tradition or culture that is perceived to oppress women from the Global South, such oppression is typically understood as embodied in the lower caste-class man (Tharu and Niranjana 1994: 100-101). These men are portrayed as the main barriers to the flourishing of women from the Global South rather than, for example, exploitative working conditions in the factories of multinational corporations. This is evident in US media coverage of Pandey's rape and murder (Roychowdhury 2013: 282) and in the promotion of "India's Daughter" a film made for the BBC by British woman Leslee Udwin about the same incident (Krishnan 2015). Both portrayed a "new India" represented by the upwardly mobile Pandey threatened by an "old India" represented by her assailants whose poor migrant status was emphasised.

The media, Pinjra Tod argue, "always already comes with a set framework on how it wants to represent the women's question in the 'Global South'". Accordingly, Pinjra Tod have been "inundated with requests from the media to perform a certain 'Indian feminism', wear 'shorts' and pose outside the hostel gate with a placard saying 'I resist', and other such visually appealing 'acts of rebellion'". It is within the "set framework" of women as oppressed victims of their culture or tradition that the image of a young woman in shorts, signalling her Westernized modernity and thus rebellion against "Indian tradition", holds such appeal. The press have "barely bothered" with Pinjra Tod's campaigns against institutionalized sexism in hostels and universities, not just because they are less photogenic, but also because their focus on "modern institutions" does not fit within a popular narrative of the threat to women's safety posed by Indian culture/men. It is within this "set framework"

that overt resistance and rebellion are imagined as the only possible expression of women's agency (cf. Mahmood 2001). And it is within this "set framework" that the protest of a middle-class urban young woman can stand in for the totality of Indian feminisms.

A prominent feminist historian, one of my key informant interviewees, explained how this uneven attention to a "certain Indian feminism" emerges through an intimate intertwining of power relations within India and between Indian and Euro-American feminisms:

Perhaps this movement [the Bodhgaya land movement] got less attention because you don't want to think of the women's movement as dealing with class. Especially the White world doesn't want to look at Indian women except in the context of violence, within which Indian women can be portrayed as needing rescue from patriarchy ... There are always efforts to restrict gender as gender and not take other structures of inequality into account. What about the garment workers' protest in Bangalore? ... Issues of class are there in these movements. We only see the movements on the street around sexuality and safety as part of "the women's movement". Why don't we see what's happening in Bangalore as part of the movement?

A similar critique is made by Richa Nagar and the Sangtin Writers, who assert the need to conceptualize different forms of violence in relation to each other rather than separating out gender-based violence. A narrow focus on "women's issues", they argue, makes it difficult to "connect processes of rural underdevelopment and impoverishment with marginalization and disempowerment of poor women" (Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006: 143). The problem of selective attention is certainly reproduced in my own research, centring the middle-class, the upper-caste, the capital city of New Delhi, and action against violence yet again. As a White Western feminist, I reproduce a set framework for understanding women's issues in the Global South. But rather than taking these young people as representative of "Indian feminism", I ask how they grapple with their position – as Indian gender justice workers vis-à-vis Euro-American feminisms and as class-caste privileged Indians vis-à-vis the more marginalised communities that have typically been the subjects of gender justice work.

Pinjra Tod's article reveals how transborder dynamics of intersecting racial and gender oppression shape gender justice dynamics *within* India, including how gender inequality is understood (violence) and who is seen as responsible for it (lower caste-class men) as well as who is seen as the agent of gender equality (urban middle-class young women resisting "tradition"). It is the postcolonial consideration of power relations across spatial scales that politicizes intersectionality, rather than allowing it to be a justification for outsourcing patriarchy. Intersectionality in turn reminds us that people are positioned differently in relation to the postcolonial, that local expressions of

colonisation/decolonisation are “multiply inflected by regional and global affinities and considerations, in turn crosscut by class, race, gender, sexuality, etc.” (Frankenberg and Mani 1993: 302). As Frankenberg and Mani (1993: 304) argue, “at given moments and locations, the axis of colonization/decolonization might be *the* most salient one, at other times, not so”. The Pinjra Tod article demonstrates that intra-national and transnational power dynamics within the arena of gender justice are co-produced, but it was the intra-national dynamics that dominated the narratives of the young people I spoke to and to which I now turn.

Outsourcing within India

Sitting on some steps on the Jawarhalal Nehru University campus, Saanvi, a member of the feminist student movement that I call Azaadi, declared “Rural feminism is actual feminism”. She went on to explain how brilliantly rural women deal with domestic violence and “blatant sexism” and concluded, “We sit and discuss nuances of feminism in coffee shops, but when it comes to dealing with these problems, they are actually the ones who are making a difference”. A few days earlier I had been on another Delhi university campus interviewing another member of Azaadi. Aisha had a very different perspective. She asserted: “if I think that not being allowed to wear short clothes is of primary importance to me and I am struggling for that, I mean it is equally feminist. It is feminist and I have the right to do that because it is the issue that is closest to me”. The contrast in the perspectives of Saanvi and Aisha was evident across the narratives of the young gender justice workers I spoke to in Delhi. For some, the most intersectional approach was to focus their energies where they felt gender issues were most acute. For others, it was to address the gender issues most relevant to their own lives. In this section I consider the first approach before turning to the second in the following section.

