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Exploring the Sky: Examinations of Women's Empowerment through Contemporary Movements

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In the post 9/11 milieu there has been a deluge of media attention towards women's empowerment (Mehta, 2009). Yet, despite the variety of origins, one dominant narrative remains: that non-Western women are often perceived as victims to underdevelopment. Furthermore, the term empowerment carries multiple connotations. Often coterminous with liberal feminist frameworks, empowerment for subaltern women presupposes that the panacea to female empowerment is access to capital. One such example is the video game *Half the Sky Movement: The Game*, published by Games for Change (G4C) and based off the New York Times bestseller written by Nicolas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. Invoking liberal feminist frameworks, the game's objective suggests that the best solution to female empowerment is access to capital. The book garnered great traction in 2009 thus leading to a social movement campaign. The video game has also gained great success with over 1.3 million players worldwide (Games for Change, 2014). Yet despite their success, their narrative universalizes subaltern women while pushing for meritocracy, a concern Monhanty (2003) expressed a decade ago.

Western feminism creates the illusion that all women share similar oppressions through their shared experiences as women. Yet, this is problematic as it ignores the historical contexts that position women worldwide. For example, often a singular "Third World Woman" is presented in mainstream media while positioning the West as arbiter. Calling this the "third world difference," Monhanty explicates that Western feminism presumes that sexual oppression in the global south is due to a universal patriarchy that lacks the historically rooted themes of Western feminism. Through its homogenization of patriarchy, Western feminism colonizes the various lives of these women (p. 51).

Kristoff and WuDunn's movement focuses on giving a voice to the women who suffer from sex trafficking, gender-based violence, and maternal mortality. For example one of their stories features Srey Rath, a Cambodian woman who has been trafficked over the Cambodian border to Thailand to work in a brothel. The story is vividly written by the authors; yet, rarely gives Rath's personal perspective. Instead, her story is written through a narrative of Kristoff's perspective of Rath, describing her as a beautiful, vibrant woman. Only a few quotes are actually given *by* her. When Spivak (1988) asks, "Can the subaltern speak?" one can see how the *Half the Sky* movement exemplifies this phenomenon.

Literature on precarity fails to draw enough on transnational feminisms. This paper aims to fill this lacuna with particular consideration to how contemporary models of women's empowerment fail to invoke the decades of scholarship that have (re)imagined alternative, more accurate, views of subaltern women (Spivak, 1988; Mernissi, 2001; Mohanty, 2003; Parameswaran, 2008). Through surveys and deep journaling this study examines how the *Half the Sky* video game is interpreted by its players. It asks: How do players describe global female empowerment after playing this game? Findings suggest that women tend to see the value of feminism but know little about how Western countries aid in creating neoliberal systems of global hegemony.

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