

DISCUSSION PAPER

NEW FEMINIST ACTIVISM, WAVES AND GENERATIONS



No. 40, April 2021

MAXINE MOLYNEUX, ADRIJA DEY, MALU A.C. GATTO AND HOLLY ROWDEN
BACKGROUND PAPER PREPARED FOR THE 25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR
ACTION, 64th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFF	African Feminist Forum
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEDEP	Centre for the Development of People
CSO	Civil society organization
FBSP	Brazilian Forum of Public Security
ILO	International Labour Organization
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex
MUCB	Mulheres Unidas Contra Bolsonaro (Women United against Bolsonaro)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party), Brazil
PFA	Platform for Action
PT	Pinjra Tod, India
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
VAW	Violence against women
WVS	World Values Survey

SUMMARY

Over the last decade, young women have taken the lead in a new wave of feminist and democratic protests in a wide range of countries, North and South. These movements raise a range of political and analytic questions: To what extent is it useful to identify the recent wave of activism in terms of a new generation of activists? How different are these new feminist movements to earlier forms, and what differences and continuities divide and unite the generations? How useful is the idea of feminist 'waves' as a way of periodizing the history of feminism?

These questions are explored first through examining the characteristics common to past and contemporary feminisms and dissecting the issues associated with periodizing feminism in terms of 'waves'. In the second part of the paper, the focus is on understanding the most recent wave of feminist activism by considering its antecedents and main characteristics. Part three presents three case studies of movements in the Global South: The cases of Brazil, India and Malawi illustrate some of the ideas, campaigns and organizational forms of 'new feminists'. They

focus on three prominent themes in feminist activism: campaigns to defend democratic rights (Brazil), gender-based violence (India) and sexual and identity rights (Malawi).

The analysis of the emergent fourth wave illustrates the importance of history and context, politics, resources and opportunities. Four distinguishing features of the 'new feminism' stand out from our research: First, we find that today, more than ever, feminist activism is global and that the countries of the South contain some of the most dynamic movements; second, feminist activism is highly dependent on new communications technology, which accelerates the temporality of communication and allows for extensive organizational power and reach. Third, this wave of feminism is characterized by more defensive campaigns, as women's rights have come under increasing threat from conservative forces. Fourth, issues of intersectionality, i.e., a strong commitment to diversity, radical inclusion and anti-racism, are all more prominent in these recent movements than in previous times.

RÉSUMÉ

Au cours de la dernière décennie, des jeunes femmes ont pris la tête d'une nouvelle vague de protestations féministes et démocratiques dans de nombreux pays, du Nord et du Sud. Ces mouvements soulèvent un éventail de questions politiques et analytiques : Dans quelle mesure est-il utile d'identifier la récente vague d'activisme en termes d'une nouvelle génération d'activistes ? De quelle manière ces nouveaux mouvements féministes se différencient-ils des formes antérieures, et quelles différences et continuités divisent et unissent les générations ? Quelle est l'utilité de l'idée de « vagues » féministes comme moyen de périodisation de l'histoire du féminisme ?

Ces questions sont tout d'abord étudiées en examinant les caractéristiques communes aux féminismes passés et contemporains et en analysant les enjeux associés à la périodisation du féminisme en termes de « vagues ». Dans la seconde partie du document, l'accent est mis sur la vague d'activisme féministe la plus récente en considérant ses antécédents et ses principales caractéristiques. La troisième partie présente trois études de cas de mouvements dans les pays du Sud : les cas du Brésil, de l'Inde et du Malawi illustrent certaines des idées, des campagnes et des formes organisationnelles des « nouveaux féministes ». Ils se concentrent sur trois thèmes principaux

de l'activisme féministe : les campagnes de défense des droits démocratiques (Brésil), la violence basée sur le genre (Inde) et les droits sexuels et identitaires (Malawi).

L'analyse de la quatrième vague émergente illustre l'importance de l'histoire et du contexte, des politiques, des ressources et des opportunités. Quatre traits distinctifs du « nouveau féminisme » se démarquent dans notre recherche : premièrement, nous constatons qu'aujourd'hui, plus que jamais, l'activisme féministe est mondial et que les pays du Sud comportent certains des mouvements les plus

dynamiques ; deuxièmement, l'activisme féministe dépend fortement des nouvelles technologies de communication, qui accélèrent la temporalité de la communication et permettent un pouvoir et une portée organisationnels étendus. Troisièmement, cette vague de féminisme se caractérise par des campagnes plus défensives, les droits des femmes étant de plus en plus menacés par les forces conservatrices. Quatrièmement, les problèmes d'intersectionnalité, notamment un engagement fort en faveur de la diversité, de l'inclusion radicale et de la lutte contre la diversité, sont tous plus importants dans ces mouvements récents qu'auparavant.

RESUMEN

Durante la última década, las jóvenes han llevado la iniciativa en una nueva ola de manifestaciones feministas y democráticas en una gran variedad de países del Norte y del Sur. Estos movimientos plantean diversas preguntas de carácter político y analítico: ¿Hasta qué punto resulta útil identificar la reciente ola de activismo en términos de una nueva generación de activistas? ¿En qué se diferencian estos nuevos movimientos feministas de sus formas anteriores, y qué diferencias y continuidades separan y unen a las generaciones? ¿Cuál es la utilidad de la noción de “olas” feministas como modo de periodizar la historia del feminismo?

Estos interrogantes se analizan en primer término mediante un examen de las características comunes entre los feminismos pasados y los contemporáneos y una disección de los asuntos asociados a la periodización del feminismo en términos de “olas”. En la segunda parte del trabajo, el foco se centra en comprender la ola más reciente de activismo feminista mediante un análisis de sus antecedentes y principales características. En la tercera parte se presentan tres estudios de casos sobre movimientos en el Sur Global: los casos del Brasil, la India y Malawi ilustran algunas de las ideas, campañas y formas de organización de los “nuevos feminismos”. Estos

movimientos se enfocan en tres temas sobresalientes del activismo feminista: campañas en defensa de los derechos democráticos (Brasil), violencia de género (India) y derechos sexuales y a la identidad (Malawi).

El análisis de esta cuarta ola emergente explica la importancia de la historia y el contexto, la política, los recursos y las oportunidades. En nuestra investigación sobresalen cuatro características distintivas del “nuevo feminismo”: En primer término, encontramos que hoy, más que nunca, el activismo feminista es global y que los países del Sur contienen algunos de los movimientos más dinámicos; en segundo lugar, el activismo feminista depende en gran medida de las nuevas tecnologías de la comunicación, las cuales aceleran la temporalidad de las comunicaciones y facilitan un amplio poder y alcance organizacional. En tercer término, esta ola del feminismo se caracteriza por campañas más defensivas, habida cuenta de la creciente amenaza que suponen las fuerzas conservadoras para los derechos de las mujeres. En cuarto lugar, destacan las cuestiones de la interseccionalidad; es decir, un férreo compromiso con la diversidad, la inclusión radical y el antirracismo, todo lo cual adquiere un carácter más prominente en estos nuevos movimientos que en los de antaño.

1.

INTRODUCTION

The second decade of the millennium has been marked by a startling upsurge of political activity by a new generation of activists. Protests against authoritarian governments and campaigns for democracy and rights have seen young people in key organizational roles and filling the ranks of demonstrators, with the short-lived Arab Spring one of the early precursors. In Turkey, young activists have taken to the streets to challenge Erdogan's erosion of their former rights; in Armenia, Algeria, China (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), Russian Federation, Sudan, Thailand and Ukraine as well as Bellarussia, protests have been led by young people demanding a change in government and an end to corruption. In the United States, they have been at the forefront of protests against migration policies and mass shootings, while the women-led Black Lives Matter campaign has focused on racist police outrages and in 2020 became a global movement. In Europe, 16-year old Greta Thunberg has inspired a host of environmental movements; and in Chile, school and university students have since 2006 been taking to the streets to protest against neoliberal educational reforms. What is striking is how young women have been key actors and leaders in many of these movements.

Young women have also brought a new dynamism to feminism and feminist activism¹ in both North and South. More than a decade ago, feminism was pronounced 'over', yet we have seen growing international support for movements such as Million Women Rise and the Me Too campaign, which have galvanized untold numbers of women across the world to denounce gender-based violence, misogyny and sexual harassment. The Women's Marches and insurgent campaigns around reproductive rights are other instances of these recent mobilizations. In Poland, thousands took part in the *Czarny* (Black) Protest to oppose attempts by the ruling Law and Justice (PIS) party to remove women's access to legal abortions, renewing protests in 2020 after further restrictions were imposed. In India, angry demonstrations against gang rapes and police sexual violence are frequent occurrences. In Latin America since 2015, tens of thousands of women have taken to the streets in the *Ni*

Una Menos (Not One Less) campaign to protest the lack of government response to violence against women (VAW). In the post-Soviet world, there have been outbreaks of feminist protest of different kinds: In Russia, Pussy Riot, and in Ukraine, *Femen*, have staged dramatic episodes of protest at the treatment of women by deploying sexuality and the female body as weapons of revolt.

Across many regions, these protests suggest a new moment in politics, when patriarchal privilege is once again being called out, this time by a new, younger generation (see Annex I). Feminism seems to have entered a new phase—a new 'wave' of activism, both dynamic and creative. We have seen an energized young generation active in organizing the protests and social media postings, unafraid of speaking out, while feminism acquires new acceptance among rock stars and media personalities. Suddenly, it was not only socially acceptable but also culturally modish to be a feminist, and it seemed that there was something exciting going on as a new generation took the lead.

¹ Feminism is used in this paper as an overarching generic term for a diverse body of ideas and activism that share some common principles and perspectives and that aim to end the harms women suffer as a result of the social distribution of power in favour of men.

While it is too early to assess the significance of these developments and how feminists will respond to the shocks of the COVID-19 outbreak, what we have seen so far bears serious analysis and raises a range of political and analytic questions. What are the characteristics of this new upsurge, seen by some as a ‘fourth wave’? How does it relate to, resemble and differ from earlier forms? What divides and unites the different generations involved in activism? How useful is the commonly used concept of ‘waves’ to describe different periods of feminist activism, and what does a generational approach bring to an understanding of feminism’s temporality and the many differences evident across movements?

The aim of this paper is to cast light on these questions, stimulate debate and complement existing scholarship on feminist movements and feminist history. Part one discusses the analytic and historical issues implied in thinking of feminism’s evolution in terms of waves and proposes an analytic approach that draws on generational studies (and interviews with activists) to periodize feminist activism as well as highlight the continuities and differences across generations. It goes on to identify the characteristics that are often used to distinguish feminism’s first three waves. In part two, the focus is on understanding the most recent wave of activism by considering its antecedents and main characteristics. Part three presents three case studies of movements in the Global South. The cases of Brazil, India and Malawi illustrate some of the ideas, campaigns and organizational forms of the generation of ‘new feminists’, contrasting these with previous movements. They focus on three prominent themes in feminist activism: campaigns to defend democratic rights (Brazil); gender-based violence (India) and sexual and identity rights (Malawi).

Our analysis of the emergent fourth wave illustrates the importance of history and context, politics, resources and opportunities. Four clear differentiating elements stand out from our research: First, we find that today more than ever feminist activism is global and that the countries of the South contain some of the most dynamic movements; second, feminist activism is highly dependent on new communications

technology, which makes communication much faster and at the same time allows for extensive organizational power and reach; third, the fourth wave of feminism, unlike its recent antecedents, is characterized by its more defensive campaigns as rights previously gained have come under increasing threat from conservative forces; and fourth, issues of intersectionality, i.e., a strong commitment to diversity, radical inclusion and anti-racism, are all more prominent in these recent movements than in previous times.

1.1.

Feminist waves and generations²

A historical perspective is important in understanding the re-emergence of feminism in the current period as it both highlights the continuities in feminist thought and sharpens an appreciation of the contextual and temporal differences across movements. Ideas seen as proto-feminist have appeared across history, but feminism’s origins as a rights-based movement can be traced to the time of the French Revolution. Feminists in different parts of the world began engaging in collective action from the 19th century, campaigning over a variety of issues and from different political positions. Despite efforts to label early feminism as an elite suffrage movement, it has never been homogeneous in class terms or dedicated to a single issue. Since its inception, it has been a plural movement

² Molyneux is the author of the next three sub-sections which are based on her research on feminist movements, interviews with activists and participant observation of feminist movements in the different waves of feminist activism in the United Kingdom and Latin America. She has also established an oral history project at Florida University called Intergenerational Dialogues, working with feminists in Chile and Mexico to record the conversations between feminist activists of different generations. This work has also informed this paper. With such a broad coverage, it is impossible to do justice to the extensive literature on feminism, but the following is a sample list of some of the texts that are useful. For histories and discussions of feminism see, among others, Basu 2010, Alvarez 1990, Collins 2009, Maier and Lebon 2010, Einhorn 1993, Beckwith 2013, Sneider 2008, Ferree and Tripp 2006, Friedman 2019, Jayawardena 1986, Macaulay 2006, Rowbotham 1972, 1973, 1997, Mohanty 1991, Sharawi Lanfranch 2014, Nawal el Sadaawi 1977, Jelin 1990.

composed of a wide range of class and ethnoracial actors and made up of many contributory and sometimes conflicting currents.³

If variations in membership, priorities and practice indicate important differences within feminism, there have also been some significant continuities in core demands over the course of feminism's history. History matters, and ideas and demands for social justice endure across both time and place. They are passed on from generation to generation, if in refigured form. If we want to understand this long evolution and the particular dynamic of what might be termed the New Feminism, we need to turn to an analysis of the context in which activists work and form their priorities while also understanding the global 'travelling' character of movement ideas. Feminism has national, regional and global dynamics, its contours given by political opportunity and material resources, but we need also to take account of the internationalization of feminist ideas, requiring us to think of it as a movement that crosses borders in constant interaction with other actors, contexts and political ideas, creating what Keck and Sikkink (1998) refer to as a 'boomerang effect'.

How feminism as a movement or collection of movements has changed across time, and how to periodize its evolution, are questions that have preoccupied historians and activists. In analysing feminism, the metaphor of 'waves' is often invoked to periodize its evolution and to capture its significant features at different times. As any historian knows, periodization is always a contested endeavour: When does one epoch end and another begin? How to characterize the distinguishing features of a particular era or time? What is the territorial reach of a movement?

Answers to these questions are by no means straightforward and vary according to the analytic frameworks deployed in these discussions, the perceptions of actors and the empirical material available to support

them.⁴ As the debates over the value or otherwise of waves shows, the issue of periodization is an unsettled matter in feminism.⁵ Not only are there intergenerational disputes over the characterization of different waves, but there is little agreement over how to define what characterizes any particular wave, let alone over the strands of feminism that were active or dominant within it. Analysts also vary in what they privilege for definitional purposes. Some, like Hemmings (2011), focus on feminist scholarship and the shifts in theoretical orientation that accompanied different waves (Marxist, post-structuralist, neo-materialist); others focus on the practices and political character (liberal/neo-liberal, radical, socialist) of feminism. Those sceptical of the analytic value of periodizing feminism have argued, rightly, that the continuities across time produce an overlapping effect that undermines attempts to demarcate particular moments or waves.⁶ Others, also rightly, criticise the limited geographical scope of studies of feminism, since in practice they excluded the Global South and the state socialist countries.⁷ Indeed many of the accounts of given periods are seen as being partial, exclusionary and biased. Nancy Hewitt (2010) expresses a widely shared frustration at those accounts of feminism that present it as a white, middle class endeavour. She charges the 'waves model' for obscuring the historical role of race in feminist organizing and documents the participation and influence of African-American women, in the suffrage movement, and in second wave feminism, along with other women from diverse backgrounds.⁸ These are all valid concerns and point to the need for more comprehensive research and more caution in making claims about the character of feminist movements.

3 The first campaign for suffrage was in the United States. It grew out of the abolitionist movement and included Black women activists in its ranks. See Hewitt 2010 and Sneider 2008 for discussion of the tensions around race in the early suffrage movement.

4 On feminist waves, see also Dicker and Piepmajer 2003, Henry 2004.

5 Snyder 2008, Heywood 2006, Ewig and Feree 2013, Rupp 1997 Hewitt 2010.

6 Banaji 2012.

7 For example De Haan (2012) and Ghodsee (2018) have argued for the inclusion of the state socialist countries in the history of global feminism as some members of the women's organizations were 'leading voices' in the United Nations advocating for women's issues to be given more prominence in the policy frameworks.

8 Chapter 1 of Hewitt (2010) 'From Seneca Falls to Suffrage? Reimagining a 'Master' Narrative in U.S. Women's history.

With these debates and critiques in mind, for present purposes we will retain the waves metaphor but treat it here as signalling the importance of temporality and history in considering social movements. For all its limitations given the present state of research and theory, it can have some heuristic or analytic uses: It expresses and demarcates in broad terms the historical time of feminism's periods of effervescence, identifies patterns enabling a tentative mapping, invites comparative analysis of different periods and generates important analytic and political debates about how to think about feminism's history as a social movement.

