The World March of Women: First Quebec, then the world?

Pascale Dufour

Département de science politique

Université de Montréal

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Proto-paper prepared for: Claiming Citizenship in the Americas A Conference Organised by the Canada Research Chair in Citizenship and Governance www.cccg.umontreal.ca Although the terms citizen and citizenship are charged with multiple connotations in everyday language; in political science, being a citizen is, minimally, acting as a member of a political community in a democracy (Mouffe, 2000: 168). Some authors would add more elements to this definition, while others would be more oriented towards the judicial definition of citizens (having some rights and duties from the State) and probably more restrictive in their definitions of citizenship. However, these authors are in agreement when it comes to the following elements of definition of citizenship: someone can be considered a citizen 1) if he or she lives in a democracy; 2) if a political community exists; 3) if he or she belongs to it.

When we consider a transnational phenomenon – that is a phenomenon that occurs across and beyond national borders - all three of these elements are problematic. What does citizenship mean in a context where democracy, political community and belonging are not situated within a national context?

In this paper, we address the question of citizenship from an empirical perspective by considering the case of the World March of Women (WMW). This is a clear example of a transnational social movement.

The concept of transnational social movement has been applied to many different things. For some, it involves transnational actions; for others it refers to transnational advocacy networks; or transnational NGOs. Here I adopt Sidney Tarrow's definition. He sees a transnational social movement as a process of building activists' networks beyond national borders (Tarrow, 1998: 184-185). From this perspective, the WMW is a transnational movement, being composed of:

- -a set of groups
- -a set of networks
- -a set of mobilisations linked to some events.

In 2000, under the umbrella of the World March of Women, 600 groups from 163 countries organised local, national, supra-national and global marches against poverty and violence towards women. In addition, popular education activities and lobbying of national states, regional organisations such as the European Commission and international organisations were conducted. These actions were organised around one common set of claims that emerged from the solidarity networks built between 1998 and 2000.

The events of the year 2000 have also generated a strong feeling of solidarity between participants from all over the world. In 2005, the activists from the WMW organised a new year of mobilisations around the *World Charter of Women for Humanity*, making the WMW appear to be not only a one-time event, but a transnational organisation that continues to exist.

Most of the time, feminist transnational networks are organised among NGOs acting in a specific field (women rights, for example) and dedicated to lobbying of international institutions. In the case of the WMW, participating groups are diverse, including women's groups but also unions, political parties, anti-poverty groups, international solidarity groups, and so on). Feminist groups who are part of the March are also very eclectic in terms of their field of actions as well as the type of actions they are involved in (local groups specialised in communitarian activities like food and NGOs very active at the international level in women rights networks); the March has used arms of contentious politics more than lobbying and has been present in the World Social Forum from the beginning. For all these reasons, the WMW could be considered different from other transnational feminists networks (Alvarez, 2000; Bunch, 2001; Naples et Desai, 2002).

If we go back to our three elements of citizenship: the first one (if the person lives in a democracy) and the second one (if a political community exists) are directly linked with the question of place: where do transnational actions occur? Part I of the paper deals with this question and also considers the relationship of the WMW to specific institutions and authority. The third element (the questions of belonging to this community) can be asked in terms of the existence of a collective identity and the finality of collective actions. In Part II, we look at the process of claims-building in the case of the World March of Women. Finally, in the conclusion, we go back to the initial problem: Is citizenship a relevant analytical frame to consider the transnationalisation social movements?

Part I - Transnational social movements and the space problematic, or which political community are we talking about?

To properly treat the question of space (and the scale of the movement), we need to analytically distinguish two timeperiods: the moment where a transnational movement emerges and the period when this process of transnationalisation becomes more permanent.

Emergence:

Two main views are advanced to explain why transnationalisation of social actors emerges. In the first, international institutional political opportunities, through their influence on the development of TNGO, produced transnationalisation of social actors (Smith, 2004; Naples and Desai, 2002). After this first step, the development of a transnational public sphere (Guidry et al., 2000) facilitates the diffusion of ideas and practices from one country to another (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005: 2). This analytical framework corresponds to the development of a transnational women's network at the end of the 1990s (Moghadam, 2000).

