The New Feminist Activism 1970-2019: Intergenerational Perspectives¹

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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.

¹ This is a work in progress, and should be seen as a rough sketching out of some ideas for discussion and comment. We are only at the start of the empirical research and the interviews are still to be carried out for the final version, the citations and bibliography are to be completed.

² Maxine Molyneux took responsibility for writing the overview sections, Malu Gatto for the data and the Brazil case study, Aridja Dey for the India case and Holly Rowden for the Africa case.
Abstract: 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 which this research will address: to what extent is it useful to identify the recent wave of activism in terms of a new generation of activists? Is generation salient to the understanding of social movement activism? How different is the ‘new’ Feminism to earlier forms, and what differences and continuities divide and unite the generations?

Introduction

The second decade of the Millennium has been marked by a startling upsurge of youth political activity. 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 an early precursor. 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 and in Sudan protests have been led by young people demanding a change in government and an end to corruption. In the US, young people 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. In Europe, 16 year-old Greta Thunberg has inspired a host of environmental protests and 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 and girls have been key actors and leaders in many of these movements.

Young women have also brought a new dynamism to Feminism and feminist activism in both North and South. The Women’s marches against Trump, and insurgent campaigns around reproductive rights are instances of these recent mobilisations. We have seen more than a decade of campaigning in the ‘Million Women Rise’ movement - an international protest against VAW and misogyny. The ongoing ‘Me Too’ campaign has seen untold numbers of women across the world denouncing the rape and sexual harassment they and others have suffered. In many regions across the global South women are active around a range of feminist issues: there have been angry demonstrations against police sexual violence and gang rapes in India; in the Post-Soviet world, there have been eruptions of feminist protest of different kinds. 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. In 2018 tens of thousands of women took to the streets in Latin America in the Ni Una Menos(Not one Less) campaign to protest the lack of government response to VAW. And in Russia Pussy Riot and in Ukraine Femen have staged dramatic episodes of protest at the treatment of women by deploying sexuality and the female body as weapons of revolt.

Across many regions, these protests suggest a new moment in feminist politics, when patriarchal privilege is once again being called out, this time by a new younger generation. Feminism seems to have entered a new phase—a ‘new wave’ of activism, both dynamic and creative. We see 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 is not only OK, but also
‘cool’ to be a feminist, and it seems that there is something new and exciting going on, as a new generation takes the lead.

The upsurge in activism has been accompanied by a rise in the number of internet searches globally for the term ‘Feminism’. As shown in Figures 1 and 2 below the term ‘Feminism’ is widely recognised and searched for on the internet.

The growing popularity of Feminism, however, may not have been equally shared everywhere. As analysis of Google Search Trends data shows, global patterns of the popularity of the term ‘Feminism’ in the last 12 months[1] have varied widely (see Figure 1). Comparatively, the term was the most popular in Zimbabwe, followed by Pakistan, Nigeria, Sweden, and Ghana. Expanding our analysis to the entire period of data availability (2004 to present), provides further insights into the global popularity of Feminism. 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 may have remained at similar levels, a specific type of Feminism has gained in popularity.

Figure 1. Google search popularity of term ‘Feminism’, by region 2018-2019
Source: 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.
While it is too early to assess the significance of these movements, they raise a range of political and analytic questions about the ‘new Feminism’ which this research will address: to what extent is it useful to identify the recent wave of activism in terms of a new generation of activists? Is generation salient to the understanding of social movement activism? How different is the ‘new’ Feminism to earlier forms, and what differences and continuities divide and unite the generations? In order to address these issues, we will first examine the arguments and evidence in relation to a generational view of Feminism, and through examples and case studies we aim to identify and explain some of the key characteristics of movements associated with the contemporary Feminism.

Our Research

To answer some of the questions about the ruptures and continuities across different moments or generations of Feminism, we are in the process of undertaking some new research. In the first place, using attitude surveys, such as the World Values Survey we will compare and contrast the socio-cultural characteristics and attitudes of young women with that of their predecessors. These data will also help to
assess the degree to which we can identify significant transnational similarities, as well as pinpointing regional differences. While these data are imperfect, given different levels of access and reliance on Google as a major search tool across countries, previous work indicates that they serve as a useful proxy for estimating issue salience. Since a key aspect of youth mobilisation is online activity, these data are particularly appropriate for the task at hand.