If, as proposed, the waves metaphor serves to indicate periods of more intense social movement activism, it is important to note that the temporality of a wave has no sharply delineated beginning or end. Some forms of activism continue for a while while others fade away. A wave signifies fluidity and motion and is made up of multiple currents, each with its own momentum. For Rupp (1997), this makes feminism seem less like waves and more like 'choppy seas'. The international character of feminism further complicates periodization because waves are not neatly synchronized across borders. The time of social movements is not simple or unilinear. To help think about the question 'when do waves begin?', a generational approach is proposed here to focus our thinking about the New Feminism. This is because young people are often at the forefront of new social movements, bringing new energy and ideas into play and often self-identifying as a 'new generation'.

It is self-evident that social movements arise in determinate historical, social and political circumstances. There has been growing interest in generational studies, including within feminist scholarship (see Annex I). Such an approach draws attention to the materiality and the temporality of historical experience, embodied in a collective endeavour, with its specific challenges, optics, opportunities, political strategies and discursive configurations. When thinking of the feminist fourth wave, a generational approach is particularly helpful as it can bring living feminists from different generations into dialogue with each other to reflect on the similarities and differences of the movements of their time,

correct false stereotypes and reach across time to a better understanding of the movements and struggles in which each engages.

First, let us consider what is meant by a generational approach. It was Karl Mannheim (1927, 1952) who first identified generation as a marker of social difference, introducing the idea that history gave shape and opportunity to certain moments in which young people became active in bringing about political as well as social change. Others have built on his insights in their work on the generation of the 1960s and 1970s, a time of youth effervescence and radicalism when cultural norms underwent significant liberalization.⁹ Inglehart's generational replacement thesis, first proposed in 1971 and based on comparative analyses of social attitudes, showed significant value shifts across generations. These shifts illustrated a transition to 'post-materialist' values, broadly associated with secularism, personal autonomy and diversity. These new values largely displaced religiosity, belief in traditional family structures and sexual conformity and were embraced first by younger urban generations and then spread over time to form majority views, as legal reforms increasingly underwrote the new norms. These trends were shown to be global in nature, but as they were associated with economic growth or stability, there was no guarantee that the trend would continue at similar scale.¹⁰

The study of generations has been dominated by research on the United States, whether that on the post-war 'Lucky Generation', the 'Woodstock Generation' or the more recent attempts to define the differences between Generations X, Y and Z, with various further additions.¹¹ Yet, even in one country there are significant challenges in defining a generation and its boundaries, and within this literature

⁹ Parsons 1964.

¹⁰ Abramson and Inglehart 1995. Indeed, as discussed in a 2019 book by Inglehart and Norris, there has been a 'backlash' in some contexts; however, the generational divide appears to hold, with younger people holding more liberal values than older generations.

¹¹ Gaining acceptance, although based on US research, is the following periodization: Boomers = those born between 1946-1964, Generation X = born between 1965-1979, Millennials = 1980-1996 and Generation Z = born after 1998.

there is little consensus over the birth dates of a particular generation and, apart from identifying some broad generalities, there is significant variation in what might be its defining characteristics.

A generation, whether spanning 20 or 30 years, may share certain general values—as instanced by large-scale attitude surveys such as Inglehart's (1971,1990)—but it will also be marked by considerable diversity. Most studies acknowledge that within a generation there exist a variety of sub-groups, with different identities and forms of self-expression in fashion, music, ethnicity, class and politics. The 'Woodstock Generation' in the United States was tabbed with the slogan 'peace, love and music', reflecting young people's opposition to the Viet Nam war, the revolution in sexual mores and the powerful bonding nature of music, whether that of Joan Baez or Jimi Hendrix. However widespread the values embraced by the young of the times, though, some caution in making more definitive claims about generations is warranted. Most analysts therefore accept that generations cannot be conceived in simple terms as homogenous, solidaristic entities but contain different cohorts and sub-cultures.

The idea that an age cohort or generation has certain historical and cultural experiences in common that can help to forge a distinct identity is acknowledged in generation studies. This is most evident where a generation experiences crises, such as war, economic meltdown, brutal dictatorship or, as we shall no doubt see, a major health event such as that which erupted with the COVID-19 virus this year. These events can have profound effects that mark generational differences more than any other changes that have been undergone. The sociology of time has proposed the concept of 'timescapes' to suggest both a temporal and spatial dimension to human experience. This is helpful in thinking about generations, as time and space are crucial determinants of their identity. Adam (1998) suggests that a timescape may have several dimensions including tempo (speed), time frames (e.g., seasons), duration (length of time) and sequence (the ordering of events). For Adam, timescapes are "the temporal equivalent of landscapes, recognizing all the

temporal features of socio-environmental events and processes, charting temporal profiles in their political and economic contexts".¹²

While generations are necessarily grounded in their time and place, and their experiences in this sense are situated, analysts have shown that, with the spread of global communications systems, youth cultures—or at least some aspects of them—have been internationalized.¹³ For LeVine, speaking of Generation X (born 1965-1980), "generation cannot be understood except through its globality".¹⁴ In other words, there are elements of a generational timescape that travel and, that share and interact across territories, helping to shape identities and imagination through reciprocal exchange.

In thinking about feminism, we are concerned here to understand some key generational differences and similarities within a particular political community and within a particular span of time. Therefore, we have considered the salience of generation in contemporary feminism by focusing on feminist activists within different generations. In a very broad sense, and with the caveats laid out in the earlier discussion in mind, the wave metaphor suggests three significant periods of feminist activism with a fourth seemingly under way: the first wave of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, the second starting in the late-1960s and early-1970s, the third wave in the 1980s/1990s and the fourth appearing in the new millennium.

From its earliest appearance as a movement, feminism has challenged illiberal and unequal socio-legal norms and the informal rules that undermine women's autonomy and place limits on their opportunities. Most feminists share a desire for gender justice and equality and work in some way to bring this about. In terms of collective action and campaigning, Nancy Fraser (2005) has identified the kinds of struggles that feminists have engaged in as of three main types: for redistributive justice, for recognition and for political inclusion. With the exception of some strands—revolutionary and anarchist feminists, for

¹² Adam 1998: 137.

¹³ Henseler ed. 2012.

¹⁴ LeVine 2012: 293.

example, who worked to overthrow the state and capitalism—Fraser’s three types of campaign involve claims on rights and can be seen as demands for citizenship and gender justice. While these core elements have proven fairly constant over time, there are variations in the priority that different generations of activists and different strands or currents of feminism across the world have given to different campaigns.

These variations have pointed to the difficulties in talking of feminism as *a* movement, in the singular, and as a result many activists prefer to use the plural ‘feminisms’ to avoid erasing differences and implying a homogeneous movement. In this paper the singular ‘feminism’ will connote a generic category, as in the use of socialism to describe a movement, without denying its many varieties. Moving from the generic to the particular, it is clear that within given countries there are a variety of feminisms just as there are variations across regions. North Atlantic feminism is in some ways distinct to European or Latin American feminism in its trajectory, as is the latter in comparison with Indian or Far Eastern feminism. Aside from their markedly different histories, the nature of States, economic models, cultural formations and political forms, all varieties have helped to shape through their activism the kind of civil and political societies in which they are active.

1.2

The first and second waves

Feminist scholars and activists tend to agree that a first and second wave can be identified at a general near-global level. The first wave refers to the emergence of feminist collective action from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century and, as noted, has often been identified with the demand for suffrage. Suffrage was indeed a key demand of these early movements starting with the Seneca Falls convention in Baltimore; later, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, suffrage was associated with a particularly prominent and militant campaign involving violence. But feminist historiography has shown that first wave feminists also included

in their demands such issues as equal rights within the family (the end of the authority of the father and husband), equal pay, access to higher education and the professions, workers’ rights and a range of other rights as well.¹⁵ The first wave also included other currents of feminism that rejected such demands as reformist; anarcho-feminists in Europe and Latin America at the end of nineteenth century called for the end of capitalism and resisted reforms they saw as reflecting ‘bourgeois’ concerns.¹⁶

While feminist ideas drew on the demands for rights and citizenship that had inspired the French Revolution, feminist activism was never exclusively confined to, or defined by, the Northern industrialized world. It always had an international, universalist vision appealing to ‘all women, everywhere’, and activists sought to develop connections with other movements and supported their campaigns. Newspapers, leaflets and articles circulated on networks and were translated into many languages; and doughty travellers crossed continents to address feminist meetings and debate campaign strategies. International associations began to gather adherents from different parts of the world, such as the Pan American women’s movement that had its first meeting in Baltimore in 1922 and brought women from over 30 countries into dialogue. In the early twentieth century, there were also movements in South Asia, Australasia and in the Far and Middle East,¹⁷ though feminists faced less opposition within liberal industrialized States and urban communities and under modernizing regimes. Given the dominance of the English language, it is probable—and problematic—that Anglophone varieties of feminism had the potential to exert more influence than others. Yet, early indigenous feminisms from the South more often than not had a clear sense of their own identities and struggles, and they were confident enough to disagree with their Northern counterparts and develop their own agendas.¹⁸ More generally, the outcome of global-local interaction was context specific, and some tendencies within

15 Hahner 1990, Lavrin 1996.

16 Molyneux 1985, Kaplan 1977.

17 Jayawardena 1986.

18 An example being the resistance of Cuban feminists of this period to making suffrage their priority (Stoner 1991).

feminism have always resisted what they experience as Western, colonial and white hegemony.

With a few exceptions, these early movements were small in scale compared to later developments and most appear to have lost their dynamism in the decades that followed. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that a more expansive and gradually more international movement began to unfold. Second wave feminism was part of a wider youth movement that grew out of the expansion of higher education. This generation of activists was open to radical ideas, was impatient for social and political change and brought international issues into their politics. They were inspired by the Civil Rights movement in the United States, the opposition to Apartheid and the Viet Nam War, while some feminists applauded the Maoist slogan 'Women hold up half the Sky'. Many young people were brought into political activity at this time, and the ferment of 1968 was not confined to Europe but spread to Latin America, the Philippines and other parts of the world.

Like some of their forbears, feminist activists of the early second wave were radical and critical. Many were sympathetic to socialist ideas; others were active in peace movements, revolutionary workers' rights and anti-racist struggles; and some supported several causes simultaneously. An important principle common to many feminist currents was the embrace of the principle of autonomy: an insistence on women's right to determine their own agendas, even if working within political organizations and parties. A common theme in interviews with feminists active at this time was the failure of the organized male-dominated left to respond in any adequate measure to their demands. This encouraged them to set up women's caucuses or to work in women-only settings and activities—whether, as in the United Kingdom, supporting fair wage and reproductive rights campaigns, creating women-only journals and publishing houses, founding women's art collectives and women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or setting up refuges from violence and women's health advisory groups. The practice of 'consciousness raising', where women met to talk about their experiences of prejudice, discrimination, abortions and patriarchy—found

in Europe in particular but by no means exclusively—helped create political awareness and solidarity expressed in the term 'sisterhood'. While this underplayed tensions between Black feminists and their white sisters, the work of Black feminist groups and the writings of bell hooks, Angela Davis and Audre Lord among others brought the different experiences and priorities of Black feminists into focus and paved the way for a greater appreciation of the unequal power dynamics sewn into early second wave feminism. Part of the work of the second wave was the search for a theoretical understanding of women's subordination. Initially inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1953), debates moved on to critiques and developments of Marxism and proposing various theories of patriarchy, absorbing ideas from Freud and Lacan. Academic feminists and activists worked on visibilizing and theorizing domestic labour and the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, and they later focused on care while subjecting liberal conceptions of democracy and citizenship to critique on gender lines.

Many of these ideas and experiences could be found in parts of the South and continue to be present today, even dominating some contemporary movements. In Latin America, the early years of the second wave had much in common with movements in Europe and the United States in this regard. Feminism attracted the expanding numbers of women students in tertiary education, at a time when socialist ideas and Marxist theory were being challenged and reformed by gender critique. Activists of that period were as likely as not to be on the Left, even if also critical of the macho culture of the comrades and the virtual neglect of gender by the socialist classics, *pace* Engels's classic treatment of the origins of the family. Latin American feminists in parties and organizations of the Left saw themselves as practicing 'double militancy': in their organization and in their feminist practice. As elsewhere, the non-aligned developed their own all-women organizations or networks, whether working against dictatorships or founding NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) working on women's rights and policy issues, often in innovative and effective ways.

Feminism's diversity as a movement was a source of strength but also of weakness in that differences of class and colour, practice and priorities could at times lead to bitter disputes and factionalism. Whether men or capitalism, racism or imperialism were the main enemy established some clear divides across the movement and generated a vigorous theoretical literature. These issues of tension are a well-documented feature of feminism but, as with most social movements, factionalism is a recurrent and almost inevitable effect of the politics of conviction and worked itself through the subsequent waves of activism in often familiar battles, with adverse and sometimes long-term consequences.

1.3

The third wave

If there exists a body of research and debate in the literature over the features of the second wave, this is not true of the period covered by the third wave, roughly spanning the 1980s and 1990s. We have an even more partial and uneven picture of this period with contrasting assessments of feminist activism at this time. While there are some continuities with the second wave, three significant elements stand out in the third period: the importance of policy-related activism; the strengthening of feminist movements and rights advocacy in the Global South; and the consolidation of women's studies as a discipline.

A notable feature of the third wave in many parts of the world was that it coincided with the gradual and still very partial entry of feminists and feminist ideas into mainstream politics. This was in part due to young feminists and older second wave activists entering public life. They became journalists, joined national and international NGOs and took up posts in universities, trade unions, government departments and international agencies. Greater awareness spread in the 1970s and 1980s of the need to represent women's interests more securely in law and policy. Although not recognized as such, this focus is arguably a core feature of the third wave, one that was replicated in parts of the South as feminists

also entered government and joined regional and international bureaucracies. Although sometimes rather disparagingly called 'femocrats', they were often part of what Macaulay (2010, 2021) calls a 'policy community' of feminists working across civil, political and grass-roots organizations. At the same time, the dynamic of feminism shifted to the South with the growth of an extraordinarily active international women's movement engaged in 'gendering' the United Nations human rights frameworks following the adoption in 1979 of the landmark Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).¹⁹

If a renewed focus on rights marked this period of feminism, for many activists in the non-Western world, the United Nations' four world conferences on women were an important stimulus for policy work and for global feminist interaction. The UN Decade for Women, inaugurated in Mexico in 1975, started a process that acquired a growing momentum at successive events in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). The scale of what became a significant international movement can be gauged by the attendance at the final Women's Conference in China in 1995 of over 30,000 women from across the world.

The women involved in these events spanned different generations but included new actors, distinct in some ways from those of the late-1960s and early-1970s who had worked on the margins within loosely linked organizations and non-hierarchical movements. They included feminist NGO representatives, academics and professionals as well as grass-roots activists from across the world who, through often intense debate and discussion, worked to create the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), a policy action framework inspired by CEDAW. Many of these activist-delegates worked back home with their local and regional movements to advance legal reform, raise awareness of injustice and, after 1995, to incorporate the PFA into national and regional law and policy. It is possible to infer that groups of these women from different countries came to form an effective actor network that at different times could exert some influence over the direction and content of

¹⁹ Charlesworth and Chinkin 2000.

international policy. This, in turn, allowed them to pressure for legal reforms regionally and domestically—a key strategy adopted by Global South scholars, as our interviewees have emphasized.

This rights-work current of feminist activism, arguably the dominant one of the time, drew on and was part of the growing international human rights movement that, in turn, was nourished by the wave of democratization that ended dictatorships in Spain and Portugal and Apartheid in South Africa and brought democracy to Latin America and the former Soviet Union, among others. In this context, the focus of that generation of activists was on deepening or consolidating democracy and reforming old laws and constitutions. Feminist demands and activism were a key part, sometimes a leading part, of that process. Depending on the political will of governments and the strength of the national and regional women's movements, the internationalizing of women's movement activism achieved many positive results as far as focusing policy attention on gender equality. All but a few governments signed up to the Beijing PFA as they had to CEDAW, providing at least the basis for policy change. The actual dynamic of change was to a considerable degree spurred by the activism on the ground of a generation of feminists and to an important degree was also enabled by feminist parliamentarians, women in international development institutions and lawyers who took up difficult policy issues such as reproductive rights in the legislature and in the courts.

Within this broad policy engagement were networks working to challenge dominant theories within development policy. One important example was the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) group of feminist economists and social scientists who developed a highly influential feminist critique of international development policy and the structural adjustment programmes that inflicted high human costs that bore heavily on women. DAWN brought feminists from both North and South together to challenge and reframe economic theory. Other groups worked on theorizing and documenting what came to be known as the 'care economy', demanding policy recognition and

responses to gendered poverty and masculine bias in policy, including notably in budget allocation, which typically marginalized or ignored the specific needs of the female population in prioritizing expenditure on infrastructure rather than welfare—what feminist later termed 'social infrastructure'.

Much of this conceptual and empirical work found gradual if conditional and selective acceptance by development policymakers and governments: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) began to publish data that quantified the hidden contribution of the reproductive work carried out by women in the home. Better statistics on the informal sector made visible the extent of women's unpaid employment in family microbusinesses and their abject conditions of employment more generally. The 'secondary' or hidden poverty suffered by women in the household was exposed through qualitative research that probed beyond the standard surveys, enabling policy instruments to be challenged and refined. Feminists advocated for seeing welfare as a productive investment rather than a drain on the economy, an argument that was taken up by some UN agencies in making the case for expanding social protection.

