

UN Women

Expert Group Meeting

Sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 64)

‘New Feminist Activism, Waves and Generations’

New York, New York

25-26 September 2019

### **New Feminist Activism, Waves and Generations**

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DRAFT: Not for citation or circulation

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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<sup>1</sup> Maxine Molyneux took responsibility for writing and conceptualising Parts 1-3; for Part 4, the case studies, Malu A. C. Gatto was responsible for the data analyses and the Brazil case study, Adrija Day for the India case and Holly Rowden for the Malawi case. Digby Ogston assisted Malu with web data retrieval.

# New Feminist Activism, Waves and Generations

Maxine Molyneux, Adrija Dey, Malu A. C. Gatto and Holly Rowden<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** Over the last decade young women have taken the lead in a new wave of feminist and democratic protests that have erupted across 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 periodising the history of Feminism? These questions are explored through examining the characteristics common to past and contemporary feminisms, and through case studies of new feminist movements in Brazil, India and Malawi.

**Key Words:** Feminism, Fourth Wave Feminism, Generation, global social movements.

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# PART 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 organisational 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, Russia, the Ukraine, Hong Kong, Sudan, Thailand and Bellarussia, protests have been led by young people demanding a change in government and an end to corruption. In the US, 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 secondary school 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 activism<sup>3</sup> in both North and South. More than a decade ago feminism was pronounced 'over' yet we have seen growing international support for movements like 'Million Women Rise' and the Me Too campaign, which have galvanised 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 mobilisations. In Poland, thousands took part in the 'Czarny Protest' (Black Protest) to oppose attempts by the ruling 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 2014, 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

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 Appendix A). Feminism seems to have entered a new phase—a ‘new wave’ of activism, both dynamic and creative. We have seen an energised young generation active in organising 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 OK, but also ‘cool’ to be a feminist, and it seemed that there was something exciting going on, as a new generation took the lead.

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 Feminisms’ temporality and the many differences evident across movements?

The aim of this paper is to cast light on these questions, stimulate debate and to 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 periodise 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 first 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 organisational forms of the generation of ‘new feminists’ contrasting these with previous moments. They focus on three prominent themes in feminist activism: campaigns to defend democratic rights (Brazil); gender-based violence, (India) and sexual and identity rights in (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 accelerates the temporality of communication and at the same time allows for extensive

organisational power and reach. Third, 4<sup>th</sup> wave feminism unlike its recent antecedents is characterised by its more defensive campaigns, as rights previously gained 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.

#### **Feminist Waves and Generations<sup>4</sup>**

A historical perspective is important in understanding the re-emergence of feminism in the current period as it highlights both 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 composed of a wide range of class and ethnoracial actors, made up of many contributory and sometimes conflicting currents<sup>5</sup>.

If variations in membership, priorities and practice indicate important differences within feminism, there are some significant continuities in core demands over the course of feminism's history. History matters, and ideas and demands for social justice endure both across 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, but also understand 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 internationalisation of feminist ideas, requiring us to

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<sup>4</sup> The first three sections are based on Molyneux's research on feminist movements, interviews with activists and participant observation of feminist movements in the different waves of Feminist activism in the UK 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 literature on feminism but here is a sample list of some of the texts that are useful. For histories and discussions of feminism see among others, Basu ed. 2010, Alvarez 1990, Collins ed. 2009, Lebon and Maier eds. 2010, Einhorn ed.1993, Beckwith 2013, Sneider 2008, Ferree and Tripp eds 2006, Friedman, 2019, Jayawardena, 1986, Macaulay 2006, Rowbotham 1972, 1973, 1997, Mohanty 1991, Sharawi Lanfranch 2014, Nawal el Sadaawi 1977, Jelin 1990,

<sup>5</sup> The first campaign for suffrage was in the United States and 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.

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 periodise its evolution, are questions that have preoccupied historians and activists. In analysing feminism, the metaphor of 'waves' is often invoked to periodise feminism's evolution and to capture its significant features at different times. As any historian knows periodisation is always a contested endeavour, - when does one epoch end and another begin? How to characterise 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 discussion, the perceptions of actors and the empirical material available to support of them<sup>6</sup>. As the debates over the value or otherwise of 'waves' shows, the issue of periodisation is an unsettled and contested matter in feminism (Snyder 2008, Heywood 2006 a and b, Ewig and Feree (2013), Rupp 2008, Hewitt 2010). Not only are there intergenerational disputes over the characterisation of different waves, but there is little agreement over how to define what characterises 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, focus on feminist scholarship and the shifts in theoretical orientation that accompanied different waves (Marxist, post-structuralist, neo-materialist), others on the practices and political character (liberal/neo-liberal, radical, socialist) of feminism. Those skeptical of the analytic value of periodising feminism have argued rightly, that the continuities across time produce an overlapping effect which undermines the attempts to demarcate particular moments or waves (Banaji 2012). Others rightly, criticise the limited geographical scope of studies of feminism, excluding the Global South and the state socialist countries<sup>7</sup>. Indeed many of the accounts of given periods are seen as being partial, exclusionary and biased. Nancy Hewitt 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. If we consider the first wave as that moment of organizing encompassing woman suffrage and the second wave as the women's liberation/women's rights activism of the late 1960s, we effectively disregard the race-based movements before them that served as precursors, or windows of political opportunity, for gender activism' (2010). These are all valid

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<sup>6</sup> On feminist waves see also Dicker and Piepmaier eds 2003, Henry 2004.

<sup>7</sup> 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 organisations were 'leading voices' in the UN advocating for women's issues to be given more prominence in the policy frameworks.

concerns and point to the need for more comprehensive research on the one hand and more caution in making claims about the character of feminist movements.

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 where others fade away. A wave signifies fluidity and motion, is made up of multiple currents each with their own momentum. For Rupp this makes feminism seem less like waves and more like 'choppy seas' (1997). The international character of feminism further complicates periodisation because waves are not neatly synchronised 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 Appendix A). 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 each engages in.

First let us consider what is meant by a generational approach. It was Karl Mannheim 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 (1927, 1952). 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 liberalisation (Parsons 1964). 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 (Abramson and Inglehart, 1995)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup>. Yet, even in one country, there are significant challenges in defining a generation and its boundaries, and within this literature there is little consensus over the birth dates of a particular generation and, apart from identifying some broad generalities, 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, 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 Vietnam 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, 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 which can help to forge a distinct identity is acknowledged in

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as discussed in a 2019 book by Norris and Inglehart there has been a 'backlash' in some contexts, but the generational divide appears to hold with younger people holding more liberal values than older generations.

<sup>9</sup> Gaining acceptance is the following periodisation but it is based on US research: Boomers = those born between 1946-64; Generation X = those born between 1965-1979; Millennials = 1980-96; and Generation Z = born after 1998.



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, major health events 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 (2000) 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' (p. 137).

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 internationalised (Henseler 2012). For Levine, speaking of Generation X (born 1965-1980), 'generation cannot be understood except through its globality'. In other words, there are elements of a generational timescape that travel, that share and interact across territories helping to shape identities and imagination through reciprocal exchange (2012). 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. The main time period in focus is that from the onset of second wave Feminism in the late 1960's up to the present, covering what is broadly conceived of as three feminist waves. However first, a return to an earlier time.

### Feminism's waves

In a very broad sense then, 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-19<sup>th</sup>/early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the second starting in the late-1960s and early-1970s, a 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 (2003) has summed up 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 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.

## **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-19<sup>th</sup> 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, and later, in the UK 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 (end of *patria potestad*), equal pay, access to higher education and the professions, workers' rights and a range of other rights as well (Hahner 1990, Lavrin 1996). It also included other currents of feminism that rejected such demands as reformist; anarcho-feminists in Europe and Latin America at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century called for the overthrow of capitalism and resisted reforms they saw as reflecting 'bourgeois' concerns (Molyneux 1985, Kaplan 1977).

