



For a Revolutionary Feminist World-Systems Analysis The Case of *Ghadar*

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Abstract

In revolutionary anti-colonial movements, women's involvement has been limited, and their contributions often marginalized or forgotten. This is not only an empirical puzzle in that anti-colonial movements have historically recruited women and furthered feminist discourse while also marginalizing female members, but also a political problem for movements that the lived reality for female participants diverges from the egalitarian philosophies of the movements themselves. In this article, I build on and further develop theories of feminist world-systems analysis, contending that feminist world-systems needs to rethink theories of anti-systemic movements to better include women's revolutionary roles as active agents in the historical process of colonial independence and decolonization. In so doing, I contend that a revolutionary feminist world-systems analysis is increasingly important to analyze that women's active roles as revolutionary agents have been sidelined because the movements that they have been a part of have also found themselves co-opted by dominant liberal ideology. This theoretical position is illustrated through an analysis of the published periodicals of the anti-colonial Ghadar Party. Through this empirical case study, I show that Ghadar's revolutionary potential receded to the background because of its failures to fully include its female members. This case study is then levied to demonstrate how reviving a feminist world-systems analysis can help us better theorize women's important but under-analyzed role in revolutionary anti-colonial movements.

Keywords: World-Systems Analysis, Feminist Theory, Anti-colonial Movements, Ghadar Party, South Asia, Historical Sociology



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It is not enough to say: “We must target women with our propaganda and draw women into our ranks;” we have to take things further, much further than that. The vast majority of male comrades...have minds infected by the most typical bourgeois prejudices. Even as they rail against property, they are rabidly proprietorial. Even as they rant against slavery, they are the cruellest of “masters.” Even as they vent their fury on monopoly, they are the most dyed-in-the-wool monopolists. And all of this derives from the phoniest notion that humanity has ever managed to devise. The supposed “inferiority of women.” A mistaken notion that may well have set civilization back by centuries. – Lucia Sanchez Saornil

In the above passage, Lucia Sanchez Saornil, a Spanish anarchy-feminist writer and poet, critiques her male comrades of the National Confederation of Labor (CNT) for their sexist attitudes towards both female members of the CNT along with women who could not enlist because of onerous domestic responsibilities. Saornil highlights the common gendered dynamic of revolutionary movements, where men oppose structures of oppression but do not question their positions regarding women whose politics have either been silenced or “added” to the movements as afterthoughts. Saornil’s analysis signals a larger problem in the global Left where women and their political contributions are sidelined, tokenized, or coopted.

Anti-colonial movements across the Global South are no exception to this broader trend. Women have historically played an important role in winning independence from colonial rule, but their contributions have gone largely unacknowledged and underappreciated (Loomba 2019; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Thapar 1993). In this article, I therefore am primarily interested in explaining how we might explain, in the context of movements with revolutionary anti-colonial aspirations, women’s marginalization and cooptation? Even when women are represented in anti-colonial movements, their role is typically limited to liberal-bourgeois ideas of women’s social roles, compounded by the more ready inclusion of upper middle-class women compared to working-class women, which betrays the revolutionary potential and aims of the movement. The limited role for women in revolutionary anti-colonial politics limits which women can participate.

One anti-colonial movement, revered for its socialist, progressive, and revolutionary efforts to overthrow British Rule in Punjab is the Ghadar Party, a South Asian diaspora anti-colonial socialist party founded in 1913 in San Francisco. It is often implicitly and explicitly argued that women do not make an appearance in the party’s narrative because they just weren’t there because of the immigration policies of North America which did not allow women to immigrate with their husbands (Dhamoon et al. 2019). In this article, I alternately contend that the apparently revolutionary anti-systemic middle-class-male-dominated movement’s gender problem was a function of the movement’s liberal ideas about women. Reading the party’s periodicals, I argue that because the movement was located in a capitalist world-system where liberal-bourgeois notions are the dominant hegemonic narratives of the cores that subsume the peripheries into their ideologies, male leadership, though revolutionary in its anti-colonial politics, was traditionalist when it came to gender (Wallerstein 1995). I extend Silvia Federici (2004) and Maria Mies (1986)

to show that not only are women's bodies exploited in this capitalist domain, but their ideological representation is also coopted for the movements' shifting ideologies. I don't claim that the movements are passive recipients of this ideology, instead, as already mentioned, I contend that anti-colonial movements have such radical potential that get coopted because of the universalist interests of the hegemony adopted by the former in these contexts. I take Ghadar as a case to illustrate the theoretical need of a *revolutionary* feminist world-systems analysis which can highlight the woman question in anti-colonial movements as situated within historical capitalism. In so doing, my objective in this paper is to not only identify where and how the women were located in anti-colonial left politics, but also bring together world-systems analysis with revolutionary feminism.

While Saornil details the problem of patriarchy in the global left, my focus on anti-colonial movements adds an important contour to this analysis. Anti-colonial movements were structured by the world-system, more specifically, bounded by core-periphery dynamics. They opposed the politico-economic structures of the core but also sought to maintain their legitimacy in the peripheries for what they envisioned to come after independence (Wallerstein 2011b). Therefore, an important factor in understanding how women were represented, (or weren't), in anti-colonial movements is understanding how the latter were shaped by global politico-economic dynamics. Drawing largely from Federici (2004) and Mies (1986), I argue that a revolutionary feminist world-systems analysis can reveal the importance of women's unique contributions to anti-colonial politics as central to the development and sustenance of struggles against capitalism. Therefore, when studying anti-systemic movements that oppose the capitalist, colonialist system, it does not suffice to accept them without questioning why they didn't include marginalized groups. As I posit in this article, women have been met with the "not yet" attitude in socialist politics, which separates class from gender and advocates dealing with class first, and then gender second, if at all.