If the heyday of third wave activism and policy dynamism was in the 1980s and into the 1990s, it was followed by a period of relative movement quiescence. Some saw this as the result of 'institutionalization', a creeping bureaucratization and/or 'NGOization' as activists termed it.²⁰ What critics saw as the 'abandonment of the street for the office' was associated with the loss of autonomy and creativity that came with an increased dependence on funding from governments and NGOs. However, others saw the entry of former activists into policymaking arenas as positive and necessary for capturing the policy process to bring about results.²¹ Debates over the pros and cons of 'institutionalizing' feminism, 'working with or against the state' divided movements and some disillusion set in. In universities, meanwhile, post-structuralist ideas gained wider acceptance, displacing most remnants of structuralism and opening up generational tensions

²⁰ Alvarez 1990, 1998.

²¹ Stetson and Mazur 1995, Macaulay 2010.

between those who saw this development as a loss, the Derridean 'cultural turn' read as a departure from politics altogether. Yet, new currents of thought were developing around identity and sexual politics. As so often, politics and theory moved in tandem with social actors—Black feminists, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people, Adivasi and indigenous women in the Americas were bringing new voices to feminism, organizing to demand their rights and recognition, each with their distinct perspectives and priorities, many critical of what they saw as 'white mainstream' feminism's weak commitment to intersectionality and inclusivity. The 1990s, dubbed "the decade of difference",²² made a lasting imprint on women's movements everywhere.

Despite the positive achievements of the third wave, the overall context was far from positive to build on them. The decade that followed in the wake of the Beijing years coincided with the high point of neo-

liberal ascendancy. These years were associated with a growing reaction to the progressive agendas of liberal internationalism. Democracy and human rights, as well as the feminist gains they helped to enable, ceased to command the enthusiasm of earlier years even among those of more radical persuasion. Some worried about what they saw as a general complacency and/or cynicism over the gains won. The 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001 was a brutal counter to the optimism signalled by such as Francis Fukuyama (1992) that liberalism had triumphed over other political and ideological systems. Even before then, conservative forces across a wide spectrum of ideology and religious belief had been gaining a foothold in the levers of power, in global human rights forums and in the grass roots through the conservative churches. They were to continue to do so with greater effect. However, as the millennium entered its second decade, a new generation of activists burst onto the scene and signalled the birth of feminism's fourth wave.

22 Hemmings 2011, Maier and Lebon 2010.

2.

THE FOURTH WAVE: ANTECEDENTS AND EVOLUTION

The fourth wave of feminist activism emerged in the new millennium after an interim period when feminism as a visible and active social movement was said to scarcely exist, with unsympathetic commentators—especially in the North—all too eager to pronounce it as ‘over’ or unnecessary.²³ Yet, if there was less street activism, a feature characteristic of the third wave, there were lively debates in universities and in popular culture over feminism as new currents of thought and new actors gained voice. In the United States, the seeds of the fourth wave were evident in the publications by young feminists that appeared declaring themselves to be a “new generation” celebrating diversity and ‘girl power’, publishing articles and personal testimonials and engaging in general cultural critique.²⁴

Keen to mark their difference from what they saw (erroniously) as their more solemn, somewhat joyless precursors they stressed that they were sex and beauty positive, gender non-binary and racially diverse.²⁵ These ideas were not new but echoed earlier strands that were present in feminism even if they were not necessarily the most prominent ones at the time. The young feminists celebrated the new diverse images of women in popular culture, while film, music and advertising reflected a new more ‘empowered’ womanhood—one that was still far from fulfilling that promise. In the countries of the South, with their very different conditions, feminism after the high point of Beijing was also seen as having entered a period of latency or retreat. Yet, feminists continued to work, pushing for further reforms and with some notable successes. In parts of Latin America, coalitions of feminist jurists, NGOs, politicians and women’s movement

activists saw their long campaigns finally making progress: Femicide, for example, was recognized as a specific offence in law across the region in the 2000s.²⁶ And in 2006, feminist lawyers in conservative Colombia succeeded in decriminalizing abortion on human rights grounds.²⁷

Although there had been many gains as a result of hard-fought campaigns, there was disappointment at the policy outcomes and the continuing ‘implementation gap’. Laws were changed but policies to support them either failed to materialize or were inadequate. In retrospective assessments of the decades of legal activism, former participants often share with today’s young feminists a sense of frustration that more was not accomplished—or feel that little real substantive change was achieved.

In the first place, structural factors placed limits on what could be achieved without more radical transformations of the economy and society. Free market

²³ McRobbie 2004, Walker 2006.

²⁴ Heywood ed. 2006.

²⁵ In the US some of these young feminists saw themselves as a ‘third wave’ of feminism whereas in this paper the trends that they were associated with appear more closely aligned with what we have identified as fourth wave feminism.

²⁶ Macaulay 2021.

²⁷ Reutersward et al. 2011.

policies, deregulation and rollbacks in social rights exacerbated gender inequalities and social inequality more broadly and created a disabling environment for realizing progressive agendas. Labour markets continued to discriminate against women, gender wage gaps persisted and young people's limited employment opportunities were indicated by the high levels of youth unemployment in many countries. Lack of cultural change or political will also diluted the effect of the reforms. Harassment at work and sexual violence continued virtually unabated and, in some cases, grew worse. While some laws and policies helped to promote positive change in key areas of family law, property rights and political representation, by the 2000s there was widespread disappointment at the lack of active policy responses, which only deepened the gap between expectations and accomplishments. Legal frameworks were often improved but failed to be applied in the courts or translated into effective policy initiatives. Getting concrete results and the funding necessary for achieving them required continuous pressure from activists and sympathetic allies within the state and beyond, from donors. Government support was limited, and where external funding was available it tended to be project-based, short-term and not always aligned with national priorities or feminist sentiments.²⁸

At the same time, thanks to the rapid spread of gender quota laws since the early 1990s, the rising expectations of women themselves and the heightened attention to gender equality measures, more women were gaining positions of power in legislatures and executives around the world. Occupying political office, however, also placed women in the position of being blamed for lack of progress in securing women's rights and gender equality—sometimes with justification. As one Ugandan activist saw it:

“Women legislators have not come out, out of fear of men's power in Parliament and so never dare to speak... Why can't they overcome this socialisation that makes them fear and feel like they should disappear in the male space of Parliament? Some women

keep quiet because they want to be seen as 'good women'—(and) not upset or challenge the status quo. This contributes to men's complacency.”²⁹

There were other political costs. As gender issues continued to be (nominally) absorbed within the mainstream, activists complained that feminist demands had lost their radical edge. A Bolivian feminist who worked in both the NGO and state sectors saw the importance of working with the state but only as part of a political movement:

“I think that this phenomenon of the bureaucratization of the women's movement has led to an approach that is too technical and not political enough. The feminists...have approached the state as technocrats, as functionaries, ...but not as a political movement. You need a movement that negotiates a political agenda with the state instead of entering through the back door.”³⁰

The absorption of feminism into formal government institutions may have also impacted on-the-ground movements. For example, another potential consequence of institutionalization is that those working on gender issues can lose whatever contact they had with the grass roots, the very women who were meant to be the beneficiaries of the policies that are put in place. As one woman explained:

“There is a gap between women up here and down there. Policies come from the top, without looking at the grassroots. When the women's movement started, it started at the grassroots. But now it has been hijacked by these women who are making policies from top-down.... Even in CSOs there are the same [elite] women from the urban areas, so how much do they know about the women down there? They have studied, travelled around the world, but how much do they know?”³¹

²⁸ UN Women 2019.

²⁹ Professional woman, quoted in Watson and Kyomuhendo 2019.

³⁰ Molyneux and Lazar 2003: 87.

³¹ Senior woman leader in Uganda, quoted in Watson and Kyomuhendo 2019.

This detachment from ‘women at the base’ also expressed itself in the rifts that existed within women’s movements between what were seen as the mainstream, more established and in some cases well-funded feminist organizations and professional individuals on the one hand, and emergent ‘outsider’ movements of minority and historically discriminated groups—whether Black, indigenous or those involved in LGBTQI+ struggles—on the other. Here, issues of resources combined with distrust and discrimination to deepen the divides, but there were also differences of politics that, although they may have had a generational aspect to them, also crossed the generational timescape.

2.1

Feminism 2010-2020: A new generation?

History, experience and circumstance clearly mark out generational differences and present activists with situated challenges and opportunities that are bound to affect tactics, alliances, priorities and forms of activism. Feminists of different generations will necessarily do politics in different ways. This means that a new generation is forged by some common experiences. The young feminists who have taken to the streets in recent years grew up in a different world to their mothers and a very different world to that of their grandmothers. While the generation that was politically active from the mid-1960s often clashed with their mothers over their social norms and values, young feminists today will have had a markedly different experience of family life. Their mothers may well have been feminists—or at least may have accepted, if not fought for some of the movements’ principles of equality and gender justice—and encouraged their daughters to adopt these principals themselves. Feminist ideas are today not only more widely accepted, with more women identifying as feminists or with feminist goals, but there is more global awareness of the term (see Annexes I and II).

More broadly, what distinguishes the new feminism from its antecedents are the social and political

changes that it is heir to. Take education, for example: Young women, and hence young feminists, are the most educated of any previous wave and, as education everywhere has expanded to broaden intake across social classes, feminism has become both more socially diverse with a larger base while containing a significant representation of young professionals.³² The great majority of young women today expect to work: The Arab Youth survey for 2020, for example, found that three quarters of young Arab women (76 per cent) and almost as many young men (70 per cent) agree that a woman can benefit her family most if she works, if only part time so she can continue to fulfil her domestic responsibilities.³³

Feminists today—wherever they happen to be—live in societies that have undergone rapid social change in their own lifetimes. This has typically included a marked shift towards more liberal attitudes on sexuality and family forms and more inclusive attitudes and ways of working with respect to race and ethnicity. These changes are reflected in young feminist movements’ direct embrace of struggles beyond those pertaining to women’s rights, such as supporting environmental justice and LGBTQI+ and other identity movements and being expressly committed to anti-racist, egalitarian practices and politics within their own movements and in on-the-ground collaborations. Of course, these strands were present in earlier waves of feminism, but less prominently and militantly so. The young ‘third wave’ feminists who emerged in the United States in the 1990s can be seen as among the precursors of the present wave in giving expression to some of the ideas that filtered through to later activists—although, as Snyder (2008) argues, their focus was more on cultural critique “than on feminist theory and politics”.³⁴ Today, while tensions may exist over some of these issues within the broader currents of contemporary feminism, and ‘radical inclusion’³⁵ may not be embraced or practiced by all organizations, still the contrast with earlier feminisms is striking. Previous generations conceptualized and argued for

³² Milkman 2017.

³³ AYS 2020.

³⁴ Snyder 2008: 177

³⁵ ‘Radical inclusion’ is the term some activists use to emphasise their strong commitment to intersectionality.

intersectional movements and worked ‘in solidarity’ with them, but current movements have incorporated radical intersectionality as a core principle of their practice and membership.

A further significant change concerns gender relations, which compared to a few generations ago have allowed women more autonomy, even though this has not brought anything like full equality in either the private or public spheres. Women’s roles have diversified more than men’s, even if they retain the major responsibility for care. The meaning of masculinity—what it means to be, behave and look like a man—has also diversified if to a lesser extent. Many young men want more equal relationships with women and greater involvement with their children. Where feminist campaigns depend on broad alliances for success, ‘feminist men’ have often acted as important allies. That said, young women today also face misogynistic abuse and violence.³⁶

Allies are especially important where feminism faces the rise of neo-conservative and right-wing forces that often draw on religious and populist tropes to campaign for reversals in women’s rights and gender diversity, promising to restore patriarchal privileges and powers within the family and society. Many young feminists today face hostile governments and see rights previously gained coming under attack.³⁷ If the previous generation can be said to have enjoyed favourable conditions for advancing gender equality demands, this is far from true today. Feminists have had to take to the streets across the world to defend legal gains that have come under threat.

Technological change, notably the global spread of the Internet, has had a major impact on politics, enabling new forms of activism and giving voice to new actors (see Annex III). Those born in this century are the first generation to have grown up entirely in the Internet age. As many commentators have noted, young activists are tech- and communications-savvy. They have at their disposal an array of social media and global networks, which they have deployed to often great effect. These technologies have shaped their

forms of collective activism and participation: Social media can secure extensive grass-roots engagement as well as reaching ever greater numbers compared to earlier forms of communication—telephone, fax and print media. Blogging and citizen journalism has democratized information, allowing previously silenced voices to be heard. Flash demonstrations and viral videos—such as the Chilean song ‘The Rapist Is in Your Path’³⁸—can be put together in minutes rather than days and disseminated globally, gaining in this case more than 27,000 views. Yet, even as young women are gaining ground in the new technologies, the opponents of women’s rights are also using the Internet and the majority of women are still disadvantaged by the digital divide, reinforced by out-of-date education and training initiatives.³⁹

The world of young feminists is one marked by a high degree of existential insecurity, which distinguishes their life chances from many of their older counterparts. The liberal reforms that have transformed labour markets and conditions have eroded many former securities and welfare support that their parents (mostly fathers) enjoyed if they worked in formal employment. The 2008 economic crisis affected young people more than adults and with lasting effects: In Latin America, the unemployment rate for those aged 15–24 years had reached nearly 20 per cent by 2016, leaving one in every five young people unemployed.⁴⁰ In the Arab world, two in five of those between 18–24 have considered migration to escape adverse economic conditions and political corruption.⁴¹ Deepening inequality, indebtedness and economic hardship impact on communities, driving the narcotics economy, crime and insecurity and increasing the risks to which young people are vulnerable. If exciting opportunities may have opened up for those who can manage ‘portfolio careers’ and can prosper in the tech economy, futures do not look so rosy for the many living with the new precarity and have become even more precarious as a result of the

³⁶ Bates 2020.

³⁷ Biroli 2019, Roggeband and Krizsan 2019.

³⁸ The title mocks an old slogan portraying the police as ‘a friend in your path’.

³⁹ UNICEF 2017, Wajcman 2020.

⁴⁰ ILO 2017.

⁴¹ AYS 2020.

global health and economic crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the same time, whereas former generations had more attachment to political parties and trade unions, this is far less the case among younger people today, many of whom experience disenchantment with political institutions and formal politics.⁴² Globally, youth satisfaction with democracy is declining not only in absolute terms but also relative to how older generations felt at the same stages in life.⁴³

Some young feminist movements today, notably in Latin America, echo earlier expressions of the Left in describing themselves as anti-politics, feminist anarchists and anti capitalists, rejecting organizations as manifestations of patriarchal power and seeking revolutionary social and cultural change.⁴⁴ Generational divides can make a difference to politics. In some countries, young people are more radical at both ends of the spectrum and more critical of liberal capitalism. In the United States, around half of millennials have a favourable view of socialism and are also more progressive on other issues than the 'Boomer' generation (born in the 1940s and 1950s) taken as a whole.⁴⁵ Yet, generation can be less important in determining political leanings than college education and class.

This is of salience for the differences at play within feminist generations, as some young people may be less committed overall to engaging with state processes—legal change, rights demands and 'engaging

the state'—or with the work of organizations such as the United Nations that were the focus of previous activist generations. Earlier gains in equal rights, for example, seem to many young feminists to be limited in their real effects or, until the recent threats to them posed by rightist mobilizations, were simply taken for granted. But the picture is mixed and ever-changing: The widespread demands for democracy and human rights in many parts of the world belie this view, and at the individual level we are seeing young feminists running for and achieving high office in numbers not seen before. Moreover, many activists who become politicized through street politics find that this experience can be a prelude to entering other more formal political spaces.

To gain a sense of some of the diverse struggles and challenges of the current wave of activism from an intergenerational and Southern perspective, three cases are summarized in the next section. The Brazil case looks at feminists involved in efforts to protect rights previously gained; the Indian case discusses the campaigns around gender-based violence and the Malawi case highlights the work of LGBTQI+ activists to secure justice and recognition in a particularly challenging context. The three campaigns were selected on account of their dominance within contemporary feminist movements along with their global resonance and organizational strategies. These cases show that, in spite of contextual specificities, ongoing feminist organizing in the Global South shares some important characteristics with other contemporary movements, as well as with previous generations (see Annex IV).

42 Inglehart and Norris 2019.

43 Foa et al. 2020. There are notable declines in satisfaction with democracy in four regions: Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, western Europe and the 'Anglo-Saxon' democracies, including Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

44 Alvarez 1999.

45 Inglehart and Norris 2019.

3.

CASE STUDIES

3.1

Brazil: Defending rights gained⁴⁶

Latin America has a long and ongoing record of feminist activism, its early movements going back to the beginning of the previous century and even before in some countries.⁴⁷ Feminist activists fought for the inclusion of women's equal rights in new constitutions during democratic transitions,⁴⁸ and when the left-wing presidents of the mid-2010s 'Pink Tide' came to office, they worked alongside or within government institutions to demand the implementation of these rights.⁴⁹

However, as the 'Pink Tide' receded, conservative Christian evangelism continued to grow and right-wing governments returned to power, women's incomplete protections—particularly those pertaining to gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive rights—became evident.⁵⁰ Facing increasing backlash from culturally conservative forces,⁵¹ in recent years, Latin America has seen large scale demonstrations demanding action to end violence against women and calling for an end to the criminalization of abortion.⁵² In many ways, the Brazilian case is thus illustrative of broader regional patterns of feminist activism from the democratization period to current times.