Another way to explain transnationalisation of social movements is to consider the world level of protest as a new opportunity structure for local or national social movements facing closed national situations and who find through transnationalisation, new resources for mobilisation (Keck et Sikkink, 1998), material ones or only symbolic ones (Boudreau, 2003 : 181). Acting globally could have a positive effect at the local level (boomerang effect) and could also offer more efficiency to local actors (Evans, 2005 : 231).

This explanation fits well the beginning of the WMW movement as first a national (or subnational) initiative, progressively linked with global actions. Stories of the WMW and of the Quebec women's movement are tightly linked. First, during the spring of 1995, in Quebec, The Women's March against Poverty (*La Marche du pain et des roses*) involved several women from the international cooperation sector. They were directly involved in the organisation of 1995 March. Despite its seemingly local focus, a number of international groups were involved: the Quebec committee of Femmes et développement (CQFD), the *Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale* (AQOI), *Cinquième Monde* and *Relais-femmes*. The international dimension was introduced into the March in order to integrate international solidarity into the process. Twenty-five women from different NGOs and women groups, from fourteen countries (Africa, Asia, Latin America) participated in the Quebec March with

thousands of Quebec women. (Acte du deuxième Séminaire international sur l'économie solidaire, VI).

The idea to organise the same type of event at the world level slowly emerged. Finally, through a big push by the *Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ)*, the project of the World March of Women 2000 was launched in 1998 (See Giraud, 2001 for details). From 1998 to 2000 the FFQ was in charge of the organisation (including the financial aspects) and was in charge of the world coordination of the event.

In 1998, the situation of the women's movement in Quebec was as the theory suggests, limited in its influence at the national level. The project and process of the WMW was a way of acting in a different sphere, to empower the movement nationally and locally. In addition, the role of the United Nations has been crucial for the March. The Beijing Conference on Women's Poverty had been a unique occasion for women groups and transnational women's NGOs to meet (as argued by Moghadam, 2000). From this perspective, we can say that an international political opportunity structure exists, initiated and created by the United Nations, and thus in the mind of the March's main leaders, transnationalisation was seen as a good tool for collective action at the national and international levels.

In this story, local and national groups joined together in specific events, linked locally and internationally, to make common claims around the anti-poverty struggle and against violence towards women. The political community here remains national (Quebec) – the institutions that are addressed are local, national and international. National or local political communities are still the point of reference for debates, and in this case, it is not too difficult to use a citizenship analytical grid to understand transnationalisation of actors from the North (the question for South actors is more difficult because democracy does not exists everywhere).

We can state that some women, citizens of national political community, joined together across borders in order to make some gains for women locally, nationally and internationally. Not only did they direct their claims towards national institutions, but also towards international ones,

particularly the United Nations, as they invited themselves to the UN to present their common claims.

The picture is far more complex when we consider the present period and the second phase of the WMW.

Institutionalisation:

In 1998, when the idea of the WMW was on the agenda of some feminists in Quebec and elsewhere in the world, it was more in the sense of a one-off event. It was expected to end in 2000. How then did the movement continue?

Two elements must be taken into account: a) the gradual autonomy of the international coordination from its Quebec origin; b) the process of autonomy in Quebec from the international coordination

Autonomy of the international coordination from Quebec

After the 2000 mobilisations, some elements clearly needed to be changed if the March were to choose to go on with transnationalisation. The March would have to have its own structure, separated from that of the Quebec women's movement. It also needed a way of existing at the world scale and at the same time to let enough room to local and regional groups. Finally, the democratic decision process inside the WMW needed to be protected. It is only at the fourth international meeting at Mumbaï, India in 2003 that the structure that today exists was adopted (Bulletin de liaison, May 2003).

