Post-colonial cosmopolitanism: Indian NGOs in the Global Call to Action against Poverty

The Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) was established in 2003 out of negotiations between large Northern-based INGOs and Southern civil society actors. GCAP was and is constituted by national level coalitions of NGOs and civil society actors. However, in its initial stages it was a Northern driven initiative (exemplified by the 2005 Make Poverty History campaign), and represented the liberal, Euro-centric cosmopolitanism so widely identified in other transnational campaigns such as the Jubilee Debt Campaign, or the response to the 2004 Asian Tsunami.

This presentation tracks the involvement in GCAP of the Indian national coalition, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA). From a rejectionist stance borne out of the suspicion that GCAP was a Northern and UN dominated campaign, the presentation explores a number of incidences where WNTA began to engage and assert its own agenda in the face of what can be described as colonial-cosmopolitan attempts to translate and mobilise the GCAP network. These incidences range from the politicisation of poverty to debates over the ability of Southern organisations to lead global campaigns (cast by Northern INGOs as an issue of ‘resources’, by WNTA as an issue of ‘leadership’). However, it is shown that in asserting its own agenda WNTA was not trying to simply assert the post colonial experience over the cosmopolitan, rejecting the ‘global’ and reifying the post-colonial/cosmopolitan tension in the process, but instead was attempting to take a cosmopolitan leadership position explicitly based on the post-colonial experience.