After re-democratization in 1985, Brazil underwent significant political and societal changes that provided the conditions for feminist activism to flourish.⁵³ It was during the governments of the Workers' Party

(Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) from 2003-2016 that feminist activists were most able to advance positive policy change.⁵⁴ However, after 14 years of left-wing governments, Brazil faces a rise of conservatism and its first far-right president since the military dictatorship: Jair Bolsonaro (2019 to date).

When Lula was elected and the PT came to office in 2003, it established the Secretariat for Women's Policies (SWP), a ministerial-level institution specifically targeted at identifying and addressing gender-based inequalities. In parallel, the Government also launched the National Conferences for Women's Policies designed to bring civil society views into the policy-making process. In its first meeting, the Conference had 120,000 attendees.⁵⁵ A similar process of broad engagement with women's groups around Brazil underlay the passage in 2006 of the Maria da Penha Law, possibly one of the world's strongest laws on domestic violence.⁵⁶

Progress continued during the governments of Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), Brazil's first woman president. For example, through the appointment of Eleonora Menicucci to the Secretariat for Women's Policies, Rousseff strengthened links with the feminist movement. A public health professor, Menicucci was more openly progressive on sexual and reproductive rights than her predecessors, something that was welcomed by feminist activists, since the PT's strategy to build large coalitions had led the government to make concessions to conservative parties on this issue. It was also under Rousseff that a law was approved aimed at giving formal protections to domestic workers and curbing labour-related abuse of a previously largely unprotected class of workers composed, overwhelmingly, of women of colour.⁵⁷

46 Malu A.C. Gatto is the author of the Brazil case study and conducted the related interviews.

47 Baldez 2002, Costa and Sardenberg 2008.

48 Waylen 1994.

49 Blofield et al. 2017, Friedman 2018.

50 Vaggione and Machado 2020, Bentancur and Rocha-Carpiuc 2020.

51 Molyneux 2017, Biroli and Caminotti 2020.

52 Souza 2019.

53 Costa and Sardenberg 2008.

54 Pinto 2010.

55 Pinto 2009.

56 Barsted 2011.

57 Bernardino-Costa 2015.

Whilst there were key advances during the PT years, coalition politics—especially the PT’s need to constrain advances in progressive areas to ensure the support of powerful Evangelical politicians—limited the Government’s actions on women’s rights. The declining popularity of Rousseff’s government led her to further give in to the coalition, and eventually the Secretariat for Women’s Policies was incorporated into the Secretariats for Racial Equality and Human Rights.⁵⁸ In other words, the PT years saw both the creation and extinction of this ministerial-level gender machinery.

Feminists’ close relations with the PT government may have also weakened organizing at the grass roots. As Céli Pinto, Professor of History at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and second-wave feminist and activist, explains:

“There was the institutionalization of the [feminist] movement when the PT came into office [...] so you’d find feminist activists in all government institutions. But this also raises problems, because there were a generation of older women, from my generation and 10 years younger, working within the state apparatus [...] and the base [grass roots] was left a bit unprotected.”⁵⁹

Still, as the Rousseff government began to decline, civil society and state relations shifted and women’s activism outside the state re-emerged as a key political force. When Rousseff was suspended from her duties and impeached in April 2016—after an impeachment process that was marked by misogyny—women went to the presidential palace to offer her flowers and staged a number of protests thereafter.⁶⁰ In a profile of the new First Lady, one of the magazines with the largest circulations in Brazil celebrated Temer’s wife, Marcela, as “beautiful, modest, and domestic”⁶¹—something that quickly prompted a new online campaign seeking to challenge traditional

gender stereotypes.⁶² Temer’s all-male (and all-white) cabinet also made international news.⁶³ As Temer’s government began enacting increasingly harsh austerity measures, widespread protests throughout the country continued.⁶⁴

Feminist activists, perhaps, were the first to notice (as well as respond to) the rise of conservatism in Brazil, a process that has reignited women’s movements across the country. While Brazil’s ‘feminist awakening’ was a gradual process supported by consistent conscientization efforts,⁶⁵ key events seem to have triggered a new ‘wave’ of collective activism. As Sueli Carneiro, Brazilian philosopher and founder and director of Geledés-Black Women’s Institute, recently noted:

“Some 20 years ago, old feminists asked: ‘where are the girls, where are the girls? What happened? They didn’t show up.’ Now, I ask: ‘there are so many of you, where were you hiding that we didn’t see you?’ And they say: ‘we were growing up.’”⁶⁶

Although feminism in Brazil was not dead during the 1990s and early 2000s,⁶⁷ a nationally representative survey conducted by DataFolha with 2,086 Brazilians on 2-3 April 2019 attests to the renewed strength of the country’s feminist movement among the youngest generation: 50 per cent of women between the ages of 16 and 25 identify with feminism, making them the most feminist age group after women who are over 65 years old (of whom 54 per cent self-declare as feminists). By contrast, for example, only 36 per cent of women between the ages of 26 and 35 identify as feminists.⁶⁸

The first explicit sign of Brazil’s feminist awakening was women’s collective response to a case of online sexual harassment.⁶⁹ On 20 October 2015, when the first episode of Brazil’s *Junior Masterchef* aired on

58 Gatto et al. 2017.

59 Interview, Skype, 9 September 2019.

60 Streit 2016, Macaulay 2017.

61 Linhares 2016.

62 Sims 2016.

63 Sims 2015, Watts 2016.

64 Aleem 2016.

65 Sardenberg 2018.

66 Carneiro in Porto 2019.

67 Gomes and Sorj 2014.

68 DataFolha 2019.

69 Buarque 2019.

television, a number of adult men tweeted sexual comments targeted at a 12-year-old girl competing on the show. Using the hashtag #FirstHarrasment (#PrimeiroAssédio)—a campaign launched by the feminist organization Think Olga—women responded to the episode by using Twitter to recount their early experiences of sexual assault and harassment. Over a four-day period, the campaign accumulated over 82,000 posts, increasing awareness about rape culture and girls' and women's shared experiences of early sexualization in the country.⁷⁰

Gender inequalities in Brazil had long been dire. For example, when protests began in 2015, the country ranked 8th in the world in feminicide and officially registered over 45,460 cases of rape—a crime that is widely known to be underreported—per year.⁷¹ The majority of rape victims are overwhelmingly young and female, with a modal age of just 14. A survey also revealed that 45 per cent per cent of young women aged 16-14 years old had suffered some kind of gender-based violence in the previous 12 months, and 70 per cent had been sexually harassed.⁷²

Soon after, women rallied to fight against institutional violence. Just one day after they began mobilizing online, a bill that would make it harder for victims of rape to access legal abortion (already one of the few exceptions protected by law) advanced in Congress after approval by the Constitutional Committee of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies.⁷³ Women reacted by taking to the streets. On 31 October 2015, it is estimated that more than 15,000 women marched in São Paulo and at least another 5,000 in other cities throughout the country.⁷⁴ With posters that read 'I can't believe I'm protesting about this in 2015' and 'Out with Cunha' (a reference to Eduardo Cunha, the Congressman who authored the bill), women of all ages sent the signal that they would not tolerate losing any rights.⁷⁵

Society paid attention and the media began speaking of the 'Feminist Spring' (*Primavera Feminista*). In fact,

in November, women's activism made the cover of one of Brazil's most popular general interest magazines, *Época*, where it was deemed "currently, the most important political movement in Brazil".⁷⁶ But the 'sudden' rise and strength of women's protests came as a surprise to many. As a newspaper headline neatly summarized: "Brazilian women say enough: Reasons have never been few, but, last week, the voice went to the streets".⁷⁷

Country-wide, women-led activism would re-emerge again in March 2018, when Black, lesbian, left-wing City Councilwoman Marielle Franco was brutally assassinated after speaking at an event about Black feminism. As women continued to mourn and demand answers about who was behind the murder, they also had to contend with the judicial process under way at the Supreme Court, which began debating the decriminalization of abortion on 3 August—a process that was met with protests against the proposal and a series of threats directed at Débora Diniz, Professor of Law at the University of Brasília and one of the key expert testimonies during the public hearings.⁷⁸

When the October 2018 elections approached, however, all eyes turned to presidential campaigns. As then-candidate Jair Bolsonaro—who became internationally recognized for his misogynistic, racist and homophobic comments⁷⁹—gained popularity, women organized again. Within a few days, a Facebook group called 'Women United against Bolsonaro' (Mulheres Unidas Contra Bolsonaro, MUCB) attracted roughly 4 million members, all women. Ludimilla Teixeira, founder of the MUCB Facebook group, highlights its successes in transforming online mobilization into street activism.⁸⁰ From within the group, women organized the #NotHim (#EleNão) campaign, a hashtag that was used over 200,000 times in a single day on Instagram and in over 193,000 tweets over a span of three days.⁸¹ Also through the efforts of the group, the largest women-led protests in Brazil's democratic history were organized, taking more than

70 Rossi 2015b.

71 FBSP 2016.

72 Ibid.

73 Bedinelli 2015.

74 Martinelli 2015.

75 Ibid.

76 Grillo et al. 2015.

77 Rossi 2015a.

78 Blower 2018.

79 Forrest 2018.

80 Interview, Salvador, 7 January 2020.

81 Uchoa 2018.

100,000 people to the streets in São Paulo alone and, on 18 September, another 25,000 in Rio de Janeiro and thousands more in at least another 144 cities across the country.⁸²

On taking office, and through nominating Evangelical Pastor Damares Alves as Minister of Human Rights, Family and Women, Bolsonaro made his hostility towards feminists clear. On the day of her inauguration, Minister Alves also made her position clear by stating that while the Brazilian state is secular, “this minister is extremely Christian” and that her time in office would represent the beginning of a new era when “boys wear blue and girls wear pink”.⁸³ Since then, Minister Alves has made numerous declarations that have sparked strong concern among feminists. One of the most recent cases, from February 2020, was the Ministry’s announcement of a plan to test an abstinence-focused sex education curriculum⁸⁴—a policy that has been shown to be largely ineffective in delaying the initiation of sexual activity, teenage pregnancies or the transmission of sexually transmitted infections.⁸⁵

The nomination of Damares Alves and the Government’s determined attempts (both through rhetoric and policy) to regulate expressions of gender and sexuality represent the institutionalization of the anti-‘gender ideology’ movement that has grown in opposition to feminist forces in Latin America over the last few years and that, in 2017, made international headlines after attacking and burning an effigy of the feminist philosopher Judith Butler during her visit to Brazil.⁸⁶ In this context, when asked about the differences between the priorities of feminist activists in the 1970s and 1980s and now, second wave feminist academic and activist Cecilia Sardenberg, Professor of Anthropology at the Federal University of Bahia, said: “Back then, we fought to gain rights; now, we fight against them being taken away”.⁸⁷

In the 1980s, a key strategy employed by feminist activists to ensure the legal protection of women’s rights in Brazil was what Pinto describes as the “politics of presence”. As she recounted, there was at least one feminist activist present at every single meeting during the process of the writing of the new Brazilian Constitution adopted in 1988.⁸⁸ Sardenberg added that, during this time, United Nations’ meetings and conventions were instrumental to policymaking, as Brazilian women could take part in the collective planning of a global agenda for women’s rights that they could then use to pressure domestic actors, in what she calls a “boomerang effect”.⁸⁹

Now, feminists are combining traditional tactics with new ones. Besides engaging in the ‘politics of presence’, by, for example, providing consultations to feminist congresswomen and attending congressional sessions (as Joanna Burigo, founder of the feminist online platform Casa da Mãe Joanna, does), young feminists are also using the web to put pressure in policy debates. For example, the Facebook bot Beta sends invites to users to contact their representatives when bills limiting women’s rights are scheduled to be debated in Congress. As well as raising awareness for causes through street demonstrations, women are now also designing and participating in viral online campaigns such as the ones instanced above. While feminist academics continue teaching the new generations in classrooms, they are also making the knowledge available for free through online portals, including the Free Feminist University (Universidade Livre Feminista). Not only are women still engaged in international feminist networks through transnational organizations but, through the use of social media, they also turn domestic issues into global trending topics that catch the attention of foreign media.

This reverberates in newly collected data. In an original survey⁹⁰ conducted with members of the MUCB Facebook group, 70 per cent of respondents attested that their political activism had been much stronger

82 Rossi et al. 2018.

83 Madov 2019.

84 Bergamo 2020.

85 Kohler et al. 2008; Stanger-Hall and Hall 2011.

86 Jaschik 2017.

87 Interview, Skype, 9 September 2019.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Based on a convenience sample of 755 responses collected in November 2018, the month following the elections.

in 2018 than in previous elections. In the same survey, 14 per cent of respondents stated that it was during the 2018 pre-electoral period that they participated in a street demonstration for the first time, while 13 per cent said that they started self-identifying as feminists during the same period.⁹¹

With this expansion in activism, the need to democratize feminism has been brought to the forefront. As mentioned in all interviews, Black feminism has always been strong in Brazil, producing innovative and ground-breaking contributions to feminist theory, but Black women's priorities have often not been recognized by the movement, prompting them to organize outside 'mainstream' feminist circles.⁹² As Carneiro explains, Black feminism emerged from Black women's exclusion from feminism led by white women and from Black movements led by men.⁹³ Pinto admits this:

"Some more radical groups [of young feminists] criticise us [second-wave feminists] because we were white, middle class, and heterosexual. So, there is this criticism, and this is not an invalid criticism. To a large extent, we were indeed mostly [white, middle class, and heterosexual]."⁹⁴

By contrast, the recognition of intersectional oppressions⁹⁵ now rests at the centre of feminist debates, with current movements seeking to better incorporate various political agendas, including struggles against racism and for LGBTQ+ rights.⁹⁶ Even as the media continues to recognize the demands and leadership of white middle-class women,⁹⁷ the heterogeneity of women's experiences and the need for multiple feminisms remains prominent: Testimony to this is the popularity and success of the book series *Plural Feminisms (Feminismos Plurais)*, curated by feminist philosopher Djamila Ribeiro. While previously Black women might have sought alternative movements,

now women of colour identify with feminism to a greater extent than white women. In the survey conducted by DataFolha in April 2019, 50 per cent of Black women, 54 per cent of indigenous women and 40 per cent of Asian women stated they consider themselves to be feminists, while 39 per cent of brown women and 39 per cent of white women self-label themselves as such.⁹⁸

While feminism has been re-energized, feminists have been under a state of alert since the election of Jair Bolsonaro. As all interviewees noted, women's movements are particularly crucial at a time when there are signs that cases of domestic violence and sexual assault are increasing in the country⁹⁹ and other previously attained rights are at risk of being taken away. In this context, intergenerational learning and exchange may be key in the fight to maintain existing rights and push for further protections. As Carneiro recently noted, now that the 'girls have grown up', they are happy to pass the baton to a new generation.¹⁰⁰ Cecilia Sardenberg agrees:

"Now, we no longer have too much strength to run around. We go there [to demonstrations] and send messages online in support, because our legs cannot stand all the walking anymore. I am 71-years-old. [...] But we are there to support young women's movements [...] and we are happy to see that younger generations are continuing our fights. [...] This gives me hope that the fight will continue."¹⁰¹

If recent events are any indication, the fight will indeed continue. As a new 'wave' of feminism takes back the streets of Brazil, new technologies accelerate the diffusion of ideas beyond the country's borders—allowing Latin American (and global) women to recognize, and build solidarity around, their common struggles.

91 Gatto 2019.

92 Bairros 2008.

93 Carneiro in Porto 2019.

94 Interview, Skype, 9 September 2019.

95 Crenshaw 1989.

96 Gomes and Sorj 2014.

97 Buarque 2019.

98 DataFolha 2019.

99 Mena and Barbon 2019.

100 Carneiro in Porto 2019.

101 Interview, Skype, 09 September 2019.

3.2

India: Mobilizing against gender-based violence¹⁰²

The understanding of any contemporary feminist movements in India would be incomplete without looking at the history of the struggle that paved the way for the current wave. However, this phase of feminist movements also cannot be understood without looking at the current larger social and political context. In 2014, Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came into power in a landslide victory. The BJP, a right-wing, conservative political party, brought with it a steep rise in Brahmanical Hindutva nationalist politics, and the communities who have borne the brunt of it the most have been Hindus from the lowest caste or Dalits, Muslims, women and queer communities.

Modi, previously the chief minister of the state of Gujarat, was accused of initiating and condoning the bloodshed during the 2002 Gujarat riots, one of the most brutal episodes of modern India in which more than a thousand people died. The riots also witnessed extensive and specific targeting of women, young girls and children, who were subjected to the most sadistic and vicious forms of sexual violence. Since coming into power, several elected ministers of the BJP government have made casual comments about rape and have openly indulged in blatant misogyny and victim-blaming. A BJP Minister of the Legislative Assembly has been accused of raping a 17-year-old girl in Unnao. In Jammu and Kashmir, BJP state ministers marched in support of men who had gang-raped and murdered a child in Kathua. The Uttar Pradesh chief minister, also a part of the BJP, started 'anti-Romeo squads' to deal with violence against women (VAW). This led to further policing and securitization of women and to the beating up of young couples who crossed caste/community lines.

Considering this background, it is a particularly interesting time to look at the new wave of Indian feminist movements. Irrespective of many debates

and disagreements, the Indian urban feminist movement has seen a recent revival.¹⁰³ In this context, it is important to remember the continued resistance across decades by women in Kashmir, North-East India, tribal women, Dalit communities, Muslim communities and other minority communities across the country. Their narratives of violence and struggles are often lost within the mainstream feminist movement or in categorization of the 'waves'.