Second, through the use of Google Trends data, which captures the popularity of term searches on Google in a given period and geographical region, we will evaluate the level of salience of issues traditionally and historically understood as feminist demands. Relying on observational data of expressed attitudes (often done in private), this complementary analysis will allow us to gain a better understanding of whether traditional feminist demands remain salient, where, and to what extent.

Third, through examples and case studies of particular movements we will illustrate some of the ideas, campaigns, and organisational forms of the new Feminism, contrasting these with previous moments. We will focus on three themes: campaigns to defend rights (Brazil); movements involved in tackling violence against women (India); and movements aiming to advance radical shifts in attitudes and laws concerning sexuality (Africa). To complement these analyses, we are also conducting interviews with young women activists and those of earlier generations, to ascertain their views and experiences of inter-generational tensions and co-operation. Overall this research will aim to contribute to our understanding of the salience of generational perspectives in analysing the evolution and contemporary forms of feminist activism.

Youth and Generation

Young people have long been the object of sociological enquiry. In recognition of what was seen as the growing separation of their world, habits and values from that of their parents, ‘Youth studies’ developed in the Chicago School and proliferated from the 1930’s onward generating analyses of particular youth subcultures and the improved material foundations on which they arose. While ‘deviance studies’ dominated in the study of young men, feminist sociologists devoted their attention to the ways that femininity was constructed in adolescence through school curricula and teen magazines (McRobbie, 1991).

But 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)³.

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 additions⁴. 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.

Nonetheless there is value for analytic purposes in the idea that an age cohort has certain historical and cultural experiences in common which can help to forge a distinct identity. 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

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³ 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.

⁴ 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 X, “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 focusing on Feminism, we are concerned to understand the generational differences and similarities within a particular political community and within a particular span of time. Our concern is to explore the salience of generation in understanding the evolution of contemporary Feminism through a focus on feminist activists within different generations in three regions of the South,—India, Latin America and Africa. The time period will be that from the onset of second wave Feminism in the late 1960’s up to the present covering what today are usually described at three feminist ‘waves’.

In so doing, we also understand the debates and limitations surrounding periodisation. For example, while some of our interviewees from Brazil stated their preference for ‘generation’ over ‘waves’ when thinking about patterns, continuities, and change in the local feminist movements, others were sceptical of the usefulness of the term in capturing specific characteristics of feminist ‘moments’. As Joanna Burigo—founder of the online feminist platform Casa da Mãe Joanna, and pedagogical coordinator of the non-governmental organization Emancipa Mulher, which offers courses on Feminism throughout the country—contends, while ‘waves’ tend to identify the core social interests of feminists during a time period, ‘generations’ tends to be more closely associated with the idea of age cohorts[2]—even though, as we will see, women from multiple age cohorts may be working side-by-side and adopting the same strategies to achieve shared goals. There has nonetheless been a growing scholarly interest in the theme of generations in the study of Feminism: an analysis of academic publications recorded in the comprehensive Web of Science Core Collection shows that from the year 1970 to date, a total of 189 publications recorded 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.[3]

**Feminist Waves and Generations**

Feminism is a social movement with a long history, and it is self-evident that such movements arise in determinate historical, social and political circumstances. The value of a generational approach to understanding how social movements evolve, change, rise and decline is that it 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. At its simplest we can say that those who were young and politically active feminists in the 1970s were shaped by their cultural context and history, and as a consequence they thought and did things differently to those of later generations, even if they shared some common understandings that served to shape demands, priorities and approaches.

Despite the continuities that can be found across time, social movements are time-bound phenomena, they rise through periods of activism and they decline, sometimes rising again, hence the metaphor ‘waves’ to describe these temporal/spatial phenomena. Within a wave, given that young people tend to
be the most active we often see a new generation taking the lead and shaping the direction of the movements involved in a wave. If waves describe periods of social movement activism, Feminism has gone through at least three such moments with a fourth seemingly under way.

As a modern social movement Feminism’s early campaigns go back to the late 19th century, and since then feminist movements have been more or less active at different points across time. In recognition of these different periods of activism, Feminism is often described in terms of two main ‘waves’—the first wave of the late 19thearly 20th century, the second starting in the late 1960s. To these have been added a third wave in the 1980s and a new wave arguably appearing in the new Millennium. But not surprisingly, it is a matter of dispute as to whether these periodisations are accurate or generalisable across regions.