By proposing a revolutionary feminist world-systems analysis, I argue for a framework that does not restrict Marxist analysis to narrowly conceived waged factory labor-relations, class analysis separated from gender, or feminist analysis ignoring historical processes. As Mies argues, "[feminist strategy for liberation] must aim at an end of all *exploitation* of women by men, of colonies by colonizers, of one class by the other" (Mies 1986: 80). In doing so, I argue that we must highlight that revolutionary women have been important forces that have struggled against colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy holistically, from a standpoint capable of seeing them as intertwined and co-constitutive processes. To this end, I analyze the role of women in the Ghadar Party through an analysis of analogous cases of revolutionary women in the Global South, which underscore the problems of additive, compensatory, and liberal-pluralist understanding of women as one among many categories in such emancipatory movements. Although world-systems as a paradigm expands Marxist analysis to a more nuanced understanding of the historical-geographical processes such as colonialism, I show that women have been absent from this framework to a large extent. Most efforts by feminist world-systems analysts, moreover, have tended to focus on the impact of these processes on women. I argue to draw the implications of such feminist world-systems analysis to movements of revolutionary feminism. Next, I provide some context of the

Ghadar Party which highlights its one-sided revolutionary zeal. Following an explanation of the data and methods I employed, I analyze the magazines of the Party to provide a nuanced analysis of how women have been envisioned and represented in its self-narration. In conclusion, I argue that while women have been absent or misrepresented in the movement's liberal-bourgeois narrative, they are central in pushing forward Ghadar's surge to present itself as a viable alternative to British rule.

Revolutionary Women of the Global South

The question is not *whether* women are revolutionary as they have always been at the forefronts (Jayawardena 1989; Ghodsee 2019). The early and later twentieth century involvement of women in armed revolution in Latin America as guerillas and spies in independence movements and rebellions have been noted by many (González-Rivera and Kampwirth 2010; Jaquette 1973; Rief 1986; Wickham-Crowley 2018). Black feminists have also undertaken the extensive task of identifying women's revolutionary praxis and involvement in the struggle for liberation (Ford 2012, 2016; Johnson 2014; Neville and Hamer 2006; Sudbury 2005; McDuffie 2011; Byran, Dadzie, and Scafe 2018). In India, scholars have identified women's struggle in liberation movements in Bengal (Ghosh 2013; Marik 2013; Mukherjee 1999), in the anti-imperialist "Gandhian, armed revolutionary, and left oriented mass movements" in the Burdwarn District (Rahaman 2014: 575), in the Telangana District (Ke and Kannabiran 1989), and many other movements and revolutionary circles (see also: Chandra 2007; Kaur 1968). In the case of the Naxalbari of post-independent India, a Maoist movement for peasants' liberation from landlord oppression, Mallarika Sinha Roy (2010) shows how the historiography of the movement has been blind to its gendered aspects. Nimmi Gowrinathan (2021) in her book, *Radicalizing Her: Why Women Choose Violence*, has also highlighted women fighters' stories in Sri Lanka, Palestine, and Colombia. The edited volume, *Women Rising: In and Beyond Arab Spring* (Stephan and Charrad 2020), highlights women's revolutionary struggles in myriad ways in the Arab world to counter ahistorical claims that they had "finally risen" during the Arab Spring. In East Asia, women's revolutionary roles in liberation movements have also been highlighted (Gill 2016; Taylor 1999). While this list is exhaustive by no means, it shows the important work done in recent decades to recover the contributions of revolutionary women and reveal how radical history has erased women's involvement.

The task facing historians of revolutionary movements in the Global South thus goes beyond recovering women as participants in anti-colonial movements. We must go further and analyze the historical dynamics that have enabled and perpetuated these mis- and non-representations. This need has been echoed by many scholars previously (Maclean 2013; Marik 2013; Sangari and Vaid 1989). Lalita and Kannabiran claim about leadership roles in liberation movements:

The fact that not many women were there at the decision making or leadership levels does not make their participation peripheral for, given the structures, the real

question that needs to be posed is whether women could have been present at the decision making level or not. (Lalita and Kannabiran 1989: 2)

It is important to question why women's roles are coopted or unrecognized in these movements because there exists a divergence within anti-systemic, socialist movements and women's movements. Immanuel Wallerstein (2011b) noted that women's movements were historically seen as a nuisance by socialist movements. Maria Lugones (2016) in her essay "Coloniality of Gender," also describes racialized men's indifference to racialized women's struggles as "insidious since it places tremendous barriers in the path of the struggles of women of color for [women's] own freedom, integrity, and wellbeing and in the path of the correlative struggles towards communal integrity" (Lugones 2016: 1). In the case of socialist movements in India, Illina Sen (1989; 1990), an Indian activist, highlighted the divisions amongst theorists who criticized women for not partaking in the "mainstream revolutionary struggle" and undermining the latter's interests by insisting on an autonomous feminist movement. Sen (1990) and others (Kishwar 1988) have pointed out how different mass movements, although they included women, also coopted women's issues and converted them into action plans to gain mass support. Women who tried to push left movements in the Global South to take on feminist concerns were criticized by male leadership who conflated feminism with "the West" and therefore dismissed feminist critiques of left movements as a variant of western imperialism (Sen 1990).