Saanvi’s idea that the most legitimate gender justice work is that with poor and rural women is not a new one. Mary John (1996: 126) writes that women’s organizations in India have historically worked primarily with poor rural women, at least in part as a way to establish the legitimacy and Indianness of their work against routine declarations of feminism as elite, Western and therefore irrelevant to the concerns of the majority. This dynamic has its origins in the colonial period when upper-caste and middle-class Indian women were framed as archetypal national subjects dispensing social reform to their “backward” sisters (Ciotti 2014). Contemporary critiques of this dynamic include the work of Richa Nagar and the Sangtin Writers, who argue that donor-driven NGOs operate according to a logic of “poor women in need of empowerment through ‘feminism’ as defined and brought to them by more privileged women” (Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006: 141) and ultimately “reproduce the very hierarchies that they are ostensibly interested in dismantling” (Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006: 144). At the time of my research, a common strategy that aimed to avoid these

pitfalls within the field of “gender and development” was the peer education program. Such programs seek to provide young people from “community” with an understanding of gender equality so that they, rather than an outsider “expert”, can promote this understanding among their peers. However, rather than avoiding dynamics of outsourcing patriarchy, the examples presented in this section illustrate that such dynamics can be produced at infinitely more granular or “local” scales.

Samaanta was established by young engineering graduates shortly after the “Delhi gang rape” of 2012. At the time of my research, the main work of the organization was a fellowship program for young people that began with a three-day gender justice and youth empowerment workshop after which fellows planned and implemented an “action project”. The fellowship program was a form of peer education, designed to develop young people as “change-makers” in their own communities. However, it involved a series of displacements of the problem of gender inequality. The urban middle-class young people who ran the organization worked with less affluent young people in Delhi and in smaller cities in North India. The majority of these young “fellows” in turn chose to run their action projects with more rural, less affluent and often Muslim youth. They explained this in terms of focusing their energies where girls face most restrictions and difficulties in “raising their voices”. Fellows positioned themselves as liberated and empowered by constructing an “other” in greater need of empowerment than they and their more immediate peers.

Samaanta leaders did not see this pattern as a problem because it was consistent with their understandings of patriarchy and intersectionality. Throughout the workshop that marks the commencement of the fellowship program, Samaanta leaders explained gender inequality as a result of misunderstanding, for example the “misunderstanding” that women are naturally better at domestic work. More marginalized communities were assumed to be the places where misunderstanding was greatest. This was reinforced by an activity called the “The Power Walk”, a common element of gender training workshops, designed to illustrate intersectionality to participants (Bandhyopadhyay 2007: 103). Participants stand side by side and are allocated identities: rich, upper-caste Hindu boy, poor lower-caste Hindu girl, middle-class Muslim girl, etc. Facilitators then read out activities and ask participants to step forward if they think someone of their assigned identity would be able to do it: study for as long as you like, stay out late, etc. After reading out several activities, facilitators ask participants to look around them and note who has taken the most steps forward – this is the person with most *samajik shakti* or social power.

On the occasion that I observed this activity, someone had been allocated the identity of a poor, lower-caste girl. As facilitators read out activities such as “marry a person of your choice” and “work outside the home”, the person with this assigned identity expressed uncertainty. A wealth of scholarship on Brahmanical patriarchy identifies a close association

between high-caste status and the control of women's sexuality such that strict rules of caste endogamy together with practices of seclusion for women rather than work outside the home are common among upper castes rather than lower castes (e.g. Chakravarti 2013; Kapadia 2002). In this moment, however, the Samaanta leaders insisted that the person with the role of "poor lower-caste girl" not step forward. In doing so, they insisted on a depoliticized version of intersectionality in which axes of inequality are always mutually reinforcing rather than, as Nivedita Menon (2015: 44) asserts, "often working against one another and weakening one another" (see also Frankenberg and Mani 1993: 305). The explanations of gender inequality that emerged during the course of the Samaanta workshop were strongly reminiscent of the culture-blaming that has been the target of postcolonial feminist critique. It is an explanation that focuses only on one scale – "misunderstandings" *within* the local rural, working-class, lower-caste and/or Muslim "community" – rather than on relations between communities and across spatial scales, relations that are structural, political and economic and cannot be reduced to a "misunderstanding".