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. Nancy Fraser has summed up the kinds of struggles that feminists have engaged in as of three main types—for justice, for recognition and for political inclusion (2009). While these elements may have proven fairly constant over time, there are clearly problems in talking of Feminism as a movement, in the singular. 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, cultural formations and political forms all help to shape the kind of civil and political societies within which social movements arise and are active.

Having said that, in a globalised, ever more connected world, feminist ideas, campaigns, and people travel, and, given the dominance of the English language it is probable, and arguably also problematic, that Anglophone varieties have had the potential to exert more influence than others, despite the fact that the outcome of global-local interaction will always be context specific and some movements actively resist what they see as Western and white hegemony.

If the idea of waves remains somewhat under-analysed, there is also little agreement over how to how to define what characterises any single wave, let alone over the various ‘types’ of Feminism active within it. Analysts vary on what they privilege for definitional purposes—some focus on types of theoretical orientation, others on cultural commonalities, others on political affiliation. Most tend to agree however that a first and second wave can be identified at a general near-global level. The ‘first wave’ refers to the irruption of feminist collective action in the early twentieth century when feminists first organised collectively to demand full citizenship rights. These initiatives, were, by comparison with later developments, smaller in scale and social penetration, and it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that a more significant, expansive and more international movement began to unfold. This ‘second wave Feminism’ contained elements whose demands were more far reaching in scope, as well as others that were focused on bringing about legal and institutional change through the arenas of organised political and economic power.
First wave Feminism was never exclusively confined to, or defined by, the Northern industrialised world (Jayawardena 1986). Even in the early twentieth century there were movements in South Asia, and in the Far and Middle East, though feminists faced less opposition within liberal industrialised states and urban communities. But from the 1970s onwards feminist activism did experience a new dynamism as part of the broader processes of social change that were under way globally. More women were in employment, more were educated than previous generations, middle class women had entered the sphere of public and political life, though a substantial gender gap in reward and power remained. Feminism often took root in the universities and in leftist political organisations with which it maintained an uneasy, often fractious alliance.

For many activists in the non-Western world an important stimulus of global feminist interaction was the impetus of the four UN World conferences that began in Mexico in 1975 with the launch of the UN Decade for Women, acquiring a growing momentum in successive events in Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing. The scale of this growing movement can be gauged by the attendance at the final Women’s Conference in China in 1995 in which over 30,000 delegates from across the world participated.

The women involved in these events were new actors and distinct in some ways from those of the early 1970s who had worked within loosely linked organisations and non-hierarchical movements. They comprised feminist NGOs representatives, ‘femocrats’, academics, professionals, policy communities, and grass roots activists who through sometimes quite intense debate and discussion worked to create the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), a policy action framework inspired by CEDAW, adopted in 1979. Many of these activist-delegates worked back home with their local and regional movements to advance legal reform, and after 1995 to incorporate the PFA into national law and policy.

To the extent that the age cohort of these actors, who were young to mid-career professionals at the time, can be considered a ‘generation’ or at least a part of one, it is generally agreed that with key allies and a favourable political climate, they achieved some notable successes. This was in part because this strand of Feminism 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.

As noted, Feminism is and always has been a highly diverse movement with many currents and strands, with multiple forms of practice and priorities. Given this, can we say that the Feminism that engaged with legal reform, policies and the state from the 1980s was the ‘hegemonic’ or mainstream version that characterised this moment in Feminism or this generation of feminists? Whether in the West or in the South it was certainly considered to be so by both its advocates and its critics, and this view did dominate much subsequent analysis. If its heyday of 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 the movement’s creeping bureaucratisation and/or ‘NGOisation’ as Sonia Alvarez termed it. What critics saw
as the ‘abandonment of the street for the office’, was associated with a loss of autonomy and creativity that came with an increased dependence on funding from governments and NGOs. Others saw the entry of former activists into the state positive and necessary for capturing the policy process to bring about results.[4] These debates over the pro’s and con’s of ‘institutionalising’ Feminism divided movements and some disillusion set in. But other social actors—black feminists, LGBTQI, Adivasi and indigenous women in the Americas were organising to demand their rights and recognition, each with their distinct perspectives and priorities, many critical of what they saw as ‘mainstream’ Feminism’s weak commitment to intersectionality and inclusivity.

The decades that followed in the wake of the Beijing years were a time not only of feminist quiescence, but also of 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. The 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001 was a brutal counter to the optimism signalled by such as 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 through the conservative churches, in the grassroots. They were to continue to do so with greater effect as the Millennium approached its third decade.