The separation of feminism and socialism in much of the left movements of the Global South have posited the former as a secondary matter that would only merit consideration *once* the capitalist regime is overthrown. This isolates patriarchy from capitalism and posits both as a binary instead of stemming from the foundations of the endless accumulation of capital. This is highlighted by how revolutionary women have also been occluded because feminism has been uncritically relegated to the urban sphere, usurped by upper-class, western-liberal concerns that alienated masses of subaltern women, separating class and gender. For example, Liu, Karl, and Ko (2013) show how around the turn of the twentieth century, liberal notions of empowerment overshadowed mass struggle in China. They claim that:

For the critically minded educated women of the late-Qing period, the problems they perceived within their own elite lives took center stage in their analysis of China's ills and the consequent challenges facing "women". Their concerns, represented then and now as concerns for the analytical totality of women as *such*...[and] tended to concentrate on such socially reformist solutions to women's and China's problems as educational opportunities, limited marriage freedom, footbinding, social and cultural equality with men, independence from crushing family norms that suppressed "female personhood"...and participation in newly emerging forms of governance. (Liu, Karl, and Ko 2013: 34)

To provide some contrast to this kind of feminism, the authors of the book translate the writings of Hi-Yin Zhen (1884–1920), an anarchist feminist who wrote about the gendered oppressions of a globalizing China with a radical "interpretation of the social totality of the early-twentieth-century world," instead of centering Chinese feminism's foundation in liberal discourses

(Liu et al. 2013: 47). Anup Grewal (2013), studying the formation of Chinese proletarian socialist woman, also discusses how the revolutionary woman stood against the “New Woman” ideal and modernity. In Pakistan, the urban feminist Women’s Action Forum idealized liberal feminist goals, overshadowing other class-based feminist movements such as Sindhi peasant women’s Sindhiani Tahreek, leading to the occlusion of the latter and the celebration of the former in the mainstream literature on the history of feminist struggle against the Islamization of the Zia regime in the 1980s (Ali 1988; Mumtaz 1991).

The separation of socialist and feminist movements along with the liberalization of the latter’s domineering ideals begs an anti-systemic movements’ analysis which argues that the exploitation of workers and women stem from the same foundation of accumulation of capital which turns both into commodities, through their bodies or even through their ideological representation, as I will show through the case of Ghadar. Women’s mis- and non- representation, therefore, is a product of the overdetermination of women’s exploitation in colonialism. My objective in this essay is to devise a revolutionary feminist world-systems analysis which highlights women’s roles in revolutionary, leftist history in order to correct masculinist historiography of Global South left movements. However, instead of isolating the movement from larger historical forces and pointing to this misrepresentation and occlusion as a result of some sexist agenda, I argue that the former functioned in the systemic conditions of colonial relations. They were anti-systemic movements, yes, but when it came to women, they retreated into liberal reformist platforms, where women’s issues and how they would be solved in the utopia they imagined overshadowed the revolutionary work that the colonized women themselves were performing in those very moments of history.

Revolutionary Feminist World-Systems Analysis: A Theoretical Intervention

In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici (2004) theorizes how primitive accumulation expropriated women from their bodies and monopolized them as reproductive commodities of the next labor force which was foundational to capitalist development. In highlighting how this appropriation divided the working class, she poignantly notes:

Primitive accumulation, then, was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was *also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class*, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as “race” and age, become constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat. (Federici 2004: 64, emphasis original)

It is this inherent divisiveness of capitalism that some Marxist strains of thought have either forgotten or ignored. These Marxists locate the rise of the historical process of capitalist production in the English agrarian class of the fifteenth century, by concentrating on relations of production (Brenner 1977). This is important to criticize because many Marxists, following Robert Brenner (1977), have understood the origins of capitalism with exclusive reference to class struggles in Europe, especially England. This framework ignores the importance of the non-West for the development and sustenance of capitalism. Brennerite Marxists focus on the industrializing West

in their accounts of the origins of capitalism, overlooking the importance of how the world-system creates a system of production and exploitation across national boundaries (Chibber 2006, 2013; Chibber and Usmani 2012; Eidlin 2014; Robinson 2007; Wood 2002). This vein of Marxist thought is not only eurocentric, but it also precludes capitalist exploitation and expropriation on the world scale which is state-sponsored, gendered, and racialized.

World-systems perspective rectifies Brennerite eurocentrism in two ways: by shifting the focus away from class struggle to the endless accumulation of capital; and by bringing into focus not merely Europe but also the non-European world to emphasize capitalist development as a global process. The former helps us analyze processes of colonialism and territorial expansion driven by this logic, as the peripheries were incorporated in the process of expropriation and exploitation of labor and resources for profit in the core. Therefore, capitalism did not diffuse from a more rational, industrialized England to the rest of the world as an equalizing process, but through the monopolization of power in the hands of the core states (led by a world-hegemon) that exploited other parts of the world through a combination of military, political and economic means (Arrighi 1994; Blaut 1994; Wallerstein 2011b).

Moreover, in tracing systemic cycles of dominance and chaos in the world-system, Giovanni Arrighi (1994) shows how Britain and the United States as world-hegemons proclaimed particular state interests as “universal interests” which maintained their successive hegemonies from the eighteenth to twentieth century. These “universal interests,” or universalism as an ideology, frames itself as working for *all*, disregards differences and portrays liberal bourgeois goals as beneficial for all classes (Wallerstein 1991). Wallerstein (2011b) identified that developments in the core impacted the economic structures of peripheries by means of colonial and imperialist trade networks premised on an unequal global division of labor. He notes how the liberal state that created boundaries of citizenship in the French and British cores transmitted these liberal ideas of citizenship to the peripheries in order to maintain their legitimacy in the eighteenth century (Wallerstein 2003, 2011b). The French and British imperial states as competing world hegemonies not only remained the sovereign nation states but universalized their liberal-democratic ideology to the colonies under the hegemony of the liberal-imperial state, to “control the dangerous classes” with the promise of “universal suffrage.” (Wallerstein 2003: 137) Liberalism then with “the combination of universalism-meritocracy [served] as the basis by which the cadres or middle strata [could] legitimate the system.” (Wallerstein 1991: 35) As Arrighi shows (1994), this conception of freedom was prevalent in the American ideology of liberty as well, which was adopted by the Ghadar party, as I will show below. But this liberal universalism has inherent notions of exclusions since the very beginning. Ideas of sovereignty constructed in the liberal state described who was a citizen and who was not. Women were the “passive citizens” in a liberal state which spread throughout the world economy; in 1789, Sieyès, a French clergyman and writer stated:

All inhabitants of a country should enjoy in it the rights of *passive* citizens; all have the right to the protection of their person, of their property, of their liberty, etc. But all do not have the right to play an active role in the formation of public authorities; all are not *active* citizens. Women (at least at the present time), children, foreigners,

and those others who contribute nothing to sustaining the public establishment should not be allowed to influence public life actively. (Wallerstein 2011b: 145)

This idea of liberal universalism helps us situate anti-systemic movements that end up using the same universalizing tropes in the name of progress. According to Wallerstein (1991), the model of universalism sustains itself on the narrative of inclusion for all, regardless of differences. It continues to cultivate the passive woman/other marginalized groups, because it seeks a utopia which is based on the future that creates a universal “Everyman.” (Wallerstein 1990: 52)

But while Wallerstein mentioned this division of women’s movements and socialist movements, world-systems as a paradigm has given nominal focus to women as part of the world economy, with the justification that the unit of analysis is macrostructures and not people, men or women (see Gunder Frank, 1998: 40). In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, there appeared to be a rising feminist world-systems analysis which has now been mostly forgotten, to name a few: Maria Mies (1986), Valentine Moghadam (1988, 2000), M. Patricia Fernández Kelly (Kelly and Garcia 1985), Joan Smith (Smith et al. 1984; Smith et al. 1988), and others (Dunaway 1997; Bose and Acosta-Belén 1995). Mies’ *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986) serves as a precursor to major subsequent feminist world-systems works (Federici 2004; Moore 2015) as it extends Marxist analysis to include women’s unwaged, reproductive work and shows the violent logic of destruction of nature inherent in capitalism. Mies (1986) helps us see why socialist movements tend to marginalize women’s issues and revolutionary activity: because women’s work is considered to be in the realm of unproductive work, such as child rearing, as opposed to waged factory work. She also expands our understanding of how divisions within women in the metropolises and colonies were created through ideas such as femininity and housewifization through processes like the witch hunt, which upheld the bourgeois housewife in the metropole against the colored, lower class witches in the colonies.

In an edited volume (Benería and Feldman 1992), Shelly Feldman analyzed how the debt crisis and structural readjustment in the 1970s in Third World countries impacted women in households through a gendered division of labor. Joan Smith and her colleagues (1988) also argue how the creation of the categories of racism and sexism are intertwined in a larger historic world economy. But the attempts for a feminist world-systems analysis have largely been overshadowed overall within the paradigm in the past. As Wilma A. Dunaway stated in an important essay which thoroughly analyzed women’s continued absence from world-systems analysis after 25 years of its existence, “we have managed to talk about plantations, peasant households, the informal sector, and labor unrest without ever mentioning women or gender disparities” (2001: 3) and which “represents the greatest intellectual and political blunder of the world-system perspective” (2001: 23).

More recently, Brewer argued that “The World Capitalist system... uses the intersecting forces of structural racism (or the white supremacy system), patriarchy, core capitalist-dependent nationalist projects, and a dynamic mix of national and international policies to create and sustain an increasingly unequal world” (Brewer 2012: 146). Jason Moore (2015), drawing largely from

Mies and Federici, has also highlighted the importance of women, nature, and ecology as foundational to capitalist accumulation as human and extra-human work.

However, feminist world-systems analysis of the post-1970s was primarily focused on the impacts of the debt crisis, structural adjustment programs, and development agendas on women of the Global South. It develops important concepts of the unwaged work women do which is not centered in Marxist analysis. The overall scholarship has been concentrated with the *impact*, and while resistance and revolution are mentioned (Federici 2004, 2012), it doesn't appear to be the primary focus, especially in the historical anti-colonial context. Therefore, while these forgotten, and more recent, works do the much-needed work of situating women at the forefront of a global political economy, it is also important to bring them back and stretch their framework to anti-systemic movements to emphasize women's *revolutionary* roles in this historical process. To this end, it is necessary to highlight the dialectic of anti-systemic movements against colonialism, and how as part of the capitalist world-system, they have often been subsumed in the liberal ideology that appealed to their middle-class leaders. I contend, then, that a revolutionary feminist world-systems analysis is increasingly important to analyze that women's revolutionary roles have been sidelined because the anti-systemic movements that they have been a part of have also found themselves co-opted by dominant liberal ideology. The tunnel vision of identity politics that looks at movements around "isms," abstracting them from global processes, have resulted in upholding even leftist revolutionary movements that focus on one goal, while disregarding, or pacifying others. By focusing on the case of the Ghadar Party, I show how it sustained its one-dimensional narrative as a revolutionary anti-colonial movement, while maintaining a liberal-democratic vision of women's equality.