Patriarchal oppression is a reality for Indian women across generations, and ending VAW has been a central and long-standing campaign issue in India. When the United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year, the Government of India commissioned a report on the status of women called "Towards Equality".¹⁰⁴ The report, published in 1975, dramatically highlighted not only existing gender inequalities, such as declining sex ratios, but also inequalities in education, access to health care, income and political representation.¹⁰⁵ Omvedt (1986) states that post-1975 women's movements all over the world emerged as a new force. In the Indian context, however, she says,

"Movements in developing countries such as India have witnessed an interaction between the more articulate and more easily organizable urban, middle-class women and the agricultural labourer or poor peasant women. Although international forces have provided ideological stimulation and funding and urban intellectual women have dominated such organizations, it has often been the case that some of the most radical and important issues have been brought forward by the movements of poor women."¹⁰⁶

It was during this time that India witnessed the formation of different kinds of women's organizations: trade unions, self-employed women's groups, Socialist/Marxists women's groups and even autonomous women's organizations.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Adrija Dey is the author of the India case study and conducted all the related interviews.

¹⁰³ Dhanaraj 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Kelly and Slaughter 1992.

¹⁰⁵ Katzenstein 1989.

¹⁰⁶ Omvedt 1986: 212.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

In keeping with the second wave of feminism, it was also during this period that VAW became the central concern of the Indian women's movement, with cases of custodial rape, state violence, gang rape, dowry death and sexual harassment taken up by feminist organizations across the country.¹⁰⁸ Since then, major changes in the legal framework around sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) can be categorized under three landmark legal cases: the Mathura case, which led to the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act of 1983 defining the category of custodial rape and gang rape in individual rape cases; the Bhanwari Devi case, which led to the introduction of the Vishakha Guidelines in 1997, the first comprehensive law against sexual harassment in the workplace; and the Nirbhaya case, which led to the most substantive overhaul of the criminal law in 2013.¹⁰⁹

The 16 December 2012 gang rape of a young university student in New Delhi started a new phase of feminist activism in India.¹¹⁰ On 16 December 2012, Jyoti Singh, a female physiotherapy student, was gang raped and beaten by six men while on a moving bus. After 13 days spent fighting for her life, she died. Abiding by Indian law, the media did not use her real name initially but adopted the pseudonym Nirbhaya (fearless);¹¹¹ thus the case popularly came to be known as the Nirbhaya case. As soon as it was reported by the media, thousands of people took to the streets of cities across India to protest against the crime and women's lack of safety and champion women's rights and anti-rape laws. People from different sections of society, including women's organizations of different ideological persuasion, students' organizations, NGOs, labour unions, working women and men, individuals with no political affiliations and housewives came together spontaneously on the streets with a common purpose: to fight for gender justice.¹¹²

The Nirbhaya case not only had a significant impact on public discourse and awareness but also had substantial legal impacts, leading to the most rapid and

substantive overhaul of the criminal law. A committee, headed by Supreme Court Judge J.S. Verma was set up by the Government on 23 December 2012 to identify the changes to be made. It handed over its report on 23 January 2013, exactly 30 days later. The first few words of the report stated that, "The constitution of this Committee is in response to the country-wide peaceful public outcry of civil society, led by the youth, against the failure of governance to provide a safe and dignified environment for the women of India, who are constantly exposed to sexual violence".¹¹³ The Verma committee report was considered exemplary in its recommendations.¹¹⁴

However, two most important areas that were excluded from the new law were marital rape and rape by the armed forces. Marital rape was not included as the lawmakers decided that this would potentially disrupt the institution of marriage and the entire family system in India, thus denying that rape can occur within the 'sacred bonds' of marriage. The armed forces, especially in the 'disturbed areas', are still effectively immune from prosecution for rape and sexual assault as they are protected by special laws, such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958.

This shows that while the state and lawmakers were willing to engage with legal or punitive measures for crimes involving SGBV, having broader conversations around regressive patriarchal practices or state violence was still largely impossible. As we saw post the Nirbhaya case, the call for the death penalty for the perpetrators in many ways became the central demand and in effect diluted the movement, taking attention away from larger questions of patriarchal oppression and structural violence.

Nevertheless, the case still managed to generate substantial debates and discussions around SGBV and raise consciousness around the issue. For example, a survey of 9,500 women across G20 countries conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation in 2015 found that 29 per cent of working women faced physical or online harassment at work, but 61 per cent of them said they never

¹⁰⁸ Kumar 1993.

¹⁰⁹ Dey 2019a.

¹¹⁰ Dey 2019a, 2019b.

¹¹¹ Her parents subsequently agreed to the use of Jyoti's real name.

¹¹² Chaudhuri 2017.

¹¹³ Justice J.S. Verma Committee 2013.

¹¹⁴ Talwar 2013.

or rarely reported this. Compared to respondents from other G20 countries, women in India were the most likely to speak out, with 53 per cent saying that they always or most often reported harassment. Indian lawyers attributed this to greater levels of public awareness after voracious media coverage of gender crimes following the Nirbhaya case. Supreme Court lawyer Vrinda Grover stated, “there is a very high level of awareness among professional women in the formal sector because of the robust debate over violence against women we have had post 2012”.¹¹⁵ At the same time, it is important to remember that reporting in India is still very low due to a culture of disbelief around cases of harassment and abuse and widespread victim-blaming. Even though reporting might have increased among women who work in the formal and organized sectors, there are still few to no mechanisms available for women working in the informal sector. Even when formal mechanisms exist, they remain largely inaccessible. So there is an urgent need for conversations around greater cultural changes by making power structures visible and questioning existing mechanisms.

The Nirbhaya case triggered, as Simon-Kumar (2011) states, “both the publicness and the personalization of rape”¹¹⁶ in a way that had not happened before, and the media—both mainstream media and social media—played a significant role in altering public attitudes. In 2012, the virtually connected Indian youth beginning to redraw the terms of engagement between the state and its urban population.¹¹⁷ In the digital sphere, large number of women started taking power back into their own hands through telling their own stories of abuse, inspiring other women to do the same and demanding justice for the violence. Through this they started establishing a counter-narrative to the mainstream’s silencing of victim/survivors and challenging dominant understandings of SGBV.¹¹⁸ These ‘testimonial’ practices had first appeared in the 1980s, when the feminist movement in India used public discourse of ‘breaking the silence’ in cases of SGBV.¹¹⁹

However, after the Nirbhaya case this approach was re-appropriated online when young women across India started sharing their stories of abuse, creating in the process communities of solidarity.¹²⁰

While a large section of feminist discussions in India have moved online due to low cost and easy accessibility, it would be incorrect to say all women’s voices are equally represented in the virtual environment. As the Internet and digital technologies become a natural extension of our daily lives, the social exclusions and inequalities in the real world also start manifesting in the virtual. Hence, according to Shaw (2012), “the study of politics online must take exclusion, affect, identity, power and inequality into consideration, and therefore cannot require an ideal public in which these things do not exist”.¹²¹ Intersectional conversations around privilege, power dynamics and hierarchies have been largely absent from the feminist discourse both online and offline in India.¹²² We have seen very similar patterns within Dalit activism, where the question of patriarchy is ignored in favour of the caste question¹²³ or even within the Left or radical left political groups where the ideology of class struggle often trumps questions of caste and patriarchy.¹²⁴ Even though Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi women in India have historically been deprived often of even the most basic of human rights, the feminist movement has been largely led by privileged, upper-class, upper-caste women. This then extends to the kind of issues that are championed by the feminist community.¹²⁵

Yet, with the embedding of digital technology within the social and cultural narrative of society, we have seen spaces open up for the emergence of a new kind of radical politics. Dalit groups in India have turned to alternative spaces online not only to challenge dominant discourse through discursive practices but also to build solidarities nationally and transnationally.¹²⁶ New media has also had significant impacts on queer

115 Thomson Reuters Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation 2015.

116 Simon-Kumar 2011: 452.

117 Anwer and Shrinivasan 2012.

118 Fileborn 2014.

119 Sen 2017.

120 Dey 2019b.

121 Shaw 2012:43

122 Ayyar 2017, Bargi 2017.

123 Chadha 2018.

124 Ghosh 2017.

125 Dhanaraj 2018.

126 Kumar 2015, Kumar and Subramani 2014, Mishra 2017, Nayar 2011.

communities in India, providing them with avenues to not only establish their own political narratives but also to carve out a social space for interaction and dialogues.¹²⁷

Inspired by this, what followed for the next few years after the Nirbhaya case was a series of feminist campaigns led by young women and largely emanating from the gender politics of university campuses. Issues-based campaigns such as #HokKolorob (Let there be noise), #PadsAgainstSexism, #HappytoBleed, #WeWillGoOut, #AintNoCinderella or larger movements such as Pinjra Tod (Break the Cage) all used social media and catchy hashtags in creative ways to spread awareness and conversations about important issues such as silence around menstruation, women's rights to public spaces and setting up of sexual harassment committees in universities. Hence, in 2017, when the #MeToo movement spread globally, young Indian women were prepared. The anger that was already brewing found its perfect manifestation through that hashtag.

On 24 October 2017, Raya Sarkar, a 24-year-old law student of Indian descent at the University of California, posted a crowd-sourced list on Facebook of male academics in Indian universities who had allegedly harassed or assaulted women. The 'list', as it came to be known, was the result of a broken academic system that routinely failed to hold sexual predators to account. However, instead of bringing the feminist community together, the 'list' showed the world the crevasses in Indian feminism, particularly along generational lines.¹²⁸

One group of Indian feminists (who came to be referred to as the 'older feminists' in the debate) vehemently disagreed with the politics of the 'list' and said that it devalued 'due process'.¹²⁹ In an open letter, noted academic and feminist Nivedita Menon wrote,

As feminists, we have been part of a long struggle to make visible sexual harassment at the workplace, and have worked with

the movement to put in place systems of transparent and just procedures of accountability. We are dismayed by the initiative on Facebook, in which men are being listed and named as sexual harassers with no context or explanation."¹³⁰

The letter was signed by over a dozen acclaimed feminists. Debates raged on social media such as Facebook and Twitter, with arguments for and against the 'list'. Instead of this being a moment of shock and self-reflection, what ensued was what has been called a "civil war in Indian feminism" causing major ideological rifts in the feminist community.¹³¹ Many academics came out openly criticising the letter written by Menon for its tone and positioning. When young feminists needed support, they were confronted with a wall of bureaucracy with 'due process' thrown in their faces—a system that many had already tried and failed to access. Young feminists seemed specifically disgruntled about the fact that their feminist heroes, who always spoke about challenging the system, seemed to have "changed their tone when it came to their comrades".¹³² The call for 'due process' from older feminists follows the Justice Verma Committee report and the Saksham report, which contained detailed recommendations for tackling SGBV within higher education. Many of these older feminists were involved in these committees and spent their lives helping survivors through both their research and their activism. However, as Lukose (2018) states, "the fractious media discourse around older feminists who worry about 'moral panic' and sexual regulation versus 'younger' feminists who too easily speak a language of exploitation and victimhood belies a more complex understanding of how sexual politics has changed over time".¹³³

Much of the feminist movement in India historically focused on changes in law. This was the priority of the time as laws on gang rape, custodial rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace were not inadequate but non-existent. However, the

127 Dasgupta 2014 and 2017, Mitra and Gajjala 2008.

128 Chadha 2017.

129 Menon 2017.

130 Ibid.

131 Ghosh 2017.

132 Interview, female, India, 6 February 2018.

133 Lukose 2018: 38.

challenge to the new wave of feminists has been the lack of implementation of laws and fighting patriarchal practices that still form a major barrier to the prevention, prohibition and redress of SGBV. It is this aspect that younger feminists supporting the 'list' were trying to address. In a society that is still segregated and divided along the lines of gender, class, caste, ethnicity, religion and nationality, among others, power dynamics and hierarchies make it impossible for many women to access formal complaints procedures and legal mechanisms. Hence, simply the presence of due process does not ensure that justice needs are met.

However, irrespective of the debates, hundreds of women came out online during the #MeToo movement in India with their own narratives of sexual harassment and abuse.¹³⁴ It was perhaps one of the first times that the voices of minority feminists were at the forefront, decentring Savarna (high-caste) feminists and disrupting the "nationalist framings of Indian feminism by revealing a vast terrain of multiple contestations and power relations".¹³⁵ So, while the feminist counterpublic discourse in India is still rife with exclusions, it is some of these online spaces that saw the emergence of a new kind of feminist politics that is intersectional and inclusive.¹³⁶

Several campaigns and collectives led by young feminists working at the grass-roots level are also focusing on challenging everyday normalized violence and empowering women. One such movement is Pinjra Tod (PT) (Break the Cage). To fight against the narrative that women needed to be protected and reclaim public spaces, a group of women students and alumni from colleges across New Delhi came together in 2015 to form this autonomous women's collective. When the movement started to reclaim the night and protest against women students being locked inside under unfair curfew rules in university hostels, women marched through Delhi University campuses at night rattling hostel locks and banging on the doors, shouting slogans, beating drums, singing, reciting poetry and even breaking

into impromptu dances. Describing their marches, a PT activist said, "Ours is a jubilant movement".¹³⁷

However, PT is not a single issue-based movement. A look at its social media pages reveal the diversity of issues that they engage with: resisting the BJP government's right-wing nationalism; protesting against fee hikes, neoliberalization and the privatization of education; speaking out about India's unconstitutional move in Kashmir with the abrogation of Article 370 and 35; and joining the sanitation workers on strike. These are all feminist issues. and that is perhaps the biggest strength of movements such as PT.

Asked about what was new and what were the differences with earlier movements in India, one young activist said:

"I would say that the methods of working and bringing about change are different as compared to the earlier waves. For example, if you look at the context of the #MeToo movement, the methods are very different. There is much more openness in the new wave compared to the older wave. The older wave had particular ways of functioning and they were very reluctant to change. So that's the difference I see. The new feminist movement is also aligning with other movements such as the LGBT+ movement, which was not done earlier. Now also it is not done in the best way but at least an effort is being made to collaborate and work together."¹³⁸

Moving away from focusing mainly on legal or punitive approaches, some of these new movements are trying to be inclusive and intersectional. Their focus is on cultural change through constructive political collective action. Through this they are giving women a voice, building solidarities across boundaries and allowing women who have suffered abuse to heal. Taking inspiration and learning from the history of the feminist movement, they are looking for more creative and community-based solutions that result in a change of culture rather than simply changing laws, while not forgetting to question caste, class, religion, sexuality

134 Chadha 2017, Datta 2017, Gajjala 2018, Pujari 2017, Sen 2017.

135 Roy 2019.

136 Dey 2019b.

137 Interview, female, age 24, India, 10 September 2019.

138 Interview, female, age 26, India, 13 September 2019.

and disability. While these movements are not without their own shortcomings, the voices of dissent that emerge out of them are loud, strong and determined.

From December 2019, thousands of Indian women across generational lines were involved in protests against an unconstitutional Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) passed by the Government that made religion a condition in citizenship, restricting the citizenship rights of Indian Muslims. This completely violated the secular principles enshrined in the Constitution. These marches and occupations were largely led by women, with activists, students, performers, artists, lawyers, students, housewives, mothers, grandmothers and children being at the forefront of this resistance across India. For many, it is the first time they have had any political engagement. This was epitomized in the neighbourhood of Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi, where hundreds of Muslim women blocked a main road in December and began a sit-in demonstration. Shaheen Bagh became not only a site of protest but also a community of love, solidarity and joy; a site of political education and collective learning. Following this, many Shaheen Bagh-style occupations emerged across Muslim communities in the country and most were led by women. Many of these activists have since been jailed for their participation in peaceful protests and are facing severe state repression.

Hence the fight of the contemporary Indian feminist movement is not only against patriarchal oppression but also against a neoliberal, fascist, Brahmanical state and its institutions. As the state becomes even more repressive and violent, however, slogans of *Azadi* (Freedom) reverberate in streets across the country and the voices of women loudly assert “*Ladenge, Jitenge*” (We shall fight, we shall win).

3.3

Malawi: Intersecting LGBTQI+ and feminist activism

The complex interactions and collaborations between feminist and LGBTQI+ activists further complicate the notion of clearly defined generational ‘waves’

of activism, bringing into sharp relief tensions over priorities and tactics. At the same time, an evaluation of the new feminist activism of the ‘fourth wave’ in African contexts demonstrates a marked shift towards making ‘radical intersectionality’ a lived reality and an alignment of ongoing demands related to sexual health, reproductive rights, violence against women (VAW) and social mobility. Just as feminist knowledge and tactics have travelled across borders and time, these demands have increasingly been articulated through newly available social media platforms in response to reactionary backlash.

Contemporary feminisms have often hinged on overarching questions about womanhood as both a theoretical category and a lived experience. Intersectionality has provided a framework for broadening these definitions to include women of colour, women with disabilities, indigenous women and queer women as well as understanding the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression. Both the Brazilian and Indian cases highlight an increasing willingness among many fourth wave feminists to align with and/or include queer women, which is also evident in various African contexts. Yet, the Malawian case explored below, and other regional examples, also nuance the generational frame by highlighting a major point of contention between different groups of feminists that can be, but is not exclusively, generational and deals with what fundamentally constitutes the notion of ‘womanhood’.