**The New Feminist Activists: a fourth wave?[5]**

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 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.

More broadly, what distinguishes the new Feminism from its antecedents in the second wave are the social and political changes that it is heir to. Take education for example—young feminists are the most educated of any previous wave and, as education 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.

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 to more liberal attitudes on sexuality and family forms, and more democratic, inclusive attitudes 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, supporting LGBTQI, and other identity movements, and being expressly committed to anti-racist, egalitarian practices and politics. While tensions may exist over some of these issues within contemporary Feminism, and ‘radical inclusion’ may not be embraced or practiced by all organisations, there can be little doubting the contrast with earlier Feminisms.
In addition, the changes in gender relations that have taken place are significant even though they have not brought anything like full equality either in the private or public spheres. Women’s roles have diversified perhaps more than men’s, but the meaning of masculinity - what it means to be, behave and look like a man,—has also diversified. Youth culture and its role models, for example male rock stars (think David Bowie) stretched the norms of masculinity and unsettled earlier notions of ‘real men’. While the high rates of domestic violence, femicide, misogyny and rape are evidence that ‘toxic masculinity’ retains its virulence, many young men want more equal relationships with their partners. Indeed their support for feminist causes and appearance on demonstrations is far more evident than in the past. Although separatist currents still exist within feminism, and the ‘issue of men’ is still contested, where feminist campaigns depend on broad alliances for success, ‘feminist men’ can be seen, and can act as important allies.

Technological change, notably the global spread of the internet has had a major impact on politics and has enabled new forms of activism. 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 and 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 quite extensive grassroots engagement as well as reaching ever greater numbers compared to earlier forms such as print media. Flash demonstrations can be organised in minutes rather than days, and co-ordinated globally—a far cry from the cyclostyled leaflets, faxes and the costly long distance phone calls, on which activism once depended. Young women are still disadvantaged by the digital divide, and by out of date education and training initiatives, but are gaining ground in this domain.

The world of young feminists is, however, one marked by a high degree of insecurity: the liberal reforms that have transformed labour markets and conditions, while removing many former securities and welfare supports 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 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). 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.

At the same time, whereas former generations had more attachments to political parties and trade unions, this is far less the case among younger people, many of whom experience disenchantment with organised politics. Yet in some countries young people are more radical at both ends of the spectrum, and more critical of 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 taken as a whole (born in the 1940s and 1950s) (Milkman, 2014). This is of salience for the generational differences at play within feminist generations, as young people may be less committed overall to engaging with the very processes—legal change and ‘engaging the state’ or the work of the UN—that were the focus of previous activist generations. In part those gains now seem to many young people to be limited in their real effects. Having said this, the picture is mixed: at the individual level we are seeing young feminists running for and achieving high office and high public profiles in numbers not seen before, and street politics can be a prelude to entering other more formal political spaces.

Feminism: Some General Trends

As the previous discussion reveals, providing a global assessment of the feminist movement’s intergenerational trends is a challenging task. Yet, there is an indication that women’s movements in general, and feminist activism in particular, are gaining more of a following. To understand some of the underlying factors behind this surge we employ longitudinal data from the World Values Survey—to our knowledge, the most complete source of behaviour data at a global scale available from the 1980s—to provide a snapshot analyses of individuals’ levels of political engagement, gender-related values, and views of the women’s movement in the last four decades.[6] We complement these analyses with Google Search Trends data. As a source that captures information about the active (but private) behaviour of individuals online, these data are helpful in giving us further insights into related topics that have sparked the curiosity of internet users globally.
As shown in Figure 3, women’s levels of political engagement—as captured by their responses on whether they have or would sign petitions and attend peaceful demonstrations—has, throughout the decades, remained consistently lower than men’s, differences of 0.083 and 0.147 (respectively) that are statistically significant at the 1%-level. Regional analyses provide further insight into these patterns. When restricting the analysis to African countries included in the dataset,[7] we find the overall populational average to be lower; in other words, African respondents are less likely to sign petitions than the global average (1.84 vs. 1.55, respectively). However, while women in Africa are also less likely to sign petitions than men, gender differences are also less substantial in Africa than in the global average. We produce similar findings when restricting our analyses to Asia.[8] In Latin America,[9] however, respondents are slightly more likely to sign petitions than the global average (1.90), while gender differences also tend to be smaller. This means that among respondents, the average Latin American woman is more likely to sign petitions (1.85) than the average woman in the global analysis (1.80). When assessing our second proxy for political engagement—attending peaceful demonstrations—we find that women in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have lower averages than overall women respondents, even though (unlike African and Asian respondents) Latin American respondents, as a whole, yield a (very slight) higher average of demonstration attendance than the global analysis—a result that seems to be driven by men’s participation in such events. In sum, the smaller gender gaps in political participation in the ‘Global South’
suggests that studies on women’s movements in these regions may provide important insights into the dynamics of women’s political engagement, more broadly.