At the time of my research, Samaanta's leaders did not identify as feminists and had very little contact with more established women's organizations. Their particular understandings of gender inequality were fairly self-consciously formed in contrast to the feminisms of the women's movement. Those who did identify as feminists and were closely connected women's organizations were not wholly successful in avoiding outsourcing patriarchy, however. They were merely more critical of it. When I spoke to Reyansh, he was in his late twenties and had been working for explicitly feminist gender justice NGOs for several years. He criticised a tendency he had observed among activists and NGO workers to portray themselves as "changed". He explained this in relation to a young man from "community", Habir, who had participated in a gender-related peer education program run by the NGO Reyansh worked for. Habir was now himself involved in training others from his community. Reyansh said that the training that Habir had received from Reyansh's NGO had provided him with "such a polarized way of understanding the changed and the non-changed people. And because you're changed, you take on a certain moral high-ground". He said that the NGO workers were "selling" this message "so he has inculcated it". Now when Reyansh asks Habir to talk to other young people who "know the suffering is there but they haven't started critically questioning it", they do not listen to him. "They are more concerned about the attitude he is throwing at them and they distance themselves more from him ... They are not able to feel that sense of peer. They feel a certain disconnect from him".

Reyansh's words echo those of scholars who have studied the production of development categories. Stacey Leigh Pigg (1992), for example, argues that development in Nepal has been framed primarily in terms of transforming people's thinking. The person framed as most in need of this transformation is the villager who is constructed as someone

who does not understand. This in turn results in “infinite dislocation” as people identify themselves as “developed” and others as “villagers”. In the examples of Samaanta and Reyansh and Habir we see gender justice conceived similarly as a process of improving understanding, involving similar dislocations or outsourcings. In Reyansh’s words, anyone who delivers gender knowledge becomes one of “the changed”, someone who understands, and anyone receiving that knowledge is positioned as someone “unchanged”, someone who does not understand, no matter how close the social position of the deliverer and receiver of the knowledge in reality.

Reyansh’s words also echo those of transnational feminist scholars who have noted the relational nature of feminisms. Following Mohanty, Sara Ahmed (2000: 165) suggests that framing the “Third World Woman” as different from the Western woman on the basis of her oppression “allows Western feminism to constitute itself”. She asks whether “such a model of the relationship between Western feminism and women who inhabit spaces other than the West involves a refusal to encounter others at all: ‘the other’ is held in place as ‘the stranger’”. Reyansh’s theorising takes the point even further – that Habir needs to constitute as the stranger those who would otherwise be his peers in order to constitute himself as a “changed” person, a person who understands gender and can now act as an agent of gender and development. For Ahmed, this is a dislocation or outsourcing between Western and non-Western feminisms, but Pigg’s work encourages us to consider that such dislocations might occur along an infinite continuum of scales. Although peer education programs attempt to avoid outsourcing patriarchy, it seems they often end reproducing problematic binaries between changed and unchanged, developed and under-developed, gender just and patriarchal. Reflecting on lessons learnt from outsourcing patriarchy at the transnational scale along with the work of Richa Nagar and the Sangtin Writers (2006), we might surmise that this occurs at least in part because gender-based violence is separated from other forms of violence, and, although marginalized youth deliver the program, what they deliver is still a form of knowledge defined by the metropolitan upper-caste middle-class and approved by Euro-American donors.

By Middle-Class Youth, For Middle-Class Youth

In the preceding sections, I have provided an example of efforts to decolonize Indian feminisms, and examples of gender justice work that reproduce colonial dynamics of outsourcing patriarchy to Othered bodies and sites, in one case uncritically and in another despite the best efforts of the development professionals involved. In this section, I present examples of young people whose concerns about their own privilege led them to focus on tackling gender inequality among other equally privileged young people. According to Srila Roy (2016), today’s middle-class, metropolitan feminist movements “are unapologetically

mobilizing around issues that have particular relevance to them” in contrast to movements that came before them that worked primarily on issues perceived to be most pertinent to rural working-class women. This was the approach advocated by Aisha, quoted in the opening of the previous section, and also by Aarav who was in his thirties and directing a feminist youth leadership NGO at the time of our interview. Aarav was critical of the view, which he attributed to older members of the Indian women’s movement, that “what is not relevant to the *behenas* [sisters] in the *bastis* [slums] has no relevance anywhere”. He explained that in his many years of working with youth in fellowship programmes, he had often faced the problem of young people wanting to work with others less privileged than themselves. He said, “marginalisation always got attention”, and he had to “continuously keep it from getting into this charity mode where people think that they are privileged and that they must contribute back and give back because they know something more”.