Ghadar Party

The Ghadar Party was founded in 1913 and constituted of Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim students, ex-soldiers, and intellectuals who had migrated to find work (Roy 2012) or were exiled as the conditions in Punjab worsened due to Britain's extraction of Indian surplus for the impending World War in the core—leading to high taxes, famines, and the dilapidation of social conditions. At a time when revolutionary activity was increasingly restricted by the British in India, the Party established its foundations along the West Coast of North America, with branches spread in the Far East, specifically Manila, Shanghai, Tokyo, among other cities (Gill 2007; Ramnath 2011). Ramnath provides a detailed analysis of Ghadar, and argues that the movement,

[blended] political libertarianism and economic socialism, along with a persistent tendency toward romantic revolutionism, and within their specific context a marked antigovernment bent, [which is why] one may argue that Ghadar movement's alleged incoherence is actually quite legible through a logic of anarchism... In short, not only did Ghadar manage to join the impulses toward class struggle and civil rights with anti-colonialism, it also managed to combine commitments to both liberty and equality. (Ramnath 2011: 6)

What brought Ghadar's diverging and overlapping political ideologies together were its core values which Ramnath points out for us: "anti-colonialist," "passionately patriotic," "internationalist," "secularist," "modernist," "radically democratic," "republican," "anticapitalist," "militant revolutionist;" "in temperament audacious, dedicated, courageous unto death" (Ramnath 2011: 6).

In its early years, revolutionary Ghadarites began an uprising against the British government in Punjab. It began in February 1915, with the intention of overthrowing the British by smuggling arms and ammunition into the country, along with enraged returnees of the deported *Komagata Maru*, who were not allowed to land in Vancouver under the Continuous Journey Act passed by the Canadian Government in 1906 (Plowman 2003). The Ghadarites infiltrated Punjab, albeit unsuccessful at the end.¹ While the men's revolutionary actions are being recovered by past and contemporary scholars (Deol 1969; Puri 1980, 1993; Ramnath 2011; Singh 1945), the female revolutionaries of the Ghadar Uprising remain silenced.

Thus, while historians have done much to recover the history of the Ghadar Movement (see also: Chattopadhyay 2018; Dhamoon et al. 2019; Moffat 2019), the question of why women's voices haven't been central has been neglected. One explanation given is that because of the restrictive immigration laws of United States and Canada at the time, women were not allowed to immigrate with their husbands in the early twentieth century, which led to the protests around the Hindu Woman Question which contended to allow women's migration as well. Another factor, in general about communist women revolutionaries from India, is that they did not write as much as the men (Raza 2020). However, such narratives are bounded by the North American geography and accepts the no women equals no participation equation unquestioningly.

Ghadar's historiography is premature in this sense, only few (e.g., Bains and Ghadar Centennial Conference 2013; Raza 2020; Singh 2017) have critiqued the gendered history of the movement. However, to not unsettle this "given" fact would be a lackadaisical endeavor. Ghadar was not limited to North America. The immigrants hailed from Punjab, sent revolutionary literature to Punjab, rose in Punjab, and were often hanged in Punjab. But they were also working in a world-system, with India as a colony of the British, the United States a rising hegemon, and the rest of the world as the constituent proxies of the competing powers. It is thus important to highlight the differences of gender created in this movement's narrative which can be alluded to the capitalist world-system. How did Ghadar bring in women in the progressive, universalist ideals they posed? While certain historians have identified the need to recover Ghadar women's histories, I use Ghadar's narrative on women as a case to show how they met with the "not yet," liberal bourgeois phenomenon that posited socialist liberation from the British as central, while it misrepresented or silenced mass women. By doing so, I highlight the significance of a revolutionary feminist world-systems analysis that underscores that women are misrepresented in

¹ For a detailed account of the unsuccessful attempt at this uprising, see Hoover 1985; Plowman 2003; Ramnath 2011; Tan 2005

anti-colonial movements because they are overdetermined by colonialism where the liberal bourgeois asserts itself.

Archival Strategy

For this essay, I examined the published materials of the Ghadar Party over the decade of 1918–1927. This published material is accessible from the collection “Ghadar Party” of the South Asian American Digital Archive, a publicly available archive for South Asian American history. The collection holds 61 documents that record mostly struggles toward the freedom movement, early immigration and activities of the Ghadarites in America, materials largely absent from mainstream collections. The periodicals I analyze include, in particular, *The United States of India: A Monthly Review of Political, Economic, Social and Intellectual Independence of India*, which was earlier called *The Independent Hindustan*. To my knowledge, these periodicals have seldom been analyzed by researchers of the Ghadar Party, who tend to focus on the main magazine *Ghadar* and *Ghadar di Gunj* (*Ghadar’s Echo*) (Ramnath 2011). These periodicals were largely published after the revolutionary uprising in Punjab, from the Pacific Coast Hindu Association in San Francisco, and they provide insights into the lesser-known conversations within and around the Party. I first surveyed the data to see where women were mentioned, if they were mentioned at all, and if so, how they were represented. My intent was to not count the number of times women were mentioned so as to give the party credit for having done so; instead, I focused on the discourse surrounding women in order to ascertain how they fit into the political ideology and program of the Party. I borrow heavily from Ke Lalita and Vasantha Kannabiran’s (1989) chapter “Writing About Women in Struggles” in their book on the Telangana people’s struggles. They argue that in Indian left literature women appear either as exceptional figures, or as passive add-ons to men’s struggles. It is an additive history.

I believe that this critique can apply to the periodicals I analyze in this essay as it highlights that merely mentioning women or laying out women’s struggles as part of the larger struggle makes them qualitatively invisible. As argued, “revolution for women demands a change that is qualitative, and not merely quantitative” (Lalita and Kannabiran, 1989: 21). My interpretation of the archives follows Janet Abu-Lughod’s (1989) route of critically reading silences as only what is recorded, not all that happened, is represented through the written archive. This route could help understand the larger structural realities of anti-systemic movements in the world-economy (Braudel 1982). As Howell and Prevenier argue, moreover, texts are “filtered through discourses—discourses of discovery, redemption, conquest, civilization, manhood, whiteness,” (Howell and Prevenier 2001: 149) which makes it imperative for us to understand them with reference to the larger structures in which they are subsumed. The following section highlights how this is accomplished.