Today, over 6000 local groups across 160 countries constitute the basis of the WMW. Some of them belong to regional and national coordinations. Next to local groups, there are work groups (a set of local groups gathering around a theme) that produce updated information for the whole network. Since 2003 these work groups are considered the "brain" of the WMW. The themes are chosen during international meetings (for example, there is a work group on feminist economic alternatives and another one on violence against women). They are distinct from international collectives, which constitute the political part of the March. The collectives represent the WMW in diverse political spaces and are devoted to building strategic alliances with other groups or networks.

An international Committee is responsible for the 2005 mobilisations. Composed of women elected from all over the world, it is supposed to be supported by an international Secretary, the permanent structure of the March. Before 2000, the international Secretary was integrated to the Quebec *Fédération des femmes* (FFQ). Until 2003, it was supposed to have an autonomous life, but still had its headquarters in the same building, in Montreal. The International Secretary has been in a situation of financial crisis from the beginning. During the fall of 2004, it was forced to close its doors and all of the March's four permanent employees lost their jobs. Today, the international Secretary is still closed and has no address, but two of the women continue to work, for free, for the March (including, Diane Matte, the head speaker of the March). Two others have been relocated in the South (Peru and Brazil) for a couple of months and all the activists continue to work on the possibility to have the International Secretary elsewhere (Brazil), as soon as possible.

As the WMW is a very decentralised structure and as a lot of its tasks are delegated to national coordinations, the absence of the International Secretary does not mean the end of the movement. For 2005 activities, for example, Quebec was responsible for the writing of the March, Brazil was in charge of the official opening of 2005 activities, and Burkina Faso organized the travel or the Charter all over the world. Each group member of the WMW has the possibility to deal quite freely with the work and tools produced by the international level of the March.

The structure of the world organisation is thought as a tool for the movement and not as an aim in itself. This perspective is very important as it allows the activists to separate the question of organisation from the question of the actions and mobilisations of the WMW.

In this entire story we have a real complex situation in terms of the "where" of the March: the international structure does not really exist on a permanent basis but rather exists virtually (it does not have a fixed address but many electronic ones). On the one hand, this world scale of the WMW is real in the sense that actions take place at this scale. At the same time, national and regional coordination (as in Europe) have also a critical role to play in keeping the WMW alive, both on a national and international level (they took care of some of the world 2005 activities). In

that respect, the questions of the where and the who are very complicated. It would be very presumptuous at this stage to conclude which political community is most concerned by the WMW actions and mobilisations.

The process of autonomy in Quebec

All women in the Quebec movement did not share the feeling that the WMW had to become an organisation autonomous from the FFQ. For some, the Quebec women's movement should keep the leadership of the WMW (interview Michèle Asselin). But, as Nancy Burrows, a permanent employee of the WMW and responsible for international coordination explains, « on était devenu plus gros que la FFQ elle-même, ça n'avait plus de sens que l'on soit à l'intérieur de cette structure-là ».

The first step of this process of autonomy was to physically and administratively separate the two organisations, and then to create a Quebec national coordination, as elsewhere in the world.

As Michèle Asselin, President of the FFQ explains:

« Maintenant, on comprend mieux que nous sommes un pays participant à la Marche, que nous ne sommes pas la Marche. (...) Et d'ailleurs, on a changé le nom de la coordination qui s'appelle maintenant la Coordination québécoise de la Marche mondiale et on se réunit strictement sur l'agenda Marche mondiale, mais bien sûr en lien avec les préoccupations québécoises ».

The mixing of the WMW and the FFQ projects in 2000 created some turbulence inside the FFQ, which was mandated to coordinate a world movement not directly linked with the defence of Quebec women's rights. Besides, a lot of Quebec women activists were disappointed by the ratio of time and energy involved in the year 2000 activities versus the very low national gains obtained (David, 2004: 13). For these women, national and local claims should be at the top of the agenda of the Quebec WMW Coordination and the Charter has to be a vehicle for Quebec claims addressed to the Quebec government. For the FFQ today, the WMW is a file among others

and is not the unique organisation which speaks in the name of the whole (Interview, FFQ employee).