Aarav saw two problems with the focus on marginalization. He said, “a lot of times people assume that this kind of work must only be done in a certain class of people” because people falsely assume that gender-based violence “is a more rampant issue in lower-class communities than in upper-class communities”. The second problem was the sense of entitlement to enter certain spaces. He worried that young people were “assuming that they can walk into somebody’s house and talk to them about their intimate life and their professional life, and that those people should respond just because you assume that they are not as privileged or they are lower in the rank”. Aarav asked, “If I am from an urban middle-class background, as a young person leading a campaign, why don’t I want to address my own background in terms of the change I want to make?”.

Aisha and Aarav make compelling arguments for work *by* middle-class youth, *for* middle-class youth. However, this approach is liable to criticism for being elitist or mainstream. For example, although Azaadi have made public statements about the need to “fight this patriarchal Brahmanical nation state” and the fact that “those of us, with caste and class privileges, are complicit in perpetuating oppression”, they have faced a lot of criticism for being elitist or “designer feminism”. Similarly, Akhila, who was 25 and running her own feminist digital media platform at the time of our interview, told me although she tries to make her work intersectional, “it gets a little difficult” and “a lot of Dalit feminists and other Adivasi feminists and people who’re working in those areas do accuse urban feminists of being very mainstream”. She agrees with these critiques, saying that urban feminists, including herself, “do tend to sometimes ignore, but I would also like to say we don’t do it intentionally”.

The tension between avoiding outsourcing patriarchy but risking being elitist is reflected in scholarly work too. For some scholars, gender justice work that focuses on the concerns of metropolitan youth has individualizing elements that take privilege for granted

(Gupta 2016; Mani 2014; Mehta 2008). For others, this approach brings attention to class dynamics beyond poverty (John 2005: 127) and critical reflection on how gender justice workers' "multiple markers of privilege shape their understanding of violence, the solutions they propose, the politics they espouse, and the manner in which they do so" (Mitra-Kahn 2012: 124). Aarav's narrative makes clear that, at least for some metropolitan youth, these latter analyses regarding sensitivity to multiple markers of privilege are accurate, but it is also easy to see how such work is liable to the same critiques directed at Pinjra Tod – dominated by upper-caste Hindus and side-lining issues faced by marginalised communities (LiveWire 2019; Maharaj et al. 2019). Dynamics of outsourcing patriarchy at the transnational scale exacerbate the tensions these young people experience between avoiding outsourcing and potentially reproducing "mainstream" feminisms. As these young people themselves acknowledge, they and their work are most visible and appealing to Euro-American funders and media, and so by focusing on issues most personally relevant, they risk reproducing a very narrow "set framework" of "Indian feminism" both globally and in Delhi.

Conclusion

At the heart of critiques of outsourcing patriarchy is the notion that humanitarianism can be a form of imperialism. Many of the young people I spoke to saw a potential continuity between North-South humanitarian imperialism and their own humanitarian efforts. For example, an undergraduate student who was a member of her college's "gender forum" is often told that it is easier for her to "be political" about gender because she has money, her parents are "Westernized", and she has "that sort of education". People describe her gender politics as "a newer version of White Man's Burden". She questions this label, but concludes, "Well, it's right". Young gender justice workers in Delhi struggle to know what the best response to their privilege is, how best to make their work intersectional. Some advocate work by middle-class youth for middle-class youth, but risk being exclusionary. Some try to facilitate work by marginalized youth for marginalized youth but find that binaries between developed and under-developed are reproduced in this context too.

The challenges of intersectionality within Indian feminisms have been particularly apparent in recent years, evident in inter-generational and caste conflict surrounding The List, and criticisms of Pinjra Tod for being dominated by upper castes. This has created an urgent need, J Devika (2018: 409) asserts, to rethink feminist political engagement and education, to "create conditions under which the fully expressed anger of non-elite women criticizing mainstream feminism" may evoke "a genuinely self-transforming response". Creating such conditions may involve metropolitan middle-class youth mobilizing around issues most relevant to them while also asserting the relevance of these issues for working-class women (Roy 2016), privileged-origin gender justice workers self-reflexively doing their own critical

work (Devika 2018: 412-413), or resisting what my key informant described as “efforts to restrict gender as gender” (see Sangtin Writers 2009). The aim of this paper has been to show that making sense of these various strategies will benefit from an approach that considers intersecting inequalities across spatial scales.

Literatures on transnational feminisms are replete with language of border-crossing, dislocation and outsourcing, conceived primarily in terms of a relation between the Global South and the Global North. Conversely, literatures on intersectionality tend to focus on dynamics within the nation-state. In this paper I have asked what is missed when particular spatial scales are prioritised. I have shown that a pattern of outsourcing patriarchy (and underdevelopment) is observable at many scales, and that these patterns at different scales are co-produced, each in turn shaping the other. Mary John (2014: 128) calls for “a mode of grasping the present time, in all its opacity and difficulty, in ways that do not shut out the forces at work both within and beyond the boundaries of ‘India’”. A multi-scalar approach to intersectionality and decoloniality is perhaps one such mode.

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