Ghadar's Representation of Women

An image of Rani Lakshmi Bai in a soldier's uniform rests on the cover page of the May 1926 issue of *The United States of India* (Pacific Coast Hindu Association 1926) with the heading "Rani Lakshmi Bai: the Heroine of the War of Independence of 1857." The issue commemorates the anniversary of the 1857 War of Independence which was an armed insurrection to overthrow the British. Lakshmi Bai was the leader of Jhansi, a princely state in Northern India, who lost her life in battle and is often remembered as a revolutionary warrior (Kaur 1968). While the central focus is not Lakshmi Bai, but the event, her reference in this periodical shows an acknowledgment of women revolutionaries in this great anti-colonial struggle. The other periodicals show, however, that the overall narrative on women is far from focused on their revolution. While women have been silenced in the Ghadar narratives, in the periodicals, women's image is coopted to be represented in a liberal-bourgeois fashion based on progress and education or as a way of sustaining the ancient traits of Hindu civilization. In both ways, they are pacified, or the middle-class based analysis is used as an overarching lens, as I will show below. And both narratives fit in how the party finds itself in a world-system where it pushes its boundaries against yet is imbedded in a core-periphery relationship.

The liberal way women are written about is illustrated by an interview (Karr and Das 2012) entitled "Women and New India" with Mrs. Lila Singh, "a suffragist from India" educated in Calcutta University, who "was the first woman student in a college exclusively meant for men." Singh acknowledges the "clearly-defined unrest of [Indian women] because of their lack of opportunity, and because of their suffering" under British rule. Connecting Indian women's struggles to Europe and America, she claims that "I admit our social evils...The same situation existed in Europe and America up to a short time ago, comparatively speaking. And the women of Europe and America would be in the same position as the women of India if the same political and economic system prevailed in those countries." Singh claims: "Our isolation from the world has been the other great reason for our position. The ideals available to you [interviewer Agnes Smedley] have not been available to us." "Among the women of India," Lila Singh claims,

while their political consciousness is not fully developed, yet there is widespread dissatisfaction with things which they are powerless to control. (Karr and Das 1920)

While Singh claims that the women are dissatisfied, the entire narrative seeks to do a catching up to the West and assumes India's isolation. Women of India appear here to have all this radical potential that remains untapped because they are not educated or waged. In the second statement, Mrs. Lila Singh argues that because of lack of education, it is only natural that women are ignorant and superstitious:

We would be beyond human if, under such circumstances, our women were not ignorant and superstitious, not to mention poverty-stricken. (Karr and Das 1920)

This idea of the backwardness of the ordinary Indian woman, as opposed to the Western-educated Indian “suffragist,” highlights and extends Hazel Carby’s (1996) argument that Third World women are seen as living in “precapitalist” conditions by white—in this case, Western educated, upper middle-class bourgeois—feminists. Carby claims that “the metropolitan centers of the West define the questions to be asked of other social systems and, at the same time, provide the measure against which all ‘foreign’ practices are gauged” (Carby 1996: 66). Singh’s assertion also presupposes a progressive, linear trajectory to revolution: only when women are educated or waged would they be able to be revolutionary. She appears to admire a binary (liberal) logic that leads from community to private lives, where the latter will give more freedom.

This highlights Sangari and Vaid’s argument that “[m]iddle class reforms undertaken on behalf of women are tied up with the self-definition of the class” (Sangari and Vaid’s 1989: 12). As stated in the case of Chinese feminism at the turn of the twentieth century quoted earlier in the essay, these middle-class, liberal aspirations are predicated as the ideals for *all* women, a trope that haunts liberal feminist movements that get coopted by these notions of progressive empowerment today. In Ghadar’s narrative, this is reflected in Lila Singh’s idealization of liberal values that assume “that it is only through the development of a Western-style industrial capitalism and the resultant entry of women into waged labor that the potential for the liberation of women can increase.” (Carby 1996: 72) While quantitatively, it could be said that at least there was a woman who was given a platform in the periodical—this interview was taken by Agnes Smedley, another feminist activist, and she had some other articles, along with Sarojini Naidu—however, their elite status and established popularity doesn’t reflect the intertwining of gender and class.

Another aspect prevalent in the portrayal of women is when they are used as tropes of ancient Hindu civilization—as docile women or brave wives. This is evident through this quote by Mrs. Lila Singh:

The women of India are part and parcel of Hindustan; they retain the traditions and customs of India, and they are the *greatest potential forces in the struggle for freedom through which India must and is passing*. (Karr and Das 1920: emphasis mine)

This equation of womanhood with nationhood fits in the larger idea of the remembrance of a national culture by the intellectuals, a trope that continues in present day postcolonial nationalist movements. It is also important to note that women here are seen as the “potential forces in the struggle for freedom.” However, this points to an important question of *how* they are the potential forces if they are made to be ahistorical caricatures of a precolonial India. This representation of women is found in an essay, “Ancient India and Her People,” beginning in May 1925 (Pacific Coast Hindustani Association 1925) and continued over a couple of issues. The essay is meant to refute Indian representation by the West, by citing validating passages by mostly Western men. In admiring India, a foreign observer writes that Hindus are no far behind Europeans in the “treatment of the female sex, full of confidence, respect and delicacy.” (Pacific Coast Hindustani Association 1925) Women’s status is upheld as the epitome of purity in the Hindu civilization when their role

is remembered in history. In one of the issues, one Sir George Birdwood's remarks on the "sweetness of Hindu womanhood" earlier published in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* are cited:

Perfect daughters, wives and mothers, after the severely disciplined, self-sacrificing Hindu ideal, remaining modestly at home, as the proper sphere of their duties, unknown beyond their families, and seeking in the happiness of their children their greatest pleasure and in the reverence of their husbands the amaranthine crown of a woman's truest glory. (Pacific Coast Hindustani Association 1925)

Mies showed how Europeans considered egalitarian practices of Africans backward because "[women had] to understand that [their] independence stands in the way of progress" (Mies 1986: 94). Here, the same "housewifization" is considered the Hindu ideal. This projection is important to contrast with how the authors themselves tried to project women and ancient India all together. In one issue, one of the authors writes:

It is interesting to note that in those ancient days, the martial spirit animated not only the men, but also the women of the land. At a time of war, the womenfolk urged their male relations to march to battle, resolved to win or die like heroes. The wife rejoiced to see her husband display his valour, and the mother to see her son show his bravery, in war; and neither was troubled by the thought of any possible danger to the life of her hero. (Karr and O'Shasnian 1920)

This notion of the past fits within the larger narrative of remembering ancient India. Here, women appear to have done better relatively before colonialism. Without romanticizing this narrative, it is still important to point out the difference between this visualization and the one by Lila Singh quoted above.

United States' "Universal Interests"

The transmission of universal hegemonic ideas can be seen in how the party took American ideas of liberty as central to their idea of democracy, which underscores how Ghadar functioned in a world-system with the dominant ideologies of the United States pertinent. Ramnath argues that,

[Ghadar's] encounter with an ideal in the founding values of French and American political liberalism, combined with disgust at the distance between this ideal and the reality they encountered, was an important impetus of the emergent Ghadarite thinking, which gravitated toward the politically libertarian aspects rather than the classical economic elements of Enlightenment thinking as it invoked the touchstones of freedom and democracy. (Ramnath 2011: 6)

This idealization is found in the July 1926 issue of *The United States of India*, for example, which begins with "America's message to India: Declaration of Independence from British Rule" (Pacific Coast Hindustani Association 1926), where the text of the declaration is cited. This is preceded by a hope that Americans, "the real lovers of freedom from all," will remember that Indians have yet to gain independence from the "same tyrant" (Pacific Coast Hindustani

Association 1926). In another issue (Pacific Coast Hindustani Association 1924), in February 1924, Indian patriots are given inspiration through images of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by short quotes from them celebrating liberty and democracy. A few pages down the authors argue about the similarity of the Indian struggle of freedom with that of America, and how the former would “forever turn their eyes to America to take new hope and renew courage until such times they will stand victorious, as victorious as Washington stood” (Pacific Coast Hindustani Association 1924). This hope is grounded in the universalist ideas of humanity and freedom, with language that is all encompassing:

The Hindustan Gadar Party was established with a view to bring about a *complete change* in the political and economic system of India. The history of the party bristles with the same sort of forces which forge the destiny of *mankind* towards the *most progressive consummation of ideals*. (Karr and O’Shasian 1920: emphasis mine)

It is important to question what Ghadar means by “progressive consummation of ideals” in this passage. While the ideals seem to provide an alternative to the oppression of colonialism, Mies argues that:

[the] concept of “progress”...is historically unthinkable without the one-sided development of the technology of warfare and development...the progress of European Big Men is based on the subordination and exploitation of their own women, on the exploitation and killing of Nature, on the exploitation and subordination of other peoples and their lands. Hence, the law of this “progress” is always a contradictory and not an evolutionary one: progress for some means retrogression for the other side: “evolution” for some means “devolution” for others; “humanization” for some means “de-humanization” for others. (Mies 1986: 63)

Ghadar’s concept of progress, developed on the American ideals, appears to follow this similar divisive logic. Ideals of liberty for *all* and freedom for *all* set well against the British tyrants, the common enemy. This overarching notion of liberty assumes inclusivity for all, but, as Wallerstein noted (quoted above), has exclusivity imbedded in it. Ghadarites had shifted their core from the British metropole to America. But these ideas of liberty and freedom that they set close to heart and actively took as inspiration show also how the ideas of universalism were inculcated in the peripheral intellectuals working in the United States. The Americanness in the party is prevalent in its desire to be like the bearers of freedom. When it comes to the conception of women in the party then, it becomes easy to see this liberal universalism taking place—where women were coopted/silenced in the unidirectional goals of the movements to overthrow colonialism.

Women’s representation thus appears to oscillate between different ideals: as docile housewives, as brave women/wives, as potentials for change. But contrasting it with the ideals set by Lila Singh and the basis of a Western conception of liberty echoes Federici when the latter points out, that “the global expansion of capitalism through colonization and Christianization ensured that [the] persecution [of women] would be planted in the body of colonized societies and,

in time, would be carried out by the subjugated communities in their own names and against their own members” (Federici 2004: 237). Walter Rodney (1974) also claimed that colonialism “intensified” the divisions of labor that divided women’s “backward” work and men’s “modern” work, although, women had held better positions before the colonialist came. This division of labor is also represented ideologically in these narratives where women are central to promote a more egalitarian *past India*, just as they are used to propose a utopic liberal *future India*. It validates the party’s claim that:

After the overthrow of the British rule, the seething masses of India will, with new freedom revolutionise the *entire economic and political thought and system of the world*. (Pacific Coast Hindustani Association 1920, emphasis mine)