The process by which the Quebec women's movement established its autonomy from the WMW clarifies the links between the two. First, modifies the place and role of the WMW inside the Quebec women's movement. The relative low intensity of the national mobilisation around the Charter in May 2005 (2000 women were in Quebec City to welcome the Charter and bring it to the doors of the parliament) further confirms this point. Nevertheless, the Quebec Coordination of the March identified five national claims. Four are directed towards the Quebec government and establish a clear link between the Charter and the national problematic and one reaffirms the importance of transnational solidarities among women of the world.

Also, the independence of the WMW from its Quebec origins poses differently the links between the many scales of actions of the movement. We see a greater disconnection between the international and the national level, compared to the first period (1998-2000). The movement is *both* a world network and a world organisation *and* a collection of national and local women's groups trying to work and act towards the same goal.

If we consider national groups (such as the Quebec Coordination), the existence of a policy community is still relevant. Local and national organisations of the movements continue to exist and be active at the local and national level as well as to address local and national institutions, as citizens of a national community.

But at the international level, the terms are more problematic – in the name of what or in whose name does the WMW act? There is no clear institutional interlocutor in 2005. Decision to focus on the Charter reflects an internal need of the transnational movement being built. The Charter was a way to build a feminist alternative to neo-liberal globalisation.

If we consider the possibility that the transnational scale exists independently from a national scale (in the sense that we pose the theoretical possibility that transnationalisation exists in itself), the existence of a political community of reference becomes more questionable. Here we need to

ask the actors themselves and to analyse their practices and discourses to see how they build their claims. This is the aim of the second part of the paper.

Part II- The process of claims-building

Interests and identity building: transnationalisation for what?

The continuation of the WMW is a real paradox as the actions of 2000 did not have concrete effects, especially in Northern countries, where governments' answers were nonexistent or very timid. In addition, the analytical tool presented earlier to analyse the emergence of the March as a transnational actor are not relevant in explaining why the movement still continues today: there is no political opportunity structure at the international level / it does not correspond to specific decisions concerning women / the efficiency of the WMW 2000 had been really bad / the movement did not have plenty of resources to spend.

So why does the movement persist?

Here, we have to consider that transnationalisation could be something else than a strategy for actors to achieve specific outcomes and that transnationalisation could be an aim in itself, chosen by actors. In this perspective, the motor of collective action is not just the « development of a shared understanding of the external reality » (Tarrow et Della Porta, 2005 : 240), as generally conceptualised by transnational social movements literature, but to consider that the building of transnational solidarity is the aim chosen by actors.

This hypothesis is first confirmed by the discourse of women activists in the WMW and especially those who were active in the International Secretary before it was closed. It is also confirmed by the debates inside the WMW between 2001 and 2004, the time when the decision to continue with the Charter was made, and by analysis of the process of elaboration of the Charter itself, during summer 2004.

a) Who is the interlocutor of the WMW with the Charter?

The main interlocutors of the WMW during the Charter period are other social actors protesting globally and not international institutions. Local and national governments are only interlocutors for local groups and national Coordinations of the March.

In 2000, political institutions (national State, supranational institutions, the United Nations, IMF, World Bank) were clearly identified as interlocutors of the March. The 2000 world action ended at New York, at the head office of the UN, when the "women of the world invited themselves to the UN" (Interview, Diane Matte). As soon as the 2000 events ended, Françoise David, who wasthe leader of the International Coordination, pondered about the future of the March and the danger that it might « faire double emploi avec ce que d'autres (les réseaux féministes transnationaux) font déjà »1. At the same time, the question of the alliance of the March with the alterna-anti-globalisation movement was posed (Martin, 2001: 15). In 2001, a consensus emerged among activists about the necessity to go beyond international and national institutions confrontation. Central was the question of the position of the movement towards 1) other transnational women's movements mainly devoted to international lobbying (especially at the UN) and 2) social movements involved in the fight for an alternative globalisation. Slowly, women activists of the March concluded they wanted to be able to propose their own alternatives, and not only in reaction to dominant neo-liberal discourses and positions (Minutes of the meeting, site MWM website, 2001). Doing so would help build an autonomous space of discourse that would belong to the women of the March and be the first step towards the construction of a collective transnational identity. At this stage, the UN was still seen as a potential ally.