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 industrialised 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, doughty travellers crossed continents to address feminist meetings and debate campaign strategies. International associations began to gather adherents from different parts of the world like the Pan American women's movement which 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, (Jayawardena 1986) though feminists faced less opposition within liberal industrialised states, 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 were confident enough to disagree with their Northern counterparts and develop their own agendas<sup>10</sup>. More generally the outcome of global-local interaction was context specific and some tendencies within 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 were open to radical ideas, were impatient for social and political change and brought international issues into their politics. They were inspired by the Civil Rights movement in the US, the opposition to Apartheid and the Vietnam 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 fervent of '68 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, workers rights and anti racist struggles, 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 organisations and parties. A common theme in interviews with feminists active at this time was the failure of the organised male -

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<sup>10</sup> An example being the Cuban feminists of this period resistance to making suffrage their priority (Stoner 1991)

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 Britain, supporting fair wage and reproductive rights campaigns, creating women-only journals and publishing houses, founding women's art collectives and women's NGOs, 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, to proposing various theories of patriarchy, absorbing ideas from Freud and Lacan. Academic feminists and activists worked on visibilising and theorising domestic labour, the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, and 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 US 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 organisations of the Left saw themselves as practicing 'double militancy', in their organisation *and* within their feminist practice. As elsewhere the non-aligned developed their own all-women organisations or networks, whether working against dictatorships or founding NGOs and CSOs working with 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.

### **The Third Wave**

If there exists a body of research and debate in the literature over the features of the second wave, neither is 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 the mainstream. This was in part due to the entry of young feminists and older second wave activists entering public life. They became journalists, joined NGOs and international organisations, 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 recognised as such this focus is arguably a core feature of the third wave, one which 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 calls a 'policy community' of feminists working across civil, political and grass roots organisations (Macaulay 2010, 2021). 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 passing in 1980 of the landmark Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (Charlesworth et al 2000).

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 in 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 in which over 30,000 women from across the world participated.

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 organisations and non-hierarchical movements. They included feminist NGO representatives, academics, 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 international policy something that, in turn, allowed them to pressure for legal reforms regionally and domestically—a key strategy adopted by Global South scholars, as our interviewees have emphasised.

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 which in turn was nourished by the wave of democratisation that ended dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, 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, the strength of the national and regional women's movements, the internationalising 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 Platform 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 by 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 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 theorising 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 marginalised or ignored the specific needs of the female population in prioritising 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: 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 instrument 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 3<sup>rd</sup> wave activism and policy dynamism was in the 80's and into the 90s, it was followed by a period of relative movement quiescence. Some saw this as the result of 'institutionalisation', a creeping bureaucratisation and/or 'NGOisation' as activists termed it (Alvarez 1990 and 1998). 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 (Stetson & Mazur 1995; Macaulay 2010). Debates over the pros and cons of 'institutionalising' 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 between those who saw this development as a loss, the Derridean 'cultural turn' read as a departure from politics altogether. But 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, LGBTQI+, Adivasi, and indigenous women in the Americas were bringing new voices to feminism, organising 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' (Hemmings 2011, Maier 2010), 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 neoliberal 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 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. 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.

## **PART TWO**

### **The New Feminism and The Salience of Generation**

The first part of this discussion has considered some analytic issues and has highlighted some characteristics of feminist activism in the different waves as they have appeared in countries across the world. In addition to the different currents of thought that came together to give shape to women's and feminist movements, there were also generational differences arising from the material and historical context of the times that coloured the politics of activists. Those who were active in the women's movements of the 1970s faced quite distinct circumstance and political challenges in a world where communist states were territorially more extensive than their capitalist rivals with significant influence on some post-colonial states. The period from the 1950s was one of global economic boom, at least until the oil shock crisis that erupted in 1973. During the years of growth, state regulated development, welfarism and Keynesian economic management prevailed, with the result that material circumstances improved, if unequally, for much of humanity. Second wave feminists are often seen as living in a golden age by contemporary observers, when education was free or more affordable for the lower middle classes, and jobs were more secure with generous pensions, at least for those in the formal sector and in state employment.

Yet, despite any broad similarities brought about by macro-economic trends, feminists in different countries inevitably faced highly variable national circumstances



which in turn affected both the character and timing of their activism. At the extremes were those living under apartheid in South Africa or suffering under brutal military dictatorships as in Latin America and parts of Africa and the Far East. North-South differences were compounded, until the fall of Communism in 1990, by Cold War divisions and allegiances. In addition, widespread poverty prevailed in many countries and patriarchal and customary laws were upheld in male-dominated courts and communities, leaving women with little power to contest them. In many such cases, women's movements remained small, sporadic and single-issue-based with successful activism around women's rights only able to emerge and have effect in less disabling contexts.

History, experience and circumstance clearly mark out generational differences and present activists with situated challenges and opportunities which are bound to affect tactics, alliances, priorities, and forms of activism. Feminists of different generations will necessarily do politics in different ways. Yet as argued and as the evidence shows it is important to avoid oversimplifying the characterisations of different feminist waves and in doing so, exaggerating the divide between generations.

The Fourth Wave emerged 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 (McRobbie 2004, Walker 2006). Yet if there was less activism 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 publications by young feminists appeared declaring themselves to be a 'new generation, a Third Wave', celebrating diversity, 'girl power', and publishing articles and personal testimonials, and engaging in general cultural critique (Heywood 2006). Keen to mark their difference from what they saw (erroneously) as the more solemn, somewhat joyless second wave they stressed that they were sex and beauty positive, gender non-binary and racially diverse. 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 recognised as a specific offence in law across the region in the 2000s

(Macaulay 2021). And in 2006 feminist lawyers in conservative Colombia succeeded in decriminalising abortion on human rights grounds (Reutersward et al, 2011).

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 materialise 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 accomplished. This may be an over-harsh verdict and was not true of all countries or regions. But if it was not the case everywhere, there were several more or less persuasive components that typically made up this view.

In the first place, structural factors placed limits on what could be achieved without more radical transformations of the economy and society. Free market policies, deregulation and rollbacks in social rights exacerbated gender inequalities and social inequality more broadly, and created a disabling environment for realising progressive agendas. Labour markets continued to discriminate against women, gender wage gaps persisted, maternal morbidity and mortality remained a low priority, and young people's limited employment opportunities were indicated by the high levels of youth unemployment in many countries. Lack of cultural change and 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, political representation, there was still 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 was not always aligned with national priorities or feminist sentiments.

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 (Professional woman, quoted in Watson and Kyomuhendo (2019)).*

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 bureaucratisation 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 (Molyneux and Lazar: 2003:87).*

The absorption of Feminism into formal government institutions may have also impacted on-the-ground movements. For example, another potential consequence of institutionalisation is that those working on gender issues can lose whatever contact they had with the grassroots, 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? (Senior woman leader 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 organisations 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. Here, issues of resources combined with distrust and discrimination to deepen the divides, but there were also differences of politics which although they may have had a generational aspect to them, also crossed the generational timescape.

## **Feminism 2010-20: a new generation?**

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 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 feminist goals, but there is more global awareness of the term (see Appendixes A and B).

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 (Milkman, 2017). The great majority of young women today expect to work: the Arab Youth survey for 2020 found that Young Arab women (76%) and men (70%) 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 (AYS 2020).

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, LGBTQI+ and other identity movements, and being expressly committed to anti-racist, egalitarian practices and politics. 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 argues, their focus was more on cultural critique ' than on feminist theory and politics'. Today while tensions may exist over some of these issues within the broader currents of contemporary Feminism, and 'radical inclusion' may not be embraced or practiced by all organisations, there can be little doubting the contrast with earlier Feminisms. Previous generations conceptualised and argued for intersectional

movements, 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 either in 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 face unprecedented levels of misogynistic abuse and violence. High levels of femicides continue unabated; reports of rape, and domestic abuse are increasing in many countries. Women politicians frequently report having to deal with threats made against them, something that has also grown in recent times. The peddling of violent pornography, a multi million dollar industry, is one factor shaping male attitudes. But women are also increasingly subject to threats of violence online, much of this stirred up by extremist networks capitalising on male resentment. Some of these networks have millions of followers, with many very young men in their early teens being groomed in misogyny. Some networks advocate rape and violent attacks of women, and yet to date no policy responses to stop this have been made with governments refusing to see this kind of misogyny as a hate crime (Bates, 2020).

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. If previous generations can be said to have enjoyed more 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 Appendix C). 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 grassroots engagement as well as reaching ever greater numbers compared

to earlier forms of communication,—telephone, fax and print media. Blogging and citizen journalism has democratised information allowing previously silenced voices to be heard. Flash demonstrations and viral videos like the Chilean song ‘The Rapist is in your Path’ can be put together in minutes rather than days, and disseminated globally gaining more than 27,000 views<sup>11</sup>. 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 (Keeley and Little 2017, Wajcman 2020).