Women, then, become an idea that fits in the larger surge of the cultured past and a universal liberal future to legitimate India in the world-system of the colony and metropole, which is not unique in the process of anti-colonial struggle. As Fanon argues: “This stated belief in a national culture is in fact an ardent, despairing turning towards anything that will afford [the native intellectual] secure anchorage” (Fanon 2007: 173). This phenomenon also highlights what Shelly Feldman (1999) noted in her essay on the silence of East Bengal from the larger narrative of the subcontinent Partition. She claimed that a feminist critique could elucidate on how first “in order to secure representation of its hegemonic interests, the nationalist narrative depends for its success on its ability to transform emergent counter-narratives” (Feldman 1999: 176). She notes “how the social practices that sought to realize national sovereignty [are] part of a process characterized by a set of institutional and normative practices that...train the new, ‘non-colonized’ woman” (Chatterjee 1993 in Feldman 1999: 176). Women’s ideological representation is then expropriated, just as their bodies and work has been, in the historical process of capitalist and colonialist development and decolonization. They are represented as prototypes of a past Hindu civilization, and while their bravery is acknowledged, it is a cursory remark. The central projection is the desire for women to be rational, educated—waged—actors in an independent India or as docile housewives of ancient India. This underscores the ideological division sustained by anti-systemic movements that see the colonized male proletariat as the revolutionary, yet women’s ideological representation puts that revolution in motion.

Conclusion

The Ghadar Party was formed in 1913 to overthrow the British Raj. With foundations along the West Coast of North America, it had its operations around the globe as it incited revolutionary struggle in Punjab. However, the one-sided, male dominated, and universalizing narratives of the party highlight the ever increasing need to question apparently anti-systemic movements’ tendencies to recede to the liberal, intellectualized and bourgeois narratives as they function within a capitalist world-system. As Ghadar idealized American notions of liberal democracy, it envisioned a homogenous new India, as it glossed over women’s role in the historical process of

colonialism, infantilized women's resistance, and idealized a non-colonized bourgeois "new" woman. By way of a revolutionary feminist world-systems analysis, in this essay, I have argued that despite this mis- and non- representation in the narrative of anti-colonial movements, women remain central in the dialectical relation of anti-systemic movements' relationship with the cores. Just as women's bodies have been integral to capitalist development, I have argued that so have their ideological representation been vital for anti-systemic movements in the capitalist world-system. As the movements try to push back on the cores, they also adopt the universalist hegemonic ideals which end up propagating a liberal agenda, premised on women's progress in the name of work and education, or as bearers of the lost—and disconnected—past. This overshadows women's active participation as revolutionaries and limits their representation to the wider goals of the movements. While certain Marxist thought have apparently forgotten or ignored this fact, this analysis is especially important when there is a tendency to divide anti-systemic—anti-colonial, socialist, Marxist—movements from women's issues. Thus, it is important to question Ghadar, and other such movements, who while revolutionary as anti-colonial, took forward the liberal ideas of the world hegemon they tried to overthrow when it came to the role of women in the movement.

Today, while leftist movements of the Global South continue to be mostly male dominated with pushback from feminist movements, women's ideological representation continues to be coopted by postcolonial nationalism movements. "Woman" as an abstracted category remains oscillating between the movements' different ideologies today. For example, ultra nationalist movements such as Hindutva, led by the RSS and BJP in India, continues to associate women with nationalism, by recruiting them into its rank based on the Hindu woman ideal; only this time, in contrast to Ghadar, it focuses on the progressiveness of the Hindu woman in comparison to the Muslim woman. Moreover, the movements' training camps advocate self-defense and leadership in upper-class women (EPW 2021). Most recently, Israel justified its continued genocide on the Palestinians also based on saving the Muslim woman, where its own military women were more "modern" and liberated. In Afghanistan, the Taliban revoked the more progressive rights Afghan women had fought for in the last 20 years, convoluting nationalism with supposed anti-imperialism. The static category of the woman thus needs to be revoked by highlighting her continued integrity to the continuation and momentum of revolutionary movements historically, but also how they continue to be coopted by postcolonial nationalism.

I have tried to show in this paper that merely including women in left narratives is not sufficient, and I have shown the liberalism of apparently revolutionary movements. Instead, I argue that that it is important to recover women at the forefront of revolutions—in the myriad forms those revolutions might take—because of the possibilities that a feminist revolutionary praxis opens up. In the Global South, we are exceedingly seeing efforts by feminist movements to chart what it means to view the world from a feminist perspective, such as the Palestinian Feminist Collective, Aurat March (Women's March) in Pakistan, and many others, which bring together a politics focused on resisting capitalist-patriarchy through an anti-imperialistic, transnational perspective. They negate the notion that "women's issues" are separate from larger structures of

oppression to highlight how a feminist praxis would entail the liberation for all against capitalist-patriarchy. However, the global left in general continues to be dominated with the male, waged-worker paradigm. A historical analysis of women's underappreciated integrity to socialist thought will show that women have never been separate from revolutionary praxis, and a feminist outlook to historical process of the world-system would show that women have not *just now* become relevant but have been fighting against oppression historically. While I have highlighted *why* women were missing in this narrative, I want to emphasize why it is important that they be there, not only to include them, but why non-cis-male, non-white narratives of revolutionary moments can be historically and contemporarily expansive. This has important implications for contemporary movements of the Left in the Global South as it also opens important questions of who is considered a revolutionary and who isn't. It is imperative to show how women have been central in a globally systemic push and pull, and it is important, therefore, to highlight their revolutionary praxis historically as the next step.

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