During the fourth international meeting at Mumbaï in March 2003, this choice was clearly decided. The events and mobilisations of 2005 around the Charter were officially launched during this meeting. The proposal of the Quebec coordination was adopted mainly because it was seen as a tool to work together in order to build a collective vision of what the members of the WMW want. The possibility to use the Women Charter for Humanity to confront international

¹ Interview with Françoise David, by Vivian Barbot and Ruth Rose, 9 February 2000 for the review *Recherches féministes* (2000: 16).

institutions was discussed, but the relevance of this link was clearly posed (Minutes of the meeting, site MWM website, 2003; Interview, activist, International Secretary). The Charter is presented as a framework for future actions for the movement and a reference for future claims. In this perspective, it is an internal tool that women want to arm themselves with (what do we want as a world movement) but is also a way to make the feminist alternative concrete and present on the world scene of social protest.

b) The elaboration of the Charter: a world action in itself

From the beginning of the process of elaboration of the Charter in 2004, the aim was to be able to affirm to other social forces that the WMW was a transformation force of global society that must be taken into account (Web site of the WMW). To the "other possible world" that is the main slogan of the alternate-anti globalisation movement; women of the March want to present their own alternative.

This position reflects well the tension that exists inside the World Social Forum or the European Social Forum, where feminist forces have to fight to be heard (as movements but also through their discourses and claims). The Charter is seen as a tool for popular education for women and men all over the world and as a way to promote feminist values in front of other social forces. Here, the feminist grid of analyse is extended to "humanity" and not only directed to the defence of women interests.

The Charter is the result of a comprehensive consultation process, where all local groups were able to participate in its elaboration and able to react several times in the year the Charter was built. Commentaries from thirty-three countries on the first version of the Charter were officially sent to the International Secretary. According to the person who was in charge of drafting the Charter, 200 groups had analysed the Charter very closely and had proposed some changes (Interview, International Secretary, 2004). The final draft of the Charter was adopted on December 10, 2004 in Kigali, Rwanda, during the fifth international meeting of the March. Important debates around the text took place during this meeting, especially around abortion rights and gay and lesbian rights. A clear North-South cleavage was present during this meeting and the consensual formulation was hard to find between the participants. The 8th of March, the

Charter was officially presented in Brazil and on the 7th of May the Charter was in Quebec City where 2000 women were there to welcome this symbolic paper. The 17th of October 2005 the Charter will end its world tour in Burkina Faso, on the International Day against Poverty.

In this process, local groups concretely participated in a global project; the WMW as an international organisation did create a tool to position itself towards other social forces and as a movement, the March proved to be alive and active.

c) The content of the Charter: is there a global feminism there?

The Charter was elaborated around five values: justice, peace, equality, solidarity and liberty. If the values promoted are not really distinctive or proper to a feminist approach, some elements are. First, the Charter directly designed a patriarchal system and a capitalist system as two systems of domination that reinforced each other. For that, it could be labelled "feminist". Second, collective rights are put on the same level as individual rights. For that it is not only an occidental Charter, but something coming from women from the South as well. Finally, some claims are directly linked with specific women problematics (body uses and abuses – minority judicial status in some part of the world – free domestic work, etc...).

Is it enough to be the symbol or the translation of something that could be called "global feminist collective identity"?

To be able to build the Charter, the women of the March involved adopted a relative classic reasoning in feminist movements: beyond the diversity of women of the world, it is possible to share a common analysis, the transnational nature of patriarchal system being recognised by all feminist activists (Vuola, 2002). In other words, the WMW movement started from a feminist collective identity, shared by all (or almost all) women groups belonging to the March. With the Charter, it is more than the transnationalisation of solidarities among women of the world (which was the purpose of the 2000 actions), but also the transnationalisation of differences among women (starting from our differences, what could we build together). With the Charter, the plurality of women becomes the foundation of the collective identity (here is what we collectively want for our world, and not only what we are, as women and as feminists).