The relevance of the Malawi case is thus evident in its examination of shifts to more radical inclusion within feminist movements—a key characteristic of the fourth wave—as well as nuancing the utility of the generational frame as a tool to periodize moments of movement effervescence. Here, a more regional, country-specific approach has been taken to avoid over-generalizing about African feminist movements, given the scale and scope of variation across the continent. By then pivoting away from Malawi to examples of similar developments in other African countries, the study gestures towards a bigger picture of overall trends, with a view to further research that does justice to regional, sub-regional and continent-wide movement dynamics.

Across the Global South, important gains have been made by advocates for LGBTQI+ rights as well as advances in women's rights more broadly amidst calls to recognize their intersections. The 1985 UN Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi saw the affirmation of the existence of lesbian identities in Kenyan society.¹³⁹ A decade later, sexual orientation became a topic of debate in negotiations on the draft of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. South Africa, along with Brazil, led the way in June 2011 to galvanize the UN Human Rights Council to explicitly commit to the principle of protecting the right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, in the wake of the 1995 Beijing Women's conference, many activists felt that sexual matters were not an immediate priority for feminist movements, an attitude that proved persistent in subsequent years.¹⁴¹ The first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen a resurgence of anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination and legislation criminalizing same-sex relations in countries in the Global South, many on the African continent. In 2009, an Anti-Homosexuality Bill was proposed in Uganda and has been repeatedly reintroduced. In 2015, Ugandan activists attempted to organize the country's first pride parade, which was disrupted and followed by a violent police crackdown. Organizers were forced to cancel the planned parade again in 2019 due to safety concerns. A Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Bill also passed in the Nigerian Senate in 2011, while in South Africa there has been an alarming rise in incidents of 'corrective rape' targeting lesbians as well as cases of forced conversion therapy.

However, it is important to note that sexuality and gender identity remain highly contested in post-colonial and post-Apartheid contexts and must be understood as part of a rich, broad history of African sexualities. Alongside the increasing visibility of African feminists and LGBTQI+ activists pursuing demands on their own terms, there has also been a growing presence and intervention by what has

been termed the 'Gay International'.¹⁴² Defined as white, Northern-based NGOs and activists with an overt interest in searching for homophobia across the Global South, this has hindered efforts to integrate LGBTQI+ rights into human rights discourses without reinforcing harmful assumptions that sideline the complex colonial legacies in countries where discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity remains strong.¹⁴³ Visibility is still a complex double-edged sword for both feminists and LGBTQI+ activists, particularly as renewed attacks on sexual minorities "in the name of national or African or traditional values" have frequently been part of more generalized attacks on feminism, gender equality and religious and civil freedoms.¹⁴⁴ As a result, feminists across numerous African countries have often taken ambivalent positions on LGBTQI+ issues.

Arguably, one of the most contentious debates between different generations of African feminists across the continent has been over gender identity and expression, which cuts right to the heart of feminist theorizing about what 'makes' a woman. To cite one illustrative example, while Nigerian feminist and author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has been a vocal opponent of Nigeria's anti-gay laws and advocate for gay rights, she was criticised by Nigerian LGBTQI+ activists and international feminists in 2017 after an interview in which she addressed the question of whether transgender women should be considered as 'women'. Adichie asserted "trans women are trans women" and expressed concerns about conflating trans women's experiences to those of women who have been socialized as female "from the beginning".¹⁴⁵ Her comments sparked a passionate online debate, bringing to the fore disputes between some older feminists representing a more essentialist definition of gender based on biological sex and many younger 'intersectional' LGBTQI+ feminists. Recent events in Malawi powerfully highlight these complexities, simultaneously illustrating feminist conflicts as well as the practice of intergenerational fourth wave activism premised on intersectionality.

¹³⁹ Salo and Dineo Gqola 2006.

¹⁴⁰ Epprecht 2013.

¹⁴¹ Jolly 2000.

¹⁴² Epprecht 2013: 85.

¹⁴³ Ekine 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Epprecht 2013: 5.

¹⁴⁵ BBC 2017.

In 2010, a Malawian transgender woman, Tiwonge Chimbalanga, and her male partner, Steven Monjeza, were put on trial and found guilty of ‘gross indecency’ following their public wedding engagement ceremony. Chimbalanga identified as a woman, but she and Monjeza were labelled as a same-sex couple and sentenced to 14 years imprisonment, although they were later pardoned by then president Bingu wa Mutharika amidst international pressure and condemnation. The case gave renewed impetus to the politicization of sexual and gender non-conformity in Malawi, resulting in protests and police repression, which strained cross-movement solidarity partnerships as some activist organizations grew increasingly concerned about supporting LGBTQI+ rights.

One Malawian feminist activist, Linda, explained her organization’s reluctance to openly support Chimbalanga and Monjeza by highlighting the risk of encountering hostility from local political or religious leaders while also facing disapproval from western NGOs if not vocal enough about their support of LGBTQI+ issues. Remaining silent, or packaging support in a less explicitly LGBTQI+ framework, thus insulated feminist groups from accusations of “promoting homosexuality” in Malawi.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, other activist organizations argued that deferring explicit public support for LGBTQI+ rights and advocating for the inclusion of sexual minorities in HIV/AIDS provision constituted a more acceptable way to engage in LGBTQI+ advocacy.¹⁴⁷

The treatment of Chimbalanga by the media and the judicial system is also an illustration of the intersections between anti-LGBTQI+ legislation and social attitudes, exemplified by the fact that she was perceived as and labelled a gay man even though she explicitly identified as a woman. Malawian activist Linda explained that her organization saw Chimbalanga and Monjeza as men and therefore did not feel they were an immediate priority, but she would have supported a lesbian charged with breaking the country’s anti-LGBTQI+ laws: “next time they try and

prosecute a lesbian, I’ll be in the forefront defending this particular person”.¹⁴⁸

Despite the complicated ambivalence of some feminist groups, many activists did openly support Chimbalanga and her partner, embracing the new opportunities afforded by technology that have been embraced by fourth wave feminists to raise awareness and share information. This included Gender Dynamix—the first African organization focusing solely on the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people—and online witness change project ‘Where Love is Illegal’, which later shared a photo entry of Chimbalanga, providing an online platform for her to tell her story. The Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), launched in Malawi in 2006 out of a collective desire to create a “movement that [gives] a voice to...other [sexual minorities] who are not able to speak out”, supported the couple throughout their trial.¹⁴⁹ This was not without negative consequences, as the presence of NGOs can often complicate local activist politics and CEDEP’s involvement did cause unwelcome, negative attention for LGBTQI+ Malawians. Indeed, a 2014 Afrobarometer survey recorded that 89 per cent of Malawian respondents were strongly opposed to having a homosexual neighbour,¹⁵⁰ and attempts to call a referendum on the issue of same sex marriage and/or the decriminalisation of homosexuality in subsequent years never materialized.

At the same time, however, CEDEP’s initially cautious role in the legal defence of Chimbalanga and Monjeza also represented an important ‘new pathway’ for strategic action and a more radically inclusive approach to human rights and feminist activism in Malawi. Primarily engaged in public health advocacy and HIV/AIDS research prior to 2010, CEDEP embraced its heightened public visibility following the Chimbalanga case to pursue expanded social-justice advocacy, paving the way for other activist organizations.¹⁵¹ The Nyasa Rainbow Alliance, to cite one example, was established in 2014 by LGBTQI+ community members

¹⁴⁶ Currier 2014: 155.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Currier 2014: 157.

¹⁴⁹ McKay 2017: 12.

¹⁵⁰ Dulani et al. 2014: 26.

¹⁵¹ McKay 2017.

in Southern Malawi to address implementation gaps within LGBTQI+ organizing and formulate strategies in response to conservative backlash. Over the last few years, CEDEP has cosponsored events commemorating the International Day of Homophobia and Transphobia in the country, while in 2014, the organization led others in demanding the decriminalization of same-sex sexual relations.¹⁵² In 2016, CEDEP published *Proudly Malawian: Life Stories from Lesbian and Gender-Nonconforming Individuals*, a book documenting grass-roots stories of survival in harsh realities and demonstrating an increasing willingness to support the shared, as well as contrasting, experiences of different groups of Malawian women. Time will tell if the landmark Constitutional Court ruling of February 2020 annulling the presidential re-election of Peter Mutharika represents a significant development in the country's democracy more broadly, as feminists and LGBTQI+ activists continue to negotiate the challenges of securing democratic rights, representation and survival.

The evolving responses to the Chimablanga case in Malawi can be understood in conjunction with a growing, continent-wide “activist-scholarly engagement” with “subaltern sexualities”.¹⁵³ Many young feminists have mobilized in direct response to the backlash against LGBTQI+ rights and women's bodily autonomy, a defensive approach that is echoed in the Brazilian and Indian cases. Responding to South African lesbian activist Palesa Beverley Ditsie's call to acknowledge lesbians' human rights as a key part of the struggle for women's rights at the 1995 Beijing Women's conference, many African feminist organizations have crafted a more inclusive platform. Despite heightened violence, discrimination and criminalization in many African countries, there has been ‘assertive’ intergenerational engagement with the state, civil society, queer communities and international NGOs.

Kenyan feminist Marren Akatsa-Bukachi, who moved to Uganda in 2004 to work as Executive Director for the Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), reflected:

“Over the years I have seen acceptance of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women coming out of the closet, and fellow feminist allies fighting for their human rights, I have seen language change from calling women ‘prostitutes’ to ‘commercial sex workers’, I have seen funding to support the human rights of these groups of sisters. I have seen a move towards inclusivity rather than exclusivity, and I have seen the revival of the women's movement in Africa. This is what we need to sustain—a movement for African women, which reflects and is supportive of the diversity within this population. This includes younger feminists, feminists in the private sector, in the villages and in religious organizations.”¹⁵⁴

One powerful example of this shift can be found in the work of Sister Namibia, the first feminist organization to support LGBTQI+ rights in Namibia. The organization established a Lesbian Support Programme, running local and national workshops, and founded the human rights initiative The Rainbow Project (TRP) in 1997, both designed to deliberately nurture “a new generation of young lesbian women who are prepared to speak publicly for their rights”.¹⁵⁵ Comparably, the African Feminist Forum (AFF), which has been a vocal supporter of LGBTQI+ issues, launched an ‘African Feminist Ancestors’ project based on a commitment to ground feminist activism, movement-building and strategies on lessons from previous generations and the ways that past feminist activists and African women have negotiated power. This commitment to intergenerational dialogues is exemplified by the African Feminist Charter of 2006, which asserts the need to “draw inspiration from our feminist ancestors who blazed the trail and made it possible to affirm the rights of African women”.¹⁵⁶ Here, relative continuity with past feminist movements is clear even as fourth wave feminists have moved closer to radical intersectionality. Furthermore, the waves metaphor once again signals the importance of temporality and history in

¹⁵² Namangale 2014.

¹⁵³ Salo and Dineo Gqola 2006: 5.

¹⁵⁴ Adeleye-Feyemi and Horn 2009: 11.

¹⁵⁵ Frank and Khaxas 2006: 85

¹⁵⁶ AFF 2006: 6.

understanding these moments of effervescence in which generations of feminists come into dialogue.

While the characteristics of much of this new feminist activism can be understood by looking at the evolving strategies of a new younger generation, critical attention should still be paid to the ways that the idea of 'generation' itself has been invoked in complex ways within nationalist anti-LGBTQI+ arguments across the African continent. Indeed, one of the clearest axes of division there among feminists and LGBTQI+ activists over the past few decades, particularly between different generations of activists, has been a narrative of 'authentic' African-ness and claims that homosexuality or gender non-conforming identities are 'un-African.' When Sister Namibia released the findings from a countrywide research study on women's participation in political decision-making, which briefly referred to gay and lesbian rights, Eunice Ipinge, assistant secretary of information and research for the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) Women's Council, announced during a press conference: "It is unfortunate that there are some elements that would like to use gender equality as a stepping ladder to reach their own goals that have no relevance to gender...[The Women's manifesto report] has no other intention but to confuse the [authentic] Namibian woman and divert them away from the concept of gender equality. [Sister Namibia activists] will have to find another platform to address homosexuality and not within the context of gender equality".¹⁵⁷

Former head of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Africa Division and activist/consultant Micheline Ravololonarisoa has offered valuable insights on these dynamics, highlighting the need to "unravel" the diverse histories of African sexualities and colonial legacies that linger in "ongoing taboos"¹⁵⁸. She also asserts the need to engage in inter-generational dialogues to not only "define the limits of past and present strategic frameworks", but also to fully understand existing patriarchal structures, particularly given the continuing global problem of violence against women and LGBTQI+ people, many of whom inhabit both identities. As countries in the

Global South have negotiated democratization and political upheaval, these questions have become ever more complex. The defensive, cautionary framing of much LGBTQI+ activism across the African continent in recent decades can in part be accounted for by the anti-LGBTQI+ backlash happening in many African countries and the sense that existing gains are under threat or that new gains are being preemptively undercut.

Social media has afforded new and dynamic platforms for mobilization and solidarity, which parallels the online young feminist activism seen in Brazil and India, particularly the sharing of personal testimonies. Groups such as None on Record, a digital media organization, have utilized online platforms to record the stories of LGBTQI+ Africans. None on Record's popular AfroQueer podcast has carved out an online space to tackle issues relating to gender and sexuality across the continent and diaspora. Nevertheless, social media has also exposed fault lines of poverty and access that determine who is able to engage in activism via new technologies. In recent years, hashtags such as #BringBackOurGirls and #FeministWhileAfrican have brought issues affecting African women and girls into the international spotlight as well as demonstrating some of the tensions that exist within African feminisms over terminology and self-identification, particularly when placed in dialogue with Western feminisms. The dynamics within and across feminist and LGBTQI+ movements resist any simple conclusions or generalizations, and any analysis of African feminisms must recognize colonial legacies as well as a longer, more nuanced history of African sexualities.

Even so, what has united many feminist activists across Africa, including in Malawi, is an increasing willingness to adopt a more intersectional approach and utilize new strategies to pursue overlapping demands. Similarly to the Brazilian and Indian cases, these fourth wave activists have utilized new technologies to accelerate mobilization and communication, adopting a defensive framing in response to increasing backlash from conservative forces. Most recently, over the summer of 2020, anti-police brutality protests erupted in Nigeria to end SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad), while anti-femicide protesters

¹⁵⁷ Lorway 2014: 85.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with author 16 March 2020.

in Namibia took to the streets to call for a state of emergency in response to gender-based violence. In both cases, leadership from feminist and LGBTQI+ activists was central in mobilizing support. Over time, as African feminists negotiate ongoing struggles, the ways in which activists frame and resolve intergenerational questions about gender identity and sexuality may indeed prove to be defining characteristics of 'waves' to come.

4.

CONCLUSIONS

Feminism is a form of contentious politics, a global social movement that has spanned three centuries, and continues to show enduring vitality. While some critical differences mark out feminisms of different historical periods, a glimpse at the diversity that exists within the ‘new feminism’ of the fourth wave allows of no easy contrasts or monolithic typologies.

Some new feminist movements work in counter-cultural spaces, some are active in political parties and some work with or within the state. For all the evident plurality, there are still many continuities in feminisms’ core demands, and struggles around rights continue to be important for activists.¹⁵⁹ The politics of the street is not the only form of activism undertaken by young feminists today, as the *Ni Una Menos* and pro-choice campaigns show with their emphasis on both activism and legal change. Campaigns around gender-based violence, identity and reproductive rights may predominate, but equal pay and job opportunities still constitute key areas of feminist organizing, and feminists still promote radical transformative visions of the good society in challenging the dystopian trends of the present. Many if not most of these campaigns are multi-generational too,¹⁶⁰ with a long history of struggle behind them. It is true that differences of strategy and tactics may demarcate generational boundaries; even here, however, as the example of social media shows, new communication technologies most often serve as an adjunct of more conventional forms of political mobilization rather than substituting for them. Street protests and social media campaigns are component parts of a rich repertoire of activism and advocacy in a variety of spaces: governments, trade unions and grass-roots organizations.

This analysis of feminism’s trajectory, and the three discussions of movement activism in Brazil, India and

Malawi, indicate that historical record and enquiry require the inclusion of the Global South when thinking about periodizing feminism as it brings new perspectives to the story. Also, a generational approach has much to offer. The history of feminism cannot be written without taking account of the experiences of those who participated in it as activists, theorists and policymakers, among others. Each generation of activists has its own perspectives shaped by the myriad influences to which it is subjected and the opportunities it has to bring about positive change. For those living in enabling environments, much can be achieved, but for those facing attacks on women’s rights—as is the case in so many regions today—the battle is to defend the gains won by a previous generation. The lines between past and present are here not too starkly drawn.

Should we be speaking about the new activism as a ‘new wave’ or as a ‘new generation’ of feminism? A decade or so ago, feminism was declared ‘passé and the ‘post-feminist age’ was confidently asserted. How wrong these claims have proven to be. At the time of writing, it seems clear that feminist activism has seen a remarkable revival in a good number of regions and that a new wave could be said to be under way. Feminisms have a significant presence at the global level, given effective transnational networks and the shared nature of contemporary concerns such as gender-based violence, sexual rights and struggles to defend feminist gains that are now under threat. Our Indian and Brazilian cases show that the large-scale protests that have erupted over sexual violence and threats to rights are rooted in longer struggles that go back decades—they have not just appeared from

¹⁵⁹ The slogan of one of the Latin American campaigns for reproductive rights read “Our grandmothers gave us the vote, our mothers gave us divorce and we are giving to our daughters the right to choose”.