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 enjoyed if they worked in formal employment. Economic downturns and austerity policies exacerbate these effects, pushing up youth unemployment, migration and casualisation, and cutting short education. Young people are far more indebted than earlier cohorts, burdened by consumer debt, and/or student debt. The 2008 economic crisis affected young people more than adults and with lasting effects: in Latin America, the youth unemployment rate (those aged 15–24 years) had reached nearly 20% by 2016 leaving one in every five young people unemployed (ILO, 2017). In the Arab world two in five of those between 18-24 have considered migration to escape adverse economic conditions and political corruption (AYS 2020). Deepening inequality 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, for the many living with the ‘new precarity’, futures do not look so rosy and have become even more precarious as a result of the global health and economic crisis associated with the Covid 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, many of whom experience disenchantment with organised politics. 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 organisations as manifestations of patriarchal power and seeking revolutionary social and cultural change (Alvarez 1999). 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 US, around half of millennials have a favourable view of socialism, and on other issues are also more progressive than the ‘boomer’ generation

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<sup>11</sup> The title mocks an old slogan portraying the police as ‘a friend in your path’.

(born in the 1940s and 1950s) taken as a whole (Inglehart and Norris 2019). Yet generation can be less important in determining political leanings than college education.

This is of salience for the generational differences at play within feminist generations, as some young people may be less committed overall to engaging with the very processes—legal change, rights demands, and ‘engaging the state’ or with the work of organisations like the UN—that were the focus of previous activist generations<sup>12</sup>. Earlier gains in equal rights for example seem to many young people to be limited in their real effects, or until the recent threats to them posed by rightist mobilisations, 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 politicised 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 summarised below—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. These cases show that, in spite of contextual specificities, ongoing feminist organising in the Global South shares some important characteristics with other contemporary movements, as well as with previous generations (see Appendix D). The three campaigns were selected on account of their dominance within contemporary feminist movements along with their global resonance and organisational strategies.

## **PART THREE**

### **Brazil: Defending Rights Gained<sup>13</sup>**

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

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<sup>12</sup> 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’.

<sup>13</sup> Malu A. C. Gatto is the author of the Brazil case study and conducted the related interviews.

(Baldez, 2002; Costa and Sardenberg 2008). While during democratic transitions feminist activists fought for the inclusion of women's equal rights in new constitutions (Waylen, 1994), when the left-wing presidents of the mid-2010s 'Pink Tide' came to office, feminists worked alongside or within government institutions to demand the implementation of these rights (Blofield et al., 2017; Friedman, 2018).

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 (Vaggione and Machado 2020; Bentancur and Rocha-Carpiuc 2020). Facing increasing backlash from culturally conservative forces (Molyneux, 2017; Biroli and Caminotti 2020), in recent years, Latin America has seen large scale demonstrations demanding action to end violence against women and calling for an end to the criminalisation of abortion (Souza 2019). In many ways, the Brazilian case is thus illustrative of broader regional patterns of feminist activism from the democratisation period to current times.

After re-democratisation in 1985, Brazil underwent significant political and societal changes which provided the conditions for feminist activism to flourish (Costa and Sardenberg 2008). It was during the governments of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) 2003-2016, that feminist activists were most able to advance positive policy change (Pinto 2010). 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.

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 which brought civil society into the policymaking process. In its first meeting, the Conference had 120,000 attendees (Pinto 2009). 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 (Barsted 2011).

Progress continued during the governments of Dilma Rousseff, 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 sexuality 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, restricting its ability to pursue more progressive policy change on sexual and reproductive rights. 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. (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, by the end of her government, the Secretariat for Women's Policies had been incorporated into the Secretariats for Racial Equality and Human Rights (Gatto, dos Santos, and Wylie 2017). In other words, the PT years saw both the creation and extinction of this ministerial-level institution.

Feminists' close relations with the PT government may have also weakened organising at the grassroots. 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 institutionalisation 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 it had a generation of older women, from my generation and 10 years younger, working within the state apparatus [...] and the base [grassroots] was left a bit unprotected (Interview, Skype, 09 September 2019).*

Still, as the Rousseff government began to decline, women's activism 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 (Streit 2016; Macaulay 2017). In a profile of the new First Lady, one of the magazines of largest circulations in Brazil celebrated Temer's wife, Marcela, as 'beautiful, modest, and domestic' (Linhares 2016)—something that quickly prompted a new online campaign seeking to challenge traditional gender stereotypes (Sims 2016). Temer's all-(white) male cabinet also made international news (Sims 2015; Watts 2016). As Temer's government began enacting increasingly harsh austerity measures, widespread protests throughout the country continued (Aleem 2016).

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 conscientisation efforts (Sardenberg 2018), 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 expressed:

*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' (Porto, 2019).*

Although feminism in Brazil was not dead during the 1990s and early 2000s (Gomes and Sorj 2014), a nationally-representative survey conducted by DataFolha with 2,086 Brazilians on 2-3 April 2019 attests to the renewed strength of Brazil's feminist movement among the youngest generation: 50% 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% self-declare as feminists). By contrast, for example, only 36% of women between the ages of 26 and 35 identify as feminists (DataFolha 2019).

The first explicit sign of Brazil's feminist awakening was women's collective response to a case of online sexual harassment (Almeida 2019). On 20 October 2015, when the first episode of Brazil's *Junior Masterchef* aired on 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 organisation *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 sexualisation in Brazil (M. Rossi 2015b).

Gender inequalities in Brazil had long been dire. For example, in when protests began in 2015, Brazil ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the world in femicide and officially registered over 500,000 cases of rape per year (M. Rossi, 2015b), for a crime that is widely known to be underreported. [DELETE AND USE PARA. BELOW]

In 2015, 4,621 women were murdered, probably at least half in domestic violence related incidents. The number and rate of killings of women had been rising steadily since 2008 (IPEA/FBSP 2020, p.40). That same year, 45,460 rapes were reported to the police (FBSP 2016). As an estimated 90% per cent of rape cases were not reported, the actual number of cases that year was likely over half a million. A survey also revealed that 45% 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 (FBSP

2016). The majority of rape victims are overwhelmingly young and female, with a modal age of just 14.

Soon after, women rallied to fight against institutional violence. Just one day after women began mobilising 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 (Bedinelli 2015). Women reacted by taking the streets. On 31 October 2015, it is estimated that more than 15,000 women marched on the streets of São Paulo and at least another 5,000 in other cities throughout the country (Martinelli 2015). 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 (Martinelli 2015).

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' (Grillo et al. 2015). But the 'sudden' rise and strength of women's protests came as a surprise to many. As a newspaper headline neatly summarised: 'Brazilian women say enough: Reasons have never been few, but, last week, the voice went to the streets' (M. Rossi 2015a).

Country-wide, women-led activism would re-emerge again in March 2018, when Black, lesbian, leftwing 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 of Marielle, 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 (Blower 2018).

When the October 2018 elections approached, however, all eyes turned to presidential campaigns. As then-candidate Jair Bolsonaro, who became internationally recognised for his misogynistic, racist, and homophobic comments (Forrest, 2018) gained popularity, women organised 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 mobilisation into street activism (Interview, Salvador, 07 January 2020). From within the group, women organised 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 (Uchoa, 2018). Also through the efforts of the group, the largest women-led protests in Brazil's democratic history was organised, taking more than 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 from across the country (A. Rossi et al., 2018).

On taking office and 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 accentuated her positionality by stating that while the Brazilian state is secular, 'this minister is extremely Christian' and ensuring that her time in office would represent the beginning of a new era when 'boys wear blue and girls wear pink' (Madvov 2019). Since then, Minister Alves has made numerous declarations that sparked strong concern among feminists. One of the most recent cases, from February 2020, consisted of the Ministry's announcement of a plan to test an abstinence-focused sex education curriculum (Bergamo, 2020)—a policy that has largely been shown to be ineffective in reducing the initiation of sexual activity, teenage pregnancies, or the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (Kohler, Manhart, and Lafferty 2008; Stanger-Hall and Hall 2011).

The nomination of Damares Alves and the government's determined attempts (both through rhetoric and policy) to regulate expressions of gender and sexuality represents the institutionalisation 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 (Jaschik, 2017). 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 Cecília Sardenberg, Professor of Anthropology at Federal University of Bahia, said: '*Back then, we fought to gain rights; now, we fight against them being taken away*' (Interview, Skype, 09 September 2019).