Interestingly, as our global analysis in Figure 3 shows, signing petitions seems to have become a lesser form of political engagement over the years (for both men and women). Meanwhile, levels of political engagement through peaceful demonstrations has been less variable over time. When restricting our analyses to the most recent wave of data collection available (2010-2014), we additionally find that while education and income seem to be positively correlated with both, the likelihood of signing petitions and participating in peaceful demonstrations, age is positively associated with the signing of petitions but negatively associated with participation in demonstrations. This provides some indication that understanding intergenerational Feminism may require an assessment of how and in what contexts different generations of feminists may interact—something that is further elaborated in the case of Brazil.

Gender-egalitarian views are at the core of women’s movements, as gender-based inequalities may both fuel Feminism movements, as well as be shaped by them. Not surprisingly, when assessing gender-egalitarian views over time—by respondents’ answers to questions about whether men are more deserving of employment when jobs are scarce and whether men make better politicians than women—we find that women are more likely to hold more progressive gender-egalitarian views than men (see Figure 4). Perhaps surprisingly, however, the average values of responses on these attitudinal questions, do not seem to decrease over time (something that could result from the nature of the analysis conducted in itself: being an aggregate-level analysis that is not taking into account country or regional variations). Restricting our global analysis to the most recent wave, we find that age and education are positively correlated with values on both variables, but income is negatively correlated with assessments about women in politics.
Figure 4. Levels of gender-egalitarian views, by sex (1981/1994-2014)
Source: 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.

Regional analyses do not provide clearer patterns of the development of gender egalitarian values over time, although they show that the level of agreement with the survey questions varies considerably across regions. Specifically, disaggregating analyses by respondents from the African, Asian, and Latin American countries included in the dataset, we find regional averages (for both questions) to be lower in Africa and Asia and higher in Latin America; in other words, Latin American respondents tend to hold more progressive gender egalitarian views than the global average. While it is plausible to argue that social desirability bias (i.e., respondents’ potential tendency to provide answers that are socially acceptable, rather than a representation of their views) is not randomly distributed and may be context-specific, as results stand, male respondents in Latin America hold substantively more progressive views on gender equality in the labour market (1.96) and politics (2.67) than the average global respondent (1.77 and 2.43, respectively), and even compared to the average female respondent 1.81 and 2.56).

Also relying on WVS data, we turn to more directly evaluating respondents’ levels of confidence in the women’s movement (a question that has only been asked since 1994). Again, we find that women have consistently held higher levels of trust in the women’s movement than men, a difference of 0.204 that is statistically significant at the 1%-level. Again, however, aggregate-level values do not seem to have
substantively changed overtime (as before, the same disclaimers about the aggregate analysis apply here). When restricting the analysis to the most recent data, we again find education and income to be positively correlated with confidence in women’s movements; the correlation with age, however, produces a negative (but not statistically significant) coefficient. This potentially suggests that some types of older respondents are less likely to trust the women’s movement—but our analyses do not allow us to make any further claims about this.

As Figure 5 illustrates, confidence in the women’s movement also varies across regions, although patterns remain unclear. For example, increased confidence in the women’s movement is only sustained across time in Asia—while there are ‘dips’ in confidence in Latin America (in the 1999-2004 wave) and Africa (in the 2010-2014 wave), something that could have been driven by particular within-region (i.e. country) events. Overall confidence in the women’s movement is higher in Asia and Latin America in 2010-2014 than in 1989-1993, but slightly lower among respondents in African countries (a drop from 2.55 to 2.50).