¹⁶⁰ Sutton 2020.

nowhere, and nor do they vanish without trace after the protesters have left the streets.

As is true of earlier times, these social movements bring together a variety of disparate actors and deploy a range of tactics, often working in different spaces to pursue their objectives. Neither Brazil nor India are optimal environments for defending, let alone advancing, women's rights, diversity and equality agendas, but nor is Malawi. These cases underline just how important rights' frameworks can be for people who suffer discrimination and persecution in challenging and dangerous contexts. Movements for justice, however small their numbers, can often achieve positive change. All three cases show how important social media can be for contemporary movements, providing an invaluable resource for networking, information exchange and mobilization. In the wrong hands, however, it can also be a new weapon of anti-feminist opposition and misogynistic hatred.

In focusing on the new activism, it is clear that despite varying priorities and interpretations, there are some striking similarities in feminists' demands that span countries, regions and decades. This speaks to the enduring character of gender inequality and the slow progress made in achieving feminist demands. A quarter of a century on from Beijing, it is not only surprising but also deeply worrying to see the unaddressed problem of high levels of gender-based violence, the lack of adequate sexual and reproductive rights and services in many countries, the continuing wage gap and the very limited progress in acknowledging the need for affordable and gender-equitable care. This is not to deny that progress has been made in many areas, but it has not been sufficient to warrant dismissing feminism as 'over'.

A second point concerns human rights frameworks. Feminist movements have always engaged in rights demands, and feminists were active in the drafting of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁶¹ and in the Beijing process. Over time, human rights frameworks have been adapted and extended to be more comprehensive and inclusive, have been tested

in the courts and have been challenged by those who oppose them. More often than not, however, it is women's movements and their campaigns, allies and resources that have played a critical role in securing and defending advances in women's rights. These, in turn, have served as a lever to advance further gains, raise awareness and challenge discriminatory norms.

While the human rights movement has lost some momentum and some of its more radical champions within human rights' institutions, feminist activists continue to work within their respective domestic and regional spheres to advance (and preserve) women's rights. Their work in defending human rights and democracy has become particularly urgent at a time when powerful States seek to undermine and roll back rights and the global architecture on which they rest. As the new wave of activism has shown, rights have continued to be central to all forms of justice claims—whether in regard to feminist or many other forms of contemporary youth activism. International agencies are no longer relied on for authority; rather, struggles around rights are owned and directed by local movements, by new actors and by a new generation that has embraced ideas of gender, race and sex equality, along with environmental justice, as integral to their striving for social change.

¹⁶¹ United Nations General Assembly, 1948, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Resolution 217 A(III).

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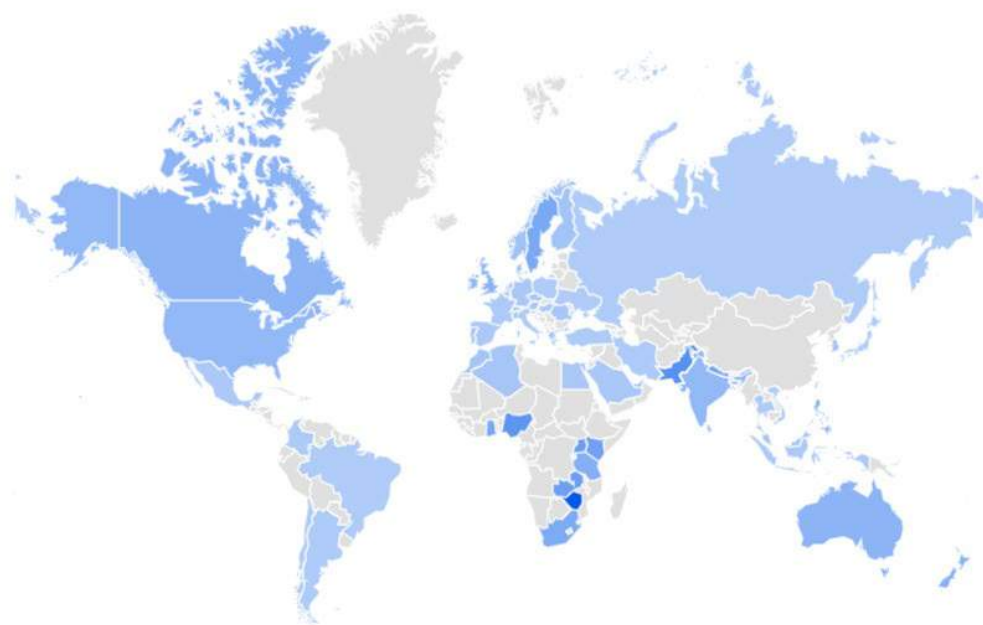
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ANNEX I.

THE GLOBAL SALIENCE OF FEMINISM: ONLINE AND IN ACADEMIA

Figure 1.

Google search popularity of term ‘feminism’ by region, 2018-2019



Source: Google Trends 2019.

Note: Darker shades of blue correspond to greater levels of search item popularity. Values of 0 are assigned when there is not sufficient data for search item specified (i.e., ‘feminism’). These cases are marked in grey.

Through the use of Google Trends data, which capture the popularity of term searches on Google in a given period and geographical region, we evaluate the level of salience of terms traditionally and historically associated with feminism. Since Internet searches are a form of observable data of expressed attitudes (often done in private), this complementary analysis allows us to gain a better understanding of fluctuations in interest around feminism in the last 15 years. While these data are imperfect—due to different levels of Internet access and reliance on Google as a major search tool across countries, and we cannot assume that search popularity indicates

positive attitudes or support for a given topic—previous work indicates that data on Google search trends serve as a useful proxy for estimating topic salience. Since a key aspect of youth mobilization is online activity, these data are particularly appropriate for the task at hand.

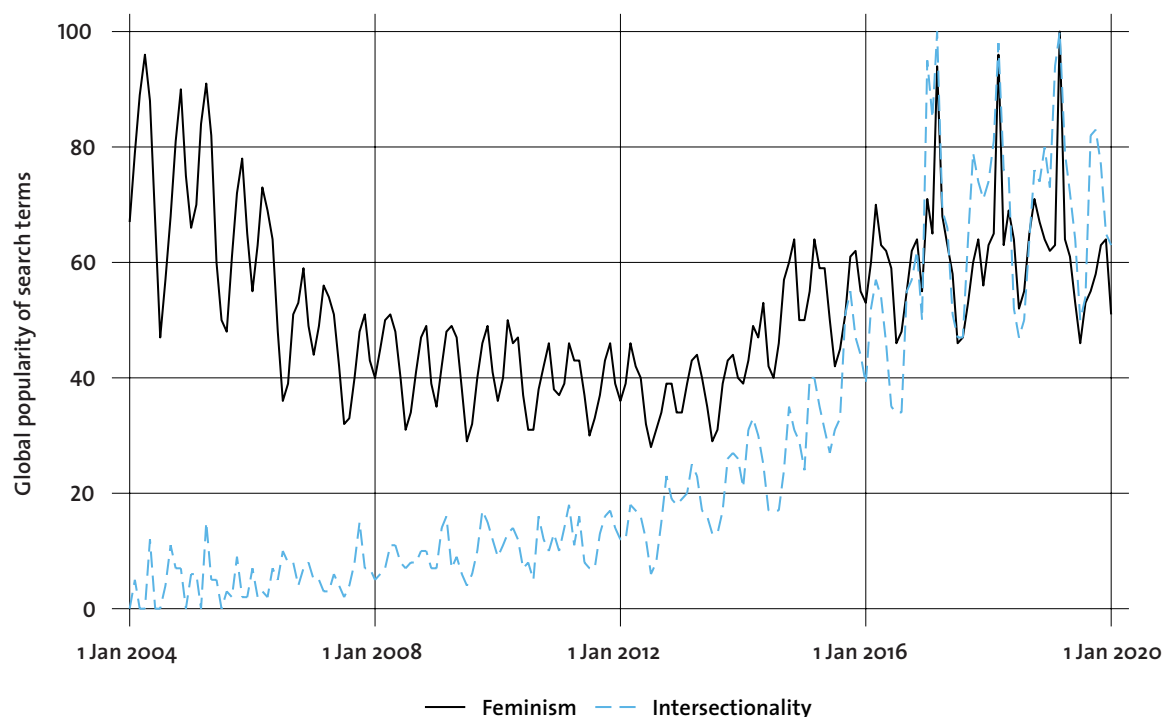
As Figures 1 and 2 show, the term ‘feminism’ is widely recognized and searched for on the Internet. In other words, the observed upsurge in activism that we describe can also be captured by a parallel rise in global awareness of feminism, as evidenced by the salience of Internet searches for the term. The

increasing social salience of feminism, however, may not have been equally shared everywhere. As analysis of Google Search Trends data indicates, global patterns of search popularity for the term ‘feminism’ in the last 12 months¹⁶² have varied widely (see Figure 1). Comparatively, the term was the most popular in Zimbabwe, followed by Pakistan, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia. Expanding our analysis to the entire

period of data availability (2004 to present) provides further insights into the global salience of searches for the term. As Figure 2 illustrates, while global online interest for ‘feminism’ has fluctuated since 2004, searches for ‘intersectionality’ have gained traction over time. This suggests that while interest in feminism has remained at similar levels, a specific type of feminism may be gaining popularity.

Figure 2.

Google search popularity of terms ‘feminism’ and ‘intersectionality’ globally, 2004-2020



Source: Original compilation using Google Trends 2020.

Note: As explained by the data source: “Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term.” The figure displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other.

There has also been a growing scholarly interest in the theme of generations in the study of feminism. An analysis of academic publications recorded in the comprehensive *Web of Science Core Collection* shows that from the year 1970 to date, a total of 189 publications recorded there have employed the terms ‘generations’

and ‘feminism’ in conjunction, with a total of 1,507 citations over the same period.¹⁶³ At the same time, feminist scholars continue to employ ‘waves’—with 15 articles using the terms ‘fourth wave’ and ‘feminism’ having been published since 2010.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Data retrieved on 19 April 2020 from <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=feminism>.

¹⁶³ Data were retrieved on 03 September 2019 from: <http://apps.webofknowledge.com/>.

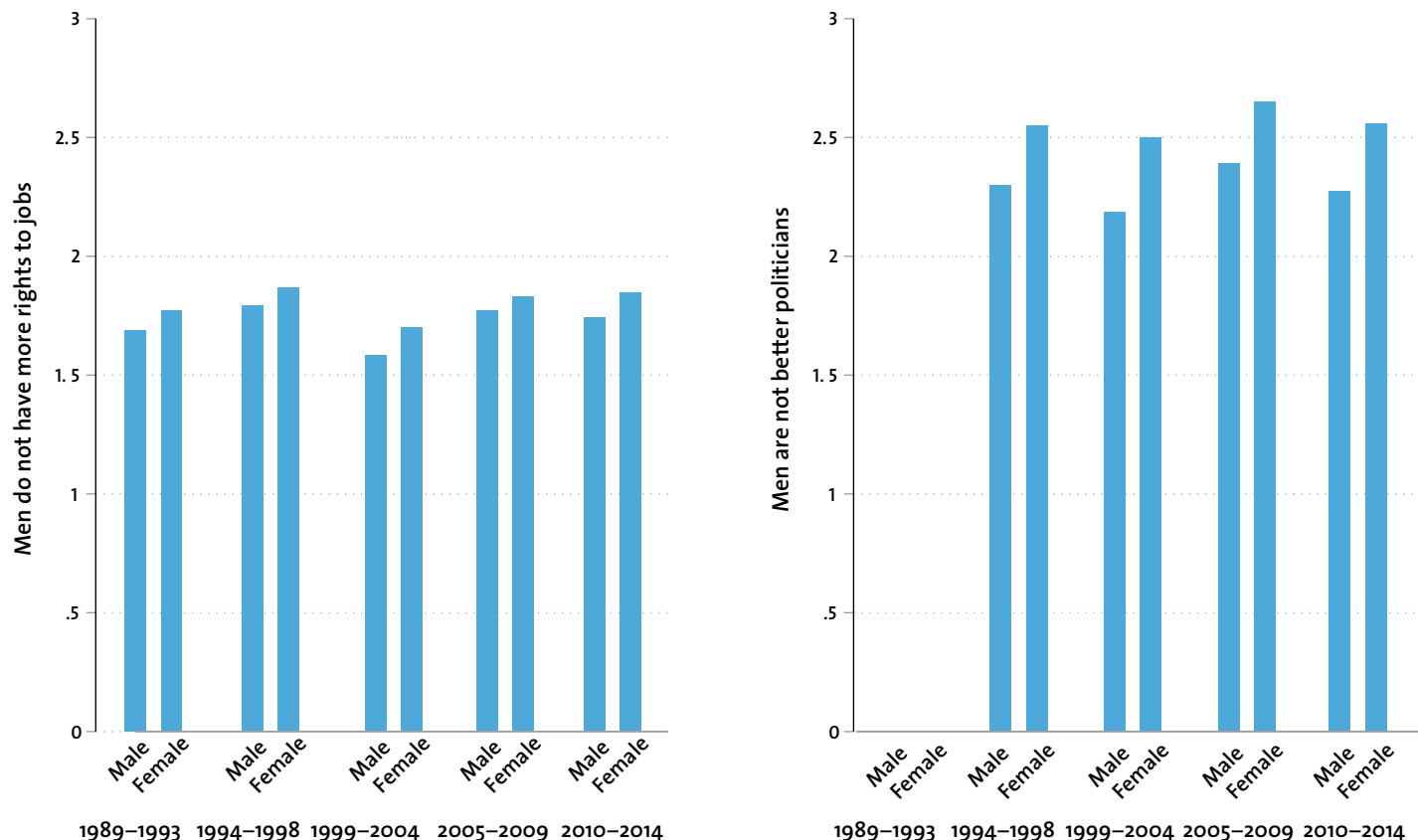
¹⁶⁴ Data were retrieved on 03 September 2019 from: <http://apps.webofknowledge.com/>.

ANNEX II.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

Figure 3.

Levels of gender-egalitarian views, by sex (1981/1994-2014)



Source: Original compilation using data from the World Values Survey (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>). Note: Variables displayed in each graph have different scales. Values for variable displayed in left-side panel range from 1 to 3. Variable displayed in the right-side panel ranges from 1 to 4.

Data from the *World Values Survey* (WVS)¹⁶⁵ corroborate notions about feminism's 'incomplete revolution' and show that gender egalitarian views on employment opportunities (left-side panel) and fitness for political

office (right-side panel) have not changed drastically since the late 1980s (see Figure 3). Restricting our global analysis to the most recent wave, we find that age and education are positively correlated with values on both variables. Unsurprisingly, this suggests that while aggregate values towards gender equality have remained more or less constant since 1989, younger individuals (in particular, young women) are more likely to hold gender egalitarian views.

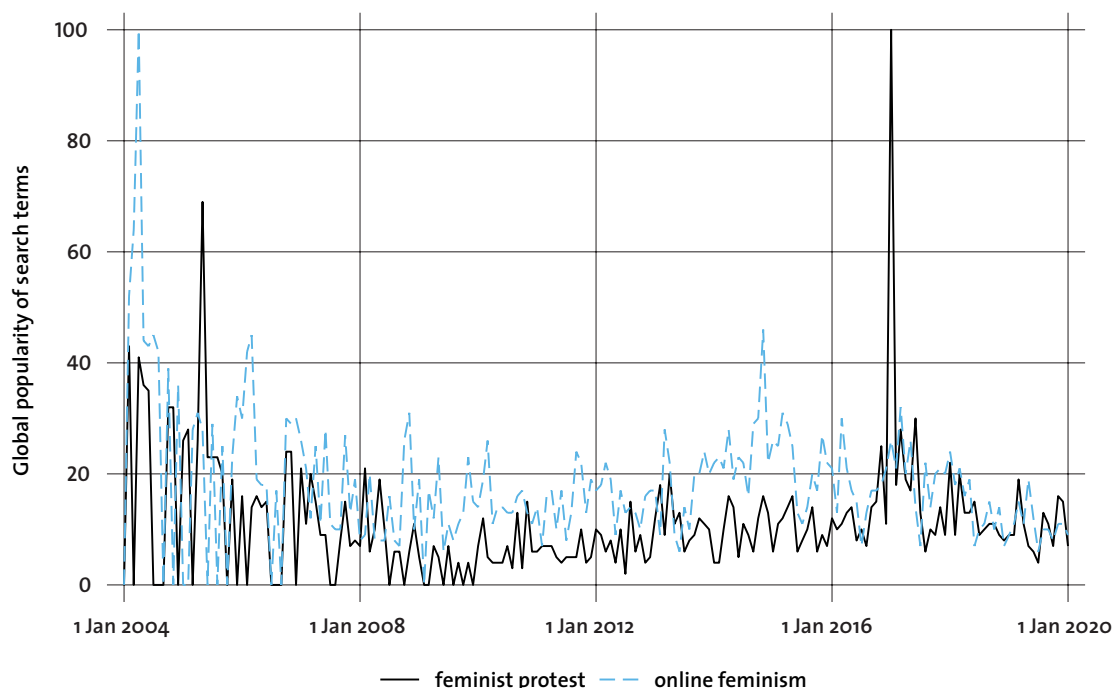
¹⁶⁵As our discussion reveals, providing a global assessment of the feminist movement's intergenerational trends is a challenging task. To our knowledge, the WVS provides the most complete data on attitudes and value preferences at a global scale available from the 1980s. In understanding the limitations of aggregate analyses, we ask that these data are only used for illustrative purposes.