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, during the process of writing the new Brazilian Constitution (adopted in 1988), there was at least one feminist activist present at every single meeting (Interview, Skype, 09 September 2019). 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' (Interview, Skype, 09 September 2019).

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 organisations, 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 survey<sup>14</sup> conducted with members of the MUCB Facebook group, 70% of respondents attested that their political activism had been much stronger in 2018 than in previous elections. In the same survey, 14% 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% of respondents said that they started self-identifying as feminists during the same period (Gatto 2019).

With this expansion in activism, the need of democratising 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 were often not recognised by the movement, prompting black women to organise outside 'mainstream' feminist circles (Bairros 2008). As Carneiro explains, Black Feminism emerged from black women's exclusion from Feminism led by white women and from black movements led by men (Porto, 2019). 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,*

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<sup>14</sup> Based on a convenience sample of 755 responses collected in November 2018, in the month following the elections.

*and this is not an invalid criticism. To a large extent, we were indeed mostly [white, middle class, and heterosexual] (Interview, Skype, 09 September 2019).*

By contrast, now the recognition of intersectional oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989) 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 (Gomes and Sorj 2014). Even as the media continues to most often recognise the demands and leadership of white middle-class women (Almeida 2019), the heterogeneity of women's experiences and the need for multiple Feminisms remains prominent: testimony of this is the popularity and success of the book series *Plural Feminisms (Feminismos Plurais)*, curated by feminist philosopher Djamila Ribeiro. While before, black women may 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% of black women, 54% of indigenous women, and 40% of Asian women stated they consider themselves to be feminists, while 39% of brown and 39% of white women self-label themselves as such (DataFolha 2019).

While feminism has gained effervescence, feminists have been under a state of alert since the election of Jair Bolsonaro. As all interviewees noted, women's movements is particularly crucial at a time when there are signs that cases of domestic violence and sexual assault are increasing in the country (Mena & Barbon, 2019) 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 secured rights and push for further protections. As Carneiro recently expressed, now that the 'girls have grown-up', they are happy to pass on the baton to a new generation (Porto, 2019). 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 (Interview, Skype, 09 September 2019).*

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.

## **India: Gender Based Violence<sup>15</sup>**

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<sup>15</sup> Adrija Dey is the author of the India case study and conducted all the related interviews.

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 of the feminist movements. 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 that followed 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 on rape and have openly indulged in blatant misogyny and victim blaming. BJP MLA, Kuldeep Singh Sengar 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 gang-raped and murdered an innocent child in Kathua. The Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, also a part of BJP, started 'anti-Romeo squads' to deal with violence against women. This led to further policing and securitisation of women and to the beating up of young couples who crossed caste/community lines.

Considering this background, it is indeed an 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 (Dhanaraj 2018). 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 categorisation of the 'waves'.

Patriarchal oppression is a reality for Indian women across generations and ending violence against women has been a central and a long-standing campaign issue in India. When the UN declared 1975 as International Women's Year, the government of India commissioned a report on the status of women called 'Towards Equality' (Kelly & Slaughter 1992). The report published in 1975 dramatically brought to attention, not only existing gender inequalities like declining sex ratios but also highlighted inequalities in education, access to health care, income and political representation (Katzenstein 1989).

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 organisable 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.

(Omvedt 1986: 212)

It was also during this time that India witnessed the formation of different kinds of women's organisations- trade unions, self-employed women's groups, Socialist/Marxists women's groups and even autonomous women's organisations (Omvedt 1986).

In keeping with the second wave of feminism, it was also during this period that violence against women became the central concern of the Indian women's movement with cases of custodial rape, state violence, gang-rape, dowry death and sexual harassment being taken up by feminist organisations across the country (Kumar 1993). Since then, major changes in the legal framework around Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) can be categorised under 3 landmark legal cases—The Mathura case which introduced 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 Criminal Law in 2013 (Dey, 2019a)

The 16 December 2012 gang rape of a young university student in New Delhi started a new phase of feminist activism in India (Dey 2019a, 2019b). On 16 December 2012, Jyoti Singh, a female physiotherapy student, was gang raped by six men while on a moving bus in New Delhi. After 13 days spent fighting for her life, Jyoti died. Abiding by Indian law, the real name of the victim was never used by the media and the most common pseudonym used was 'Nirbhaya' ('fearless') and the case popularly came to be known as the Nirbhaya case. As soon it was reported by the media, thousands of people took to the streets of cities across India to protest the death of the innocent victim, women's lack of safety, women's rights and anti-rape laws. People from different sections of society, including women's organisations of different ideological persuasion, students' organisations, NGOs, labour unions, working men and women, individuals with no political affiliations and housewives came together spontaneously on the streets with a common purpose, to fight for gender justice (Chaudhuri, 2017)



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 Criminal Law. A separate committee, headed by Supreme Court judge J. S. Verma was set up on December 23, 2012 to identify the changes to be made to the Criminal Law. The Verma Commission handed over its reports to the Government on January 23, 2013, exactly thirty days after it was set up by the Government. 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' (Verma, Seth, & Subramaniam, 2013). The Verma commission report was considered exemplary in its recommendations (Talwar, 2013).

However, two most important recommendations that were excluded from the new law were related to marital rape and rape by the armed forces. Marital rape was not included in the amendments, as the lawmakers decided that it 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 within legal or punitive measures for crimes around SGBV, having broader conversations around regressive patriarchal practices or state violence was still largely impossible. As we saw post the -Nirbhaya case, the demand for the death penalty for the perpetrators in many ways became the central demand in effect diluted the movement, taking attention away from larger questions of patriarchal oppression and structural violence.

However, the Nirbhaya case did manage to generate substantial debates and discussions around SGBV and raise consciousness around the issue. A survey of 9,500 women across G20 countries conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation in 2015 found that 29% of working women faced physical or online harassment at work, but 61% of them said they never or rarely reported this. Compared to respondents from other G20 countries, women in India were the most likely to speak out, with 53% 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 Rape 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' (Thomson Reuters Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation, 2015). However, it is important to remember that reporting in India is still very low due to larger culture of disbelief around cases of harassment and abuse and wide-spread 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 larger cultural changes by making power structures visible and questioning existing mechanisms.

The Nirbhaya case triggered, as Simon-Kumar states, 'both the publicness and the personalisation of rape' (2014, 452) 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. The year 2012 saw the virtually connected Indian youth beginning to redraw the terms of engagement between the state and its urban population (Anwer & Shrinivasan 2012). In the digital sphere, large number of women in India 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 (Fileborn 2014). 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 (Sen, 2017). 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 (Dey, 2019b).

Due to low cost and easy accessibility a large section of feminist discussions in India have moved online. However, to say all women's voices are equally represented in the virtual environment would be also be incorrect. As 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' (ibid 2012, p. 43). Intersectional conversations around privilege, power dynamics and hierarchies have been largely absent from the feminist discourse both online and offline in India (Ayyar 2017; Bargi 2017). We have seen very similar patterns within Dalit activism where the question of patriarchy is ignored in favour of the caste question (Chadha 2018) or even within the left or radical left political groups where the ideology of class struggle often trumps questions of caste and patriarchy (Ghosh 7 November 2017). 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 (Dhanaraj 18 November 2018).

However, with the embedding of digital technology with 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 (Kumar 2015; Kumar & Subramani 2014; Mishra 2017; Nayar 2011). New media has also had significant impact on queer communities in India providing them avenues to not only establish their own political narratives but carved a social space for interaction and dialogues (Dasgupta, 2014, 2017; Mitra & Gajjala, 2008).

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 Pinjra Tod (Breaking 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, setting up of sexual harassment committees in universities, and women rights to freedom and mobility. Hence, in 2017 when the #MeToo movement spread globally, the young Indian women were prepared. The anger that was already brewing found its perfect manifestation through #MeToo.

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 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 of Indian feminism particularly on generational lines(Chadha, 2017)

A 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'(Menon, 2017). 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.

(Menon 2017)

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'. Further, 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 (Ghosh 2017). 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 at their faces - a system that many had tried to access but failed. 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' (interview, female, India, 6 February 2018). The call for 'due process' from older feminists follows the Justice Verma Commission 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 Ritty Lukose (2018, 38) 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'.