![Confidence in the Women's Movement by Region and Sex](image)

Figure 5. Levels of confidence in the Women's Movement, by sex and region (1994-2014)
Source: Original compilation using data from the World Values Survey.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, increased confidence in women’s movements is consistent with the rising popularity of Feminism around the globe. If a ‘fourth wave’ is indeed taking shape, it is plausible that its unique characteristics not only extend to the ‘mainstream’ popularity of Feminism, but also to new forms
of activism and priorities. Again, providing a global assessment of what these patterns may mean is not possible, although Google Search Trends data can assist us in gaining insights into the online popularity of specific search items since 2004. Using these data, we first analyse the popularity of one traditional form of feminist activism, protests, and one ‘new’ type of activism, ‘online Feminism’. As Figure 6 shows, in the last 15 years, the popularity of ‘online Feminism’ was often higher than that of ‘feminist protests’, although there has been a clear surge in January 2017—something that captures the popularity of the U.S. Women’s March, which took place on the 21st. Since then, the global popularity of these two terms have remained ‘hand-in-hand’. This suggests that current women’s movements are not only relying on ‘new forms’ of activism, but also on more traditional strategies—a theme that is further developed in our case studies.

![Figure 6. Google search comparative popularity of terms ‘Feminism protest’ and ‘online Feminism’, globally, 2004-2019](image)

Source: Original compilation using Google Search Trends, 2019. 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.’

Finally, we also use the same source of data to analyse the comparative global popularity of the terms ‘gender pay gap’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘sexual harassment’, and ‘abortion’—areas that have been core demands of feminist movements across the decades. As Figure 7 illustrates, ‘abortion’ has, by far,
remained the most searched topic among the four items we comparatively analyse—followed by ‘domestic violence’, ‘sexual harassment’, and ‘gender pay gap’. In other words, the high levels of searches on abortion and domestic violence suggest that a key characteristic of the ‘current feminist wave’ is concern with the continued global restrictions on women’s reproductive rights and high rates of violence against women. The search popularity of ‘sexual harassment’—which reached a peak of 33 in November 2017, following the beginning of the #MeToo movement in the previous month—also suggests this to be a topic of increasing relevance.

![Figure 7. Google search comparative popularity of terms ‘gender pay gap’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘sexual harassment’, and ‘abortion’ globally, 2004-2019](image)

**Figure 7.** Google search comparative popularity of terms ‘gender pay gap’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘sexual harassment’, and ‘abortion’ globally, 2004-2019

**Source:** Original compilation using Google Search Trends, 2019. 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.’

**Feminist Generations**

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, forms of activism. Young feminists will necessarily do politics in different ways. Yet it is important to avoid oversimplifying the characterisations of different feminist waves and in doing so, exaggerating the divide
between generations. Feminism’s history is one of diversity and we should not take one strand to be representative of the whole movement even if it may have been a dominant one. Despite clear differences that mark out the generations, there are also continuities that link feminist movements. Young feminists may have less in common, and feel some distance with those feminists who entered the spaces of government or who were active in political parties and in ‘development’ work; but as our interviews attest, many still work with actors in these spaces to secure legal, political or cultural change. We need to examine the evidence for asserting that a rupture with previous histories of feminist activism has occurred in the present wave of activism, and understand more clearly how distinctive are the demands and tactics they pursue.

We hypothesise that while critical differences necessarily 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; and there are a surprising number of continuities in Feminisms’ core demands. Similarly, 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. Differences of strategy and tactics clearly demarcate generational boundaries but even here, as the example of social media shows, it most often serves as a tool of more conventional forms or political mobilisation rather than substituting for them: street protests are one part of an often rich repertoire of activism.

Intergenerational Reflections

In our treatment of the history of Feminism from the 1970s, two generations of activists can be identified as preceding the present wave of activism: those who joined various movements from the mid-late 1960s at a time when new ideas, theories and forms of practice were in play; and those who engaged in securing legal and policy reform working with, or within states and policy arenas. With regard to the first of these, for all the diversity of those times, certain distinguishing traits stand out as indicative of the times: feminists of the early second wave were radical and critical, many were sympathetic to socialist ideas and worked in solidarity with working class women’s struggles and leftist organisations. However important to Feminism was the embrace of the principle of autonomy: feminists insisted on women’s right and need to determine their own agendas, even if working within political organisations and parties. The failure to respond in any adequate measure encouraged women to work in women-only settings and activities—whether supporting fair wage campaigns, setting up women-only journals and publishing houses, founding women’s art collectives and women’s NGOs, refuges from violence, and health advisory groups. The practice of ‘conscioussness 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 soon to be abandoned term ‘sisterhood’.

Many of these ideas and experiences could be found in most parts of the South and continue to be present in 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 critical of the macho culture of the comrades and the neglect of gender by the socialist classics. Latin American