Links with citizenship

- a) In the body of the Charter, citizenship is directly mobilised and women are perceived as citizens before being mothers or spouses. In this perspective, citizenship is part of the collective identity that the Charter tries to develop. Nevertheless, the type of citizenship cited is not clear. From what was said earlier, it is as if women were considered first as women and feminists of the world, acting at the world scale, for a better world that they have collectively defined. Do they define this world as citizens? Furthermore, The Charter is addressed to men and women all over the world that want to fight for a better world and want to adopt the sharing values and claims presented by the Charter. Does the call that the Charter wants to make is a call to other citizens or human beings of the world?
- b) From another perspective we can say that the Charter is not centrally a citizenship claim. Links to institutions (internationally or even nationally) are not really clear (even if in Quebec for example, most of the claims are directed towards the provincial government) and a lot of autonomy is given to national and sub-national coordination. Most importantly, the UN is not mentioned at all in the Charter. If men and women are viewed as active political subjects, it is difficult to know subjects of what and also to know what kind of power relationships are put into question (patriarchal and capitalists systems do not designate citizenship by themselves).

Conclusion:

What sort of conclusion could be drawn between transnational mobilisation, such as the WMW, and citizenship?

1) The case of the WMW clearly shows that the "claim for citizenship" is an affirmation that should be posed as an empirical question and not taken for granted precisely because the concept of citizenship is difficult to apply outside national borders. As it is dominantly conceptualised in the literature, the concept of citizenship as a transnational phenomenon will be problematic as long as international or continental authority (and power) does not materialize. To that extent, the European example is very interesting to explore. In the case of the WMW, national European coordination of the March clearly addresses both levels of government and is much more clearly embedded in the European context.

- 2) In the first part of the paper, we have shown that the questions of place and the question of interlocutors were problematic. This means the issue of scale and multi-scalar mobilisations and actions in the case of transnational movement such as the WMW needs significant attention. If you consider only local and national groups of the movement, and if you conceptualize the WMW as only a network of social forces, each entity of the movement remains clearly located at a national or sub national level, even if they act at different scales of action. As soon as you consider the movement as more than a network, something that exists transnationally more or less permanently, the location of actors is more problematic. The international level of actions presupposes the presence of international institutions but, as we have seen, in the case of the March with the Charter, there is no such level. What does it mean?
- 3) If we go back to the components of citizenship that we mentioned in the introduction, what can be said? For each element, there is a tension due to the transnational nature of the movement that should be taken into account in the analysis:
- <u>Belonging</u>: probably the most problematical element in the case of the WMW activists: belonging to what : the world ? The common conditions of women dominated by a patriarchal system ? a people ? The local community?
- Existence of political community: there is no political community at the world level.
- <u>Existence of democracy</u>: do we need to live in a democracy to act as a citizen? What do the women from non-democratic country belonging to the March do?

Finally, the case of the March poses a critical question to our nation centred social science tradition: is it possible to think citizenship outside public authority and public power? If yes, how?

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Brigitte Verdière, salariée, Responsable de la Rédaction de la Charte

Diane Matte, salariée, Coordonnatrice du Secrétariat international

Nancy Burrows, salariée, Agente de liaison internationale

Militante, bénévole, Comité international, impliquée autour de la Charte

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Marie-France Benoît, Conseillère à la Condition féminine, Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, membre de la Coordination nationale

Militantes, Front Commun des personnes assistés sociales du Québec, Association des religieuses pour la promotion des femmes, salariée, FFQ, ancienne salariée et militante, FFQ-MMF

Michèle Asselin, Présidente de la FFQ

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Nelly Martin, SUD-PTT, responsable de la Marche Mondiale, CNDF

Joelle Palmieri, Les Pénélopes, France

Judith Martin-Razi, coordinatrice et Nicole Thuet, présidente du Collectif 13- Marseille

Participation à l'Assemblée européenne des femmes, Bobigny, le 12 novembre 2003 et au FSE Paris-Saint- Denis, du 13 au 15 novembre 2003.