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, sexual harassment in the workplace were not only inadequate but non-existent. However, the 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 prevention, prohibition and redress of SGBV. It is this aspect that younger feminists supporting the 'list' tried to address. In a society that is still segregated and divided in 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, during the #MeToo movement in India hundreds of women came out online with their own narratives of sexual harassment and abuse (Chadha 2018; Datta 2017; Gajjala 2018; Pujari 2017; Sen 2017). It was perhaps one of the first times where 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' (Roy 2019). So, while the feminist counterpublic discourse in India is still rife with exclusions, it is in some of these online spaces that saw the emergence of a new kind of feminist politics that is intersectional and inclusive (Dey, 2019b)

Several campaigns and collectives led by young feminists working on a grassroots level are also focusing on challenging everyday normalised violence and empowering women. One such movement is Pinjra Tod (PT) ('break the cage'). To fight against the security narrative and reclaim public spaces, in 2015, a group of women students and alumni from colleges across New Delhi came together to form this autonomous women's collective. When the movement started, to reclaim the night and protest against women students being locked 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' (Interview, Female, age 24, India, 10 September 2019).

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 right-wing nationalism, protesting against fee hikes, neoliberalisation and privatisation of education, speaking out about the Indian states unconstitutional move in Kashmir with the abrogation of Article 370 and 35, and joining the sanitation workers on strike- they are all feminist issues. and that is perhaps the biggest strength of movements like 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 (Interview, Female, age 26, India, 13 September 2019).*

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 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.

In February 2020, thousands of Indian women across generational lines were involved in the protests against an unconstitutional Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) passed by the current Indian government. These marches and occupations have been largely led by women with activists, students, performers, artists, and lawyers, students, housewives, mothers, grandmothers and children, across India being at the forefront of this resistance. For many, it is the first time they have had any political engagement. This was epitomised in the neighbourhood of Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi where hundreds of Muslim women blocked a main road since December and began a sit-in demonstration. Shaheen Bagh became not only a site of protest, but also 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 India and they were mostly led by women. Many of these activists have since then 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. But as the state become even more repressive and violent every day, 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).

### **Malawi: LGBTQI+ Activism and Feminism**

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, 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 both as a theoretical category and 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, which can be, but isn't exclusively, generational, and deals with what fundamentally constitutes 'woman.'

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 periodise moments of movement effervescence. Here, a more regional, country-specific approach has been taken to avoid over-generalising about African feminist movements, given the scale and scope of variation across Africa. By then pivoting away from Malawi to examples of similar developments in other African countries, I gesture 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 recognise their intersections. The 1985 UN Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi saw the affirmation of the existence of lesbian identities in Kenyan society (Salo; Dineo Gqola 2006). 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 galvanise 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 (Epprecht 2013, 1).

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 (Jolly 2000,10). The first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen a resurgence of anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination and legislation criminalising 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 organise the country's first pride parade, which was disrupted and followed by a violent police

crackdown. Organisers 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' (Epprecht 2013, 85). 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 side-line the complex colonial legacies in countries where discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity remains strong (Ekine 2013, 85). 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 generalised attacks on feminism, gender equality, and religious and civil freedoms (Epprecht 2013, 5). 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 theorising about what 'makes' a woman. To cite one illustrative example, Nigerian feminist and author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has been a vocal opponent of Nigeria's anti-gay laws and advocate for gay rights, although 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 women who have been socialised as female 'from the beginning' (BBC, 16 March 2017). 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.

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. Although Chimbalanga identified as a woman, 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 a renewed impetus to the politicisation of sexual and gender non-conformity in Malawi, resulting in protests and police repression, which strained cross-movement solidarity partnerships as some activist organisations grew increasingly concerned about supporting LGBTQI+ rights.

One Malawian feminist activist, Linda, explained her organisation's reluctance to openly support Chimbalanga and Monjeza, by highlighting the risk of encountering hostility from local political or religious leaders, on the one hand, and disapproval from western NGOs on the other 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 (Currier, 2014, 155). Indeed, other activist organisations 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 (Currier, 2014).

The treatment of Tiwonge 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 and labelled a gay man even though she explicitly identified as a woman. Malawian activist Linda explained that her organisation perceived 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' (Currier 2014, 157).

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 organisation 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 Tiwonge, 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 (McKay, 2017, 12). 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% of Malawian respondents were strongly opposed to having a homosexual neighbor and attempts to call a referendum on the issue in the subsequent years never materialised. (Afrobarometer, 2014, 26)

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 organisations (McKay, 2017). The Nyasa Rainbow Alliance, to cite one example, was established in 2014 by LGBTQI+ community members in Southern Malawi to address implementation gaps within LGBTQI+ organising 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 Malawi, while in 2014, the organisation led others in demanding the decriminalization of same-sex sex (Namangale 2014). In 2016, CEDEP published the book *Proudly Malawian: Life Stories from Lesbian and Gender-Nonconforming Individuals*, documenting grassroots 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 Malawian democracy more broadly, as Malawian 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' (Dineo Gqola 2006, 5). Many young feminists have mobilised in direct response to the backlash against LGBTQI+ rights and women's bodily autonomy, a defensive approach which 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 organisations have crafted a more inclusive platform. Despite heightened violence, discrimination, and criminalisation 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 organisations.” (Adeleye-Feyemi & Horn, 2009, 11)

One powerful example of this shift can be found in the work of Sister Namibia, the first feminist organisation to support LGBTQI+ rights in Namibia. The organisation established a Lesbian Support Programme, running local and national workshops, and founded human rights initiative 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’ (Khaxas 2006, 85). Comparably, the African Feminist Forum, 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.” (AWDF, 2006, 6) 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 understanding these moments of effervescence in which generations of feminists come into dialogue.

Important new developments have also been evident in the arena of popular culture and entertainment. In 2018, Kenyan director Wanuri Kahiu released her fourth film, *Rafiki*, focusing on the romantic story of two young Kenyan women amidst pressures from their families and political pressures surrounding LGBTQI+ rights in Kenya. Directly inspired

by environmental feminist activist Wangari Mathai, who launched Kenya's Green Belt movement in 1977, Kahiu's work aimed to challenge the notion that queer love is 'un-African.' Rafiki was banned by the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB), but its appearance at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival as the first Kenyan film in the festival's history prompted discussion about the need for greater visibility and representation among both Western and non-Western audiences. Comparably, genderqueer South African artist UMLILO, meaning 'fire', is one of many emergent performers using music to challenge gender stereotypes. Advocating for art as intersectional activism, UMLILO has asserted that queer South Africans will only be free "when all Black South Africans are also free from internalized generational trauma from Apartheid, economic recession, patriarchy, racism, sexism, and all the other isms" (Afropunk, 26 June 2019).

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. The notion that feminism is distinctly 'new,' even if African women's activism has a long and rich history, rhetorically pits feminist activism against nationalisms or nation-building imperatives. This stance was exemplified by Prime Minister of Zimbabwe Morgan Tsvangirai when he suggested that 'when people have no food...no jobs...when people have so many problems', placing sexual rights at the forefront of the national agenda is a 'diversionary attitude' that distracts from more important issues (Epprecht 2013, 2).

Indeed, one of the clearest axes of division among feminists and LGBTQI+ activists in African contexts 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 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" (Lorway 2014, 85).

Former head of the UNIFEM Africa Division and expert 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”. She also asserts the need to engage in intergenerational dialogues to not only “define the limits of past and present strategic frameworks”, but 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 democratisation and political upheaval, these questions have become ever more complex.

In 1994, postcolonial feminist M. Jacqui Alexander posed the question: ‘in the absence of visible lesbian and gay movements, can feminist political struggles radically transform these historically repressive structures?’ (Lorway 2014, 85). Revisited now, her question alerts us to the vibrant, dynamic activism happening at the grassroots, while also giving responses to the anti-LGBTQI+ backlash happening in many African countries, and in countries across the global South, a particular sense of urgency. The defensive, cautionary framing of much of the LGBTQI+ activism across the African continent in recent decades can in part be accounted for by this backlash 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 mobilisation 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 organisation, have utilised 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 African continent and diaspora. Nevertheless, social media has also exposed fault lines of poverty and access, which determine who is able to engage in activism via new technologies. In recent years, hashtags like #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 generalisations, and any analysis of African feminisms must recognise colonial legacies as well as a longer, more nuanced history of African sexualities.

Even so, what has united many feminist activists across the African continent, in countries like Malawi, is an increasing willingness to adopt a more intersectional approach and utilise new strategies to pursue overlapping demands. Similarly to the Brazilian and Indian cases, these Fourth Wave activists have utilised new technologies to accelerate

mobilisation 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 in Namibia anti-femicide protesters 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 mobilising 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.