ANNEX III.

TYPES AND TOPIC SALIENCE OF FEMINIST ENGAGEMENT

Figure 4.

Google search popularity of terms ‘feminism protest’ and ‘online feminism’ globally, 2004-2020



Source: Original compilation using Google Trends 2020.

Note: As explained by the data source: "Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term." The figure displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other.

The salience of search terms on Google again provides us with insights about the interaction between political demands and social movements. As Figure 4 shows, in the last 15 years, the popularity of ‘online feminism’ has often been higher than that of ‘feminist protests’. However, in January 2017 there was a clear surge in searches for ‘feminist protests’—a reflection of the popularity of the Women’s March that took place across the United States after the presidential election of Donald Trump. Since then, the global salience of searches for ‘feminist protests’ and ‘online feminism’ has remained similar—suggesting that recent political developments may have revived traditional

forms of feminist demonstrations and possibilities for feminism’s ‘return to the base’.

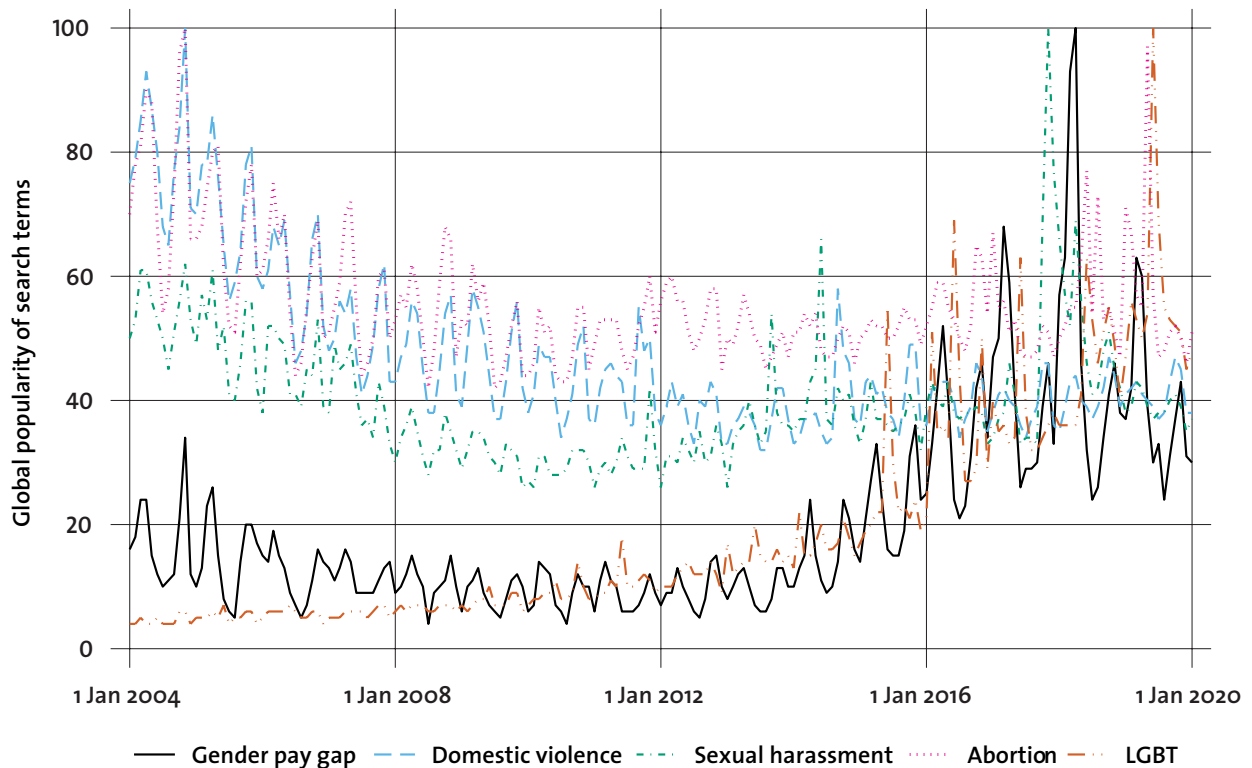
Another way of assessing potential shifts in feminist activism is by examining the salience of demands historically associated with feminist movements. Using Google Search Trends data, we first analyse the individual popularity of the terms ‘gender pay gap’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘sexual harassment’, ‘abortion’ and ‘LGBT’. As Figure 5 shows, while up to 2016 each term maintained its own level of search popularity, there seems to have been a conversion in the global interest of these terms since 2016. This could suggest not

only that gender-related issues are being discussed more often but also that the popularity of feminism generates interest for a collection of topics (instead of

individual topics) surrounding gender-related rights. In particular, however, the increased salience of 'gender pay gap' and 'LGBT' as topics of interest is noteworthy.

Figure 5.

Google search popularity of terms 'gender pay gap', 'domestic violence', 'sexual harassment', 'abortion' and 'LGBT' globally, 2004-2020



Source: Original compilation using Google Trends 2020.

Note: As explained by the data source: "Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term." The figure displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other.

Figure 5 displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other. In other words, it allows us to gain a better understanding of how the salience of a particular term has increased/decreased when compared to its own previous levels—but it does not allow us to examine the salience of one term in comparison to another. So, of the topics above, which one is the most salient globally? Figure 6 illustrates the relative popularity trends for the five gender-related issues selected. As shown, 'abortion' has, by far, remained the most searched topic among

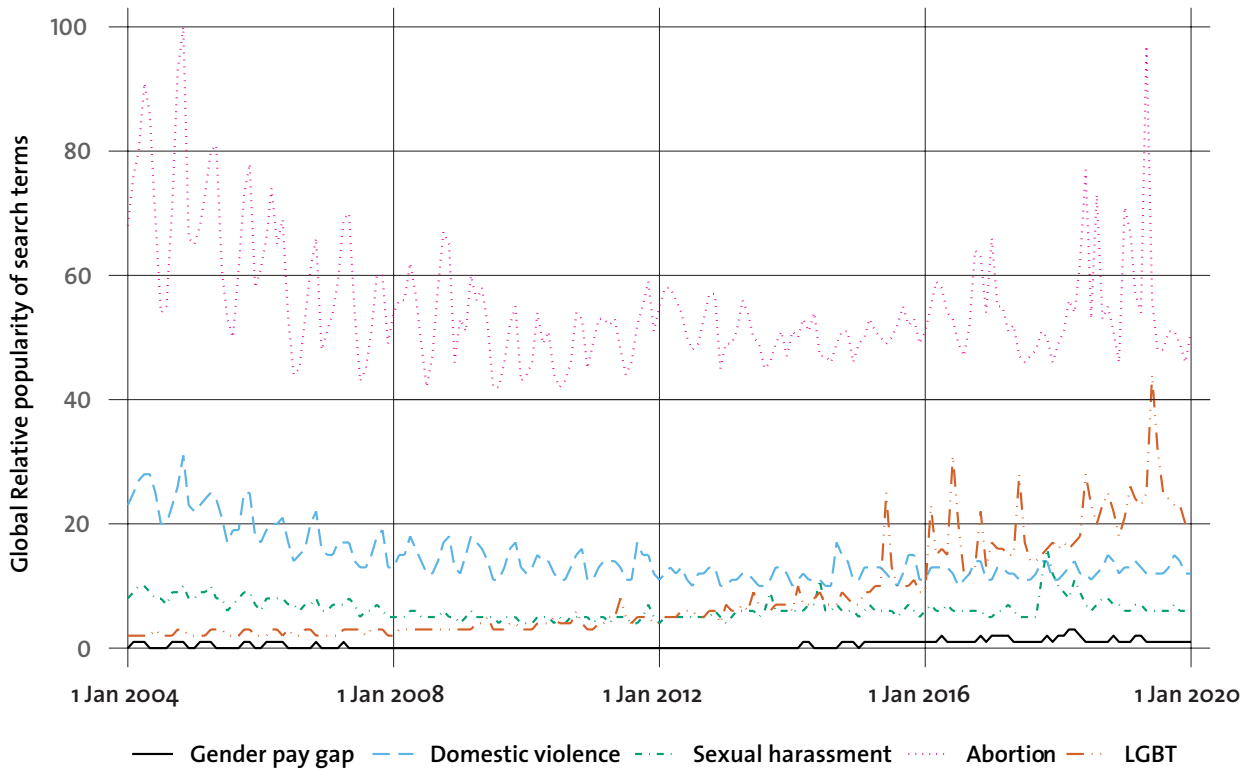
the five items we comparatively analyse—this conveys that reproductive rights, a core historical feminist demand, continue to remain a globally salient topic. By contrast, the search popularity of 'LGBT' has been changing and increasing over time and has now overtaken 'domestic violence' as the second most globally salient search term of the ones analysed. This is aligned with our findings about the growing relevance of identity movements and the plurality of current feminisms. The terms 'domestic violence', 'sexual harassment' and 'gender pay gap' follow respectively in order of search

popularity. Notably, the search popularity of ‘sexual harassment’ reached a peak in November 2017, following the beginning of the #MeToo movement in the

previous month—something that indicates the association between online movements and the salience of related topics.

Figure 6.

Google search relative popularity of terms ‘gender pay gap’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘sexual harassment’, ‘abortion’ and ‘LGBT’ globally, 2004-2020



Source: Original compilation using Google Trends 2020.

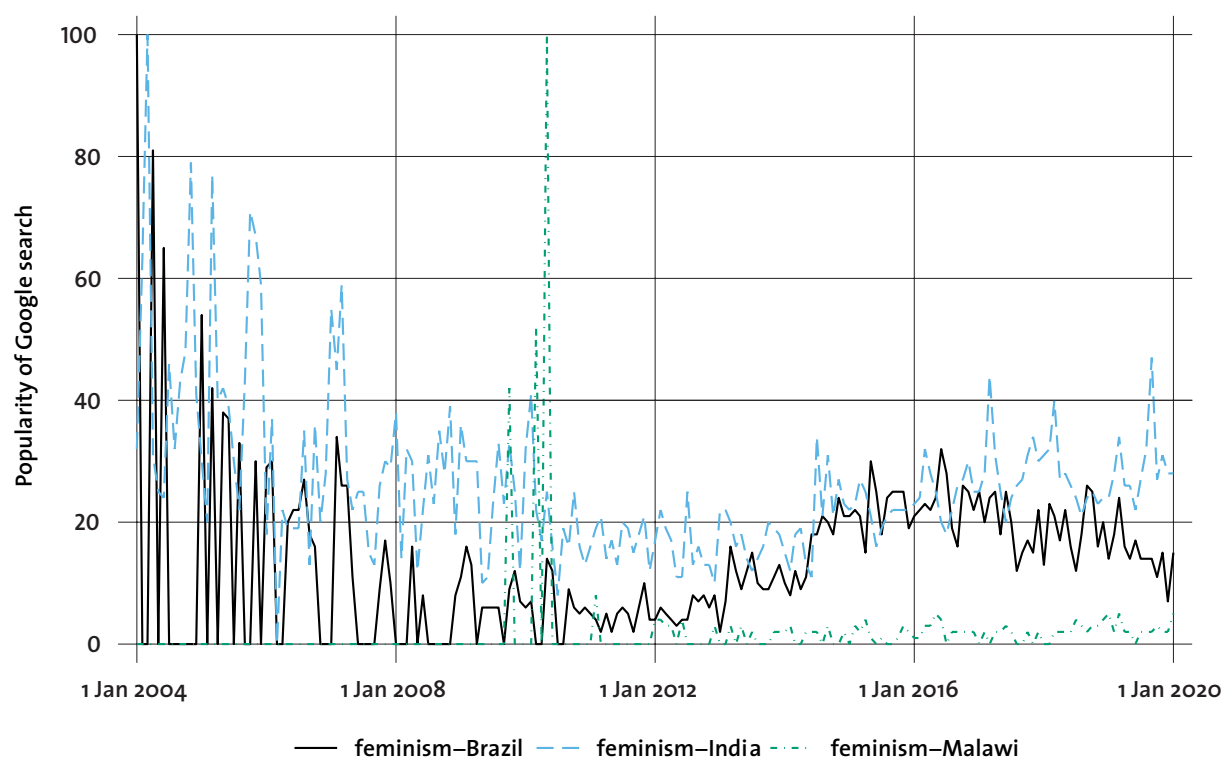
Note: As explained by the data source: “Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term.” The figure displays values for the popularity of search terms comparatively.

ANNEX IV.

THE ONLINE POPULARITY OF FEMINISM AND TOPIC SALIENCE IN BRAZIL, INDIA AND MALAWI

Figure 7.

Google search popularity of term 'feminism' in Brazil, India and Malawi, 2004-2020



Source: Original compilation using Google Trends 2020.

Note: As explained by the data source: "Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term." The figure displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other.

We also use Google Trends data to analyse the web salience of 'feminism' in our case studies. As before, Figure 7 does not report the popularity of the term comparatively (i.e., in a country relative to its popularity in another country) but, instead, shows fluctuations of the salience of 'feminism' within each country over time. While the search popularity of 'feminism' varies significantly within and across our case studies, a couple of trends are worth highlighting: In all three

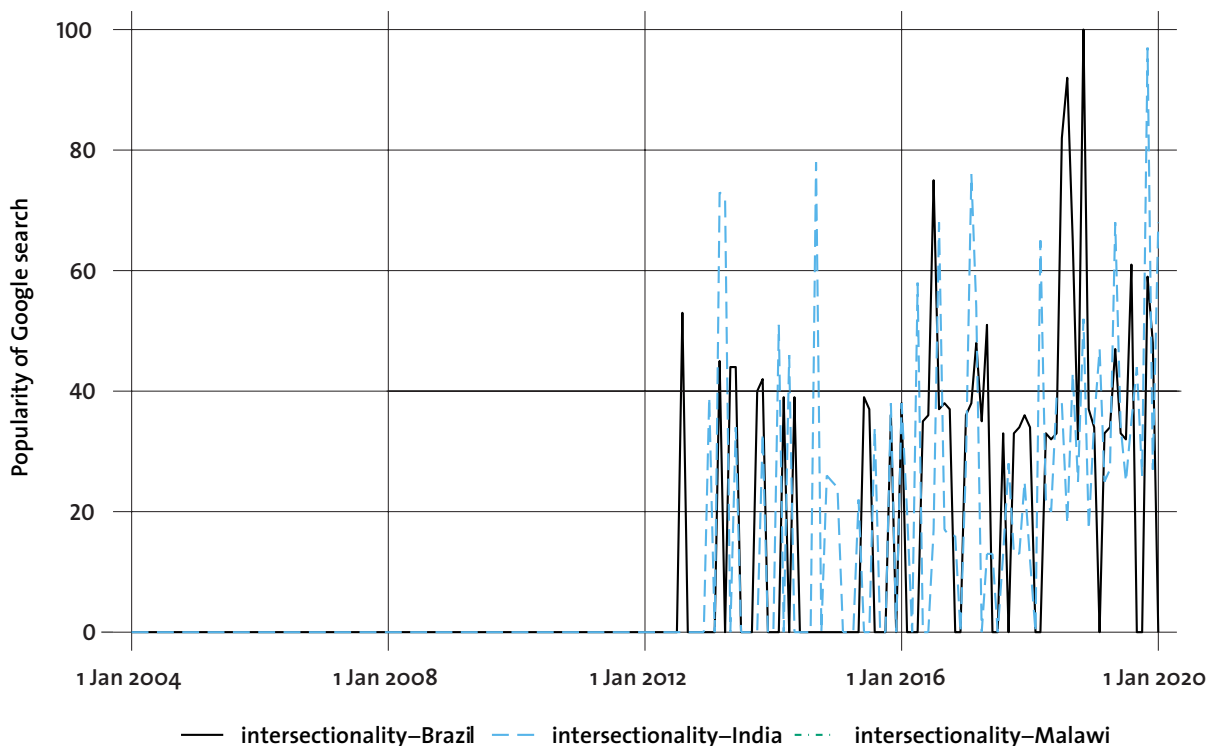
cases, peak interest in 'feminism' precedes 2011, suggesting that earlier events may have raised interest in a term that has now become more commonplace. In Brazil, the level of the trend has increased since 2013, reaching its most recent peak in 2016 and slightly falling since 2019. Conversely, in India, the popularity of the term has been on the rise. In Malawi, apart from infrequent peaks, the search popularity of 'feminism' has remained persistently low. Figure 8 complements

our analysis by illustrating the search popularity of ‘intersectionality’ across our cases. As shown, the search salience of the term fluctuates significantly in Brazil and India but consistently reaches high levels of interest in both countries. Notably, the term only

started to gain traction in August 2012 in Brazil and January 2013 in India—but it now seems to be frequently salient in both countries. In Malawi, search for the term seems to be minimal and Google Trends is not able to capture its salience over time.

Figure 8.

Google search popularity of term ‘intersectionality’ in Brazil, India and Malawi, 2004–2020



Source: Original compilation using Google Trends 2020.

Note: As explained by the data source: “Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term.” The figure displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other.

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