## Conclusions

Feminism is a form of contentious politics, a global social movement that has spanned three centuries, and is one which continues to show enduring vitality. While some critical differences mark out the Feminisms of different historical periods, a glimpse at the diversity that exists within the 'new Feminism', allows of no easy contrasts, or monolithic typologies. Some new feminist movements work in counter-cultural spaces, some are still active in political parties, some work with or within the states. For all the evident plurality there are still many continuities in Feminisms' core demands and struggles around rights continue to be important for activists. 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 today, but equal pay and job opportunities still constitute key areas of feminist organising, 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 (Sutton 2020) with a long history of struggle behind them. It is true that differences of strategy and tactics may demarcate generational boundaries; but even here, as the example of social media shows, new communication technologies most often serve as an adjunct of more conventional forms or political mobilisation 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, grass roots organisations.

This analysis of Feminism's trajectory and the three discussions of movement activism in Brazil, India and Malawi, indicate that historical record and enquiry requires the inclusion of the global South when thinking about periodising 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 that it is subjected to and the opportunities it has to bring 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 a 'new generation' of feminism? A decade or so ago, Feminism was declared 'passé', as 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 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. As all three cases show we see how important social media can be for contemporary movements, providing an invaluable resource for networking, information exchange and mobilisation. But in the wrong hands 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 Rights<sup>16</sup> and in the Beijing process. Over time, human rights frameworks have been adapted and extended to be more comprehensive and inclusive, they have been tested in the courts, and they have been challenged by those who oppose them, but more often than not 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. No longer reliant only on international agencies for authority, 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 struggles for social change.

Ends

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<sup>16</sup> Available at [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf) (last checked 22 February 2020).



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#### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. Thanks too to the numerous individuals who gave their thoughts and time to this project. In addition to those named as interviewees, we would like to thank Marilyn Thompson, Gareth Davies, Mary Carmen Feijóo, Miriam Glucksman, Fiona Macaulay, Kate Saunders Hastings and Nada M. Ali and her students for reading an earlier draft and for their comments. A warm thanks to Holly Rowden for editorial assistance throughout.

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# APPENDIX

## Appendix A. The Global Salience of Feminism: Online and in Academia

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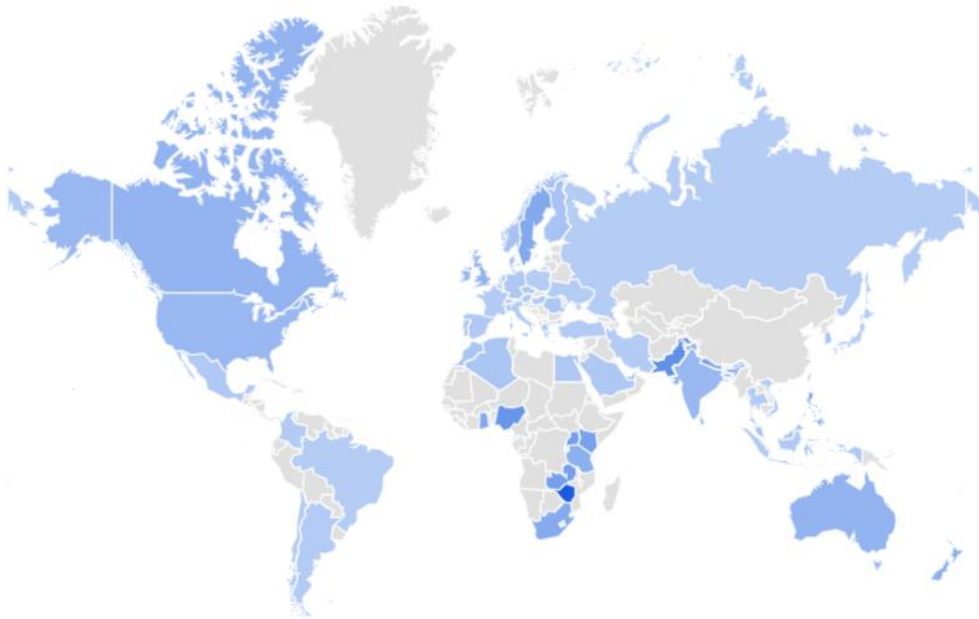


Figure 1. Google search popularity of term 'Feminism', by region 2018-2019

Note: Google Search Trends, 2019. 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 mobilisation is online activity, these data are particularly appropriate for the task at hand.

As Figures 1 and 2 show, the term 'Feminism' is widely recognised 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 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 indicate, global patterns of search popularity for the term 'Feminism' in the last 12 months<sup>17</sup> 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.

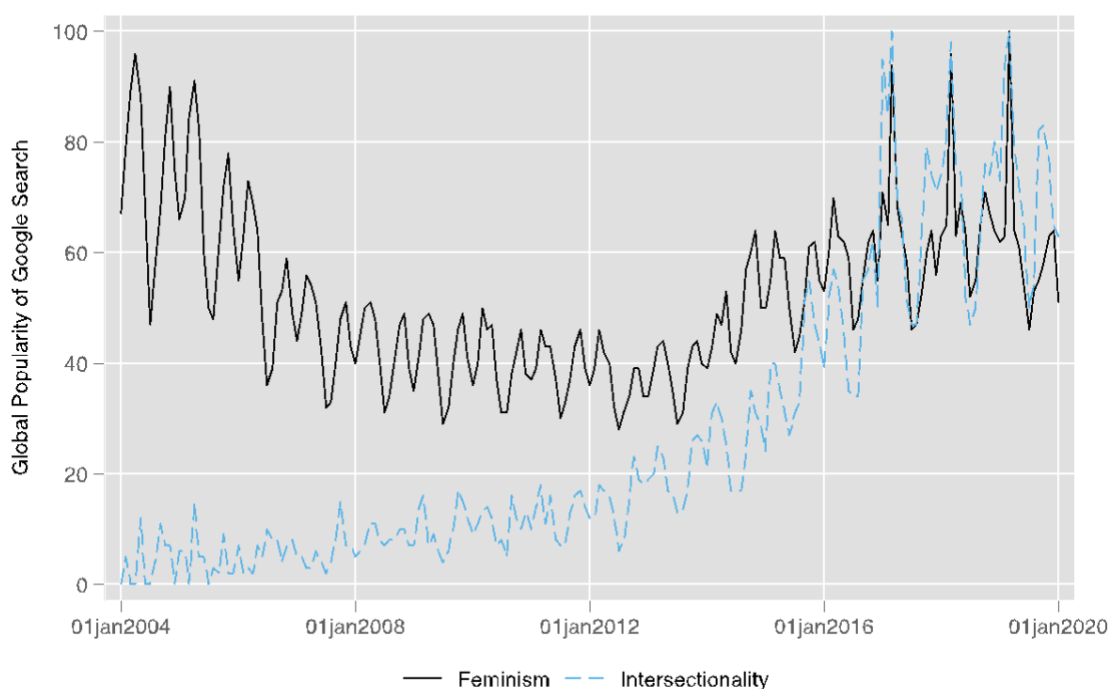


Figure 2. Google search popularity of terms 'Feminism' and 'intersectionality', globally, 2004-2020

Note: Original compilation using Google Search Trends, 2020. 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.' 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

<sup>17</sup> Data retrieved on 19 April 2020 from <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=feminism>.



comprehensive *Web of Science Core Collection* shows that from the year 1970 to date, a total of 189 publications recorded in the *Web of Science Core Collection* have employed the terms ‘generations’ and ‘Feminism’ in conjunction, with a total of 1,507 citations over the same period.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Data were retrieved on 03 September 2019. The database can be accessed at: <http://apps.webofknowledge.com/>.

<sup>19</sup> Data were retrieved on 03 September 2019. The database can be accessed at: <http://apps.webofknowledge.com/>.

## Appendix B. Attitudes towards Gender Equality

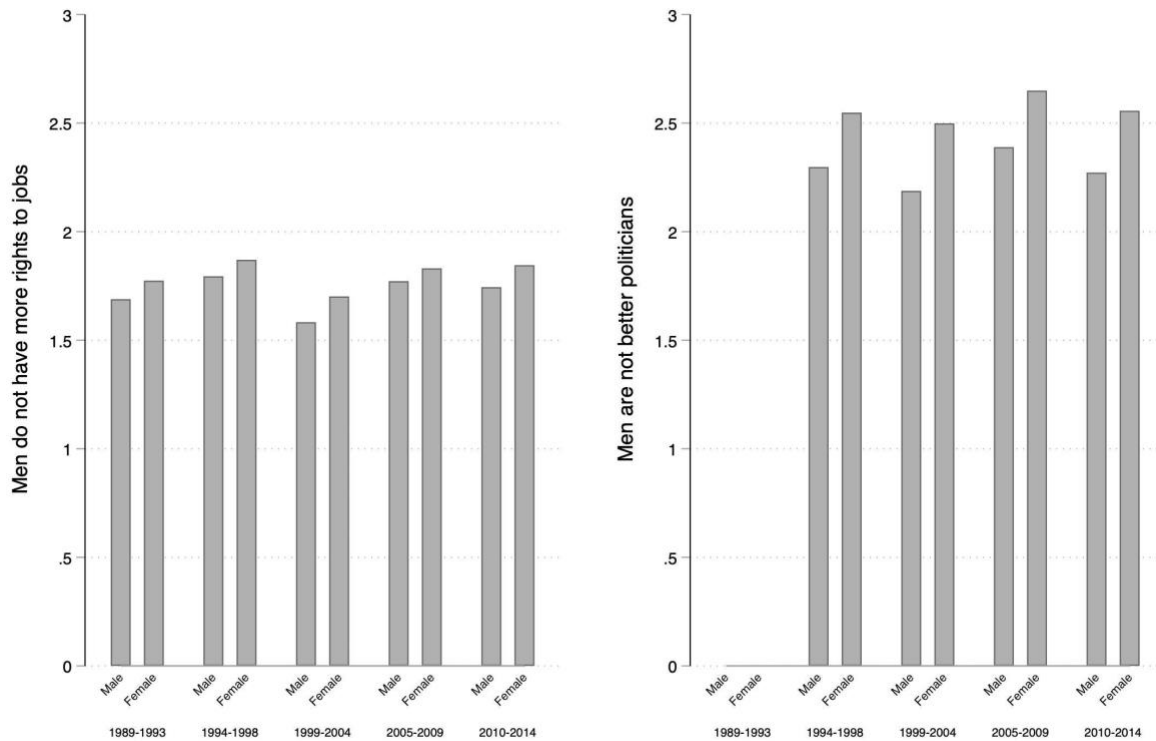


Figure 3. Levels of gender-egalitarian views, by sex (1981/1994-2014)

Note: Original compilation using data from the World Values Survey. Note that 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)<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> As 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.

## Appendix C. Types and Topic Salience of Feminist Engagement

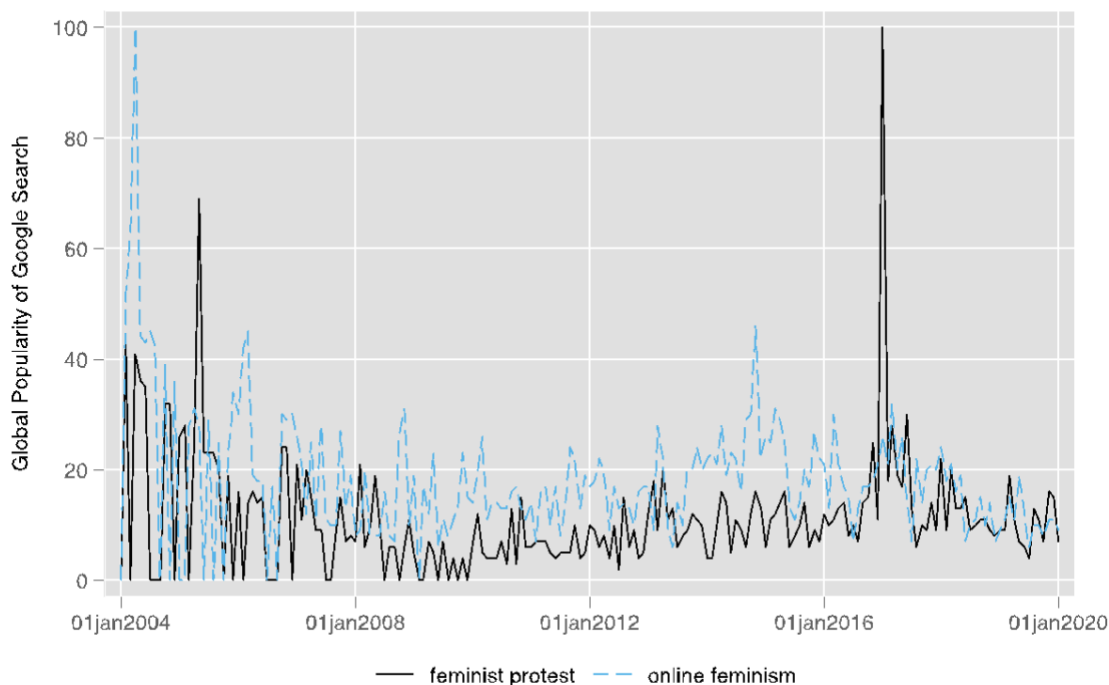


Figure 4. Google search popularity of terms ‘Feminism protest’ and ‘online Feminism’, globally, 2004-2020

Note: Original compilation using Google Search Trends, 2020. 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.’ Figure displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other.

The salience of search terms on Google again provide 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 previously 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 that gender-related issues are not only 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.

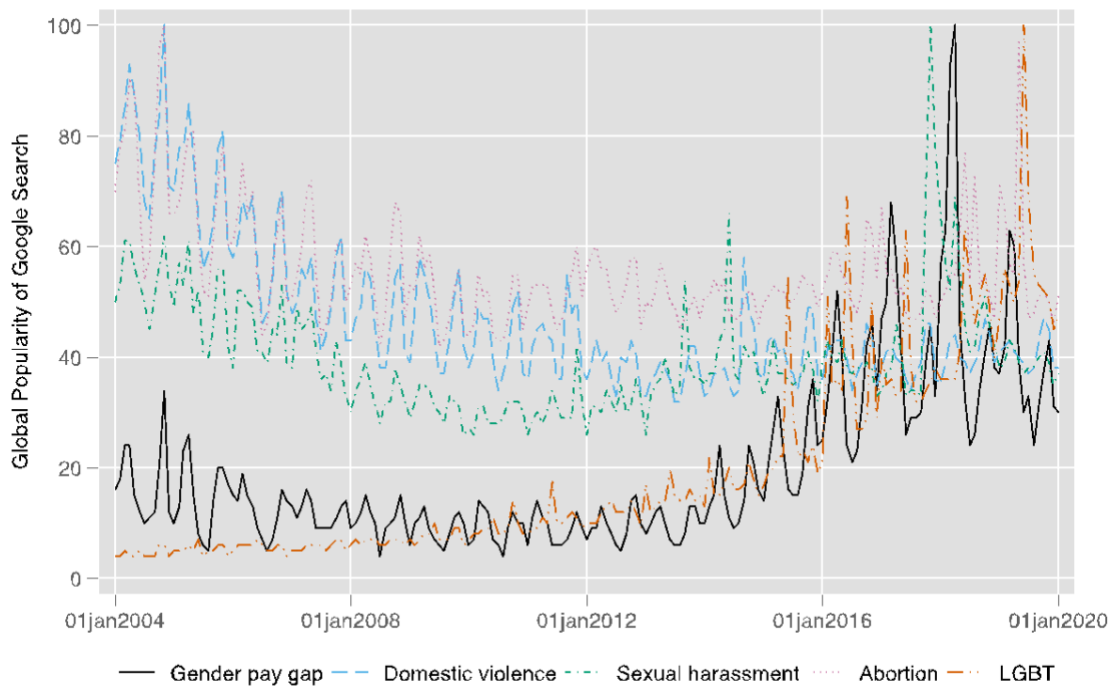


Figure 5. Google search popularity of terms 'gender pay gap', 'domestic violence', 'sexual harassment', 'abortion', and 'LGBT' globally, 2004-2020

Note: Original compilation using Google Search Trends, 2020. 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.' 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 does not allow us to examine the salience of a 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 overtime 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.

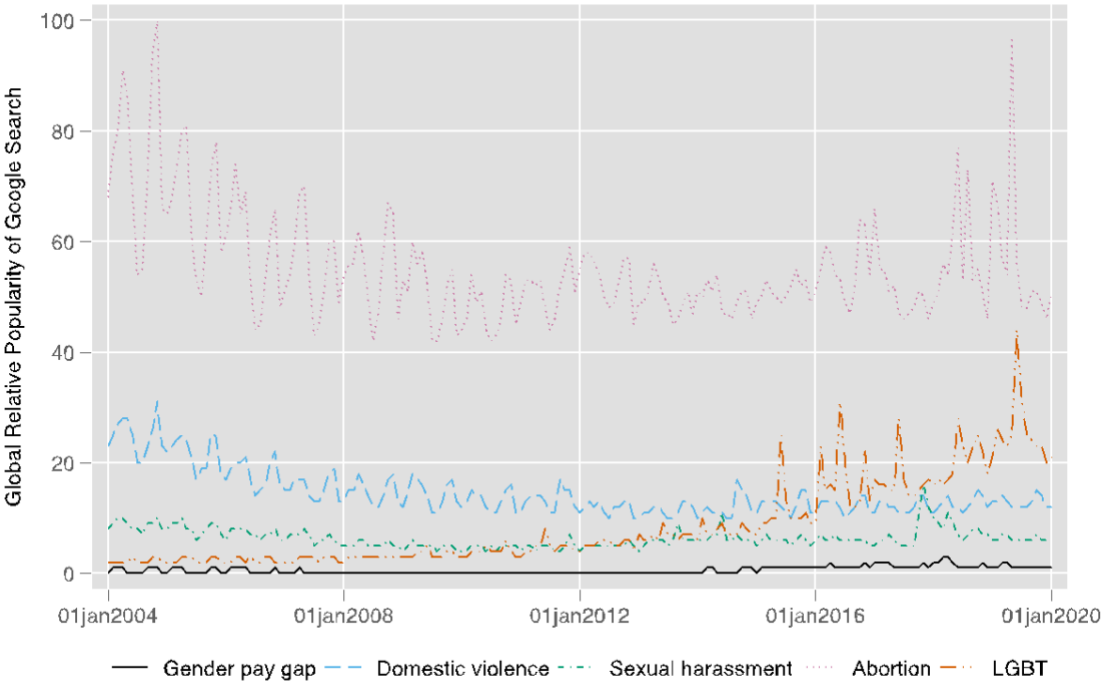


Figure 6. Google search **relative** popularity of terms ‘gender pay gap’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘sexual harassment’, ‘abortion’, and ‘LGBT’ globally, 2004-2020

Note: Original compilation using Google Search Trends, 2020. 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.’ Figure displays values for the popularity of search terms comparatively.

## Appendix D. The Online Popularity of Feminism and Topic Salience in Brazil, India, and Malawi

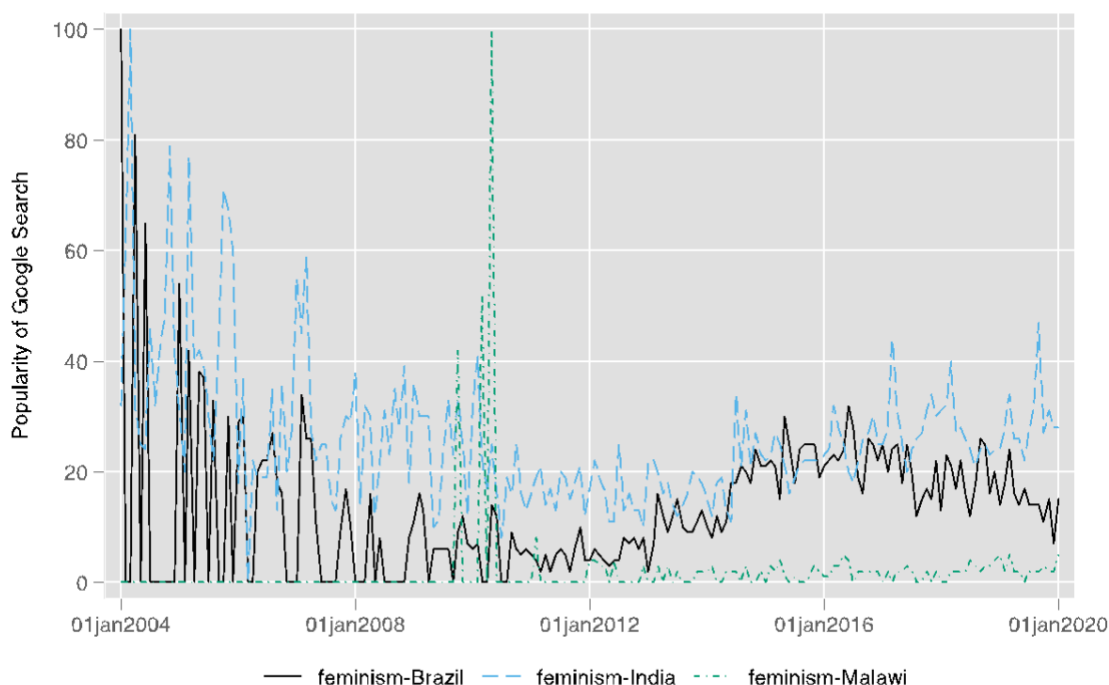


Figure 6. Google search popularity of term 'Feminism' in Brazil, India, and Malawi, 2004-2020

Note: Original compilation using Google Search Trends, 2020. 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.' Figure displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other.

We also use *Google Search Trends* data to analyse the web salience of 'Feminism' in our case studies. As before, Figure 6 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 the '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. By contrast, apart from infrequent peaks in Malawi, the search popularity of 'Feminism' has remained persistently low. Figure 7 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 the search term 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 Search Trends* is not able to capture its salience over time.

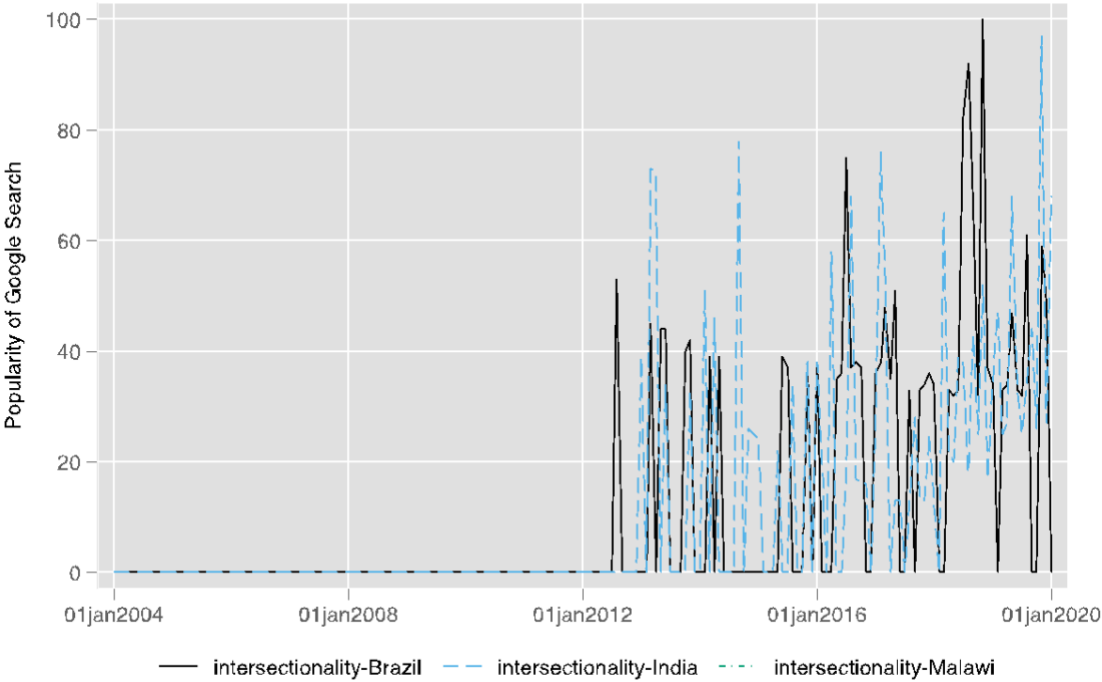


Figure 7. Google search popularity of term 'Intersectionality' in Brazil, India, and Malawi, 2004-2020

Note: Original compilation using Google Search Trends, 2020. 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.' Figure displays values for the popularity of search terms individually, not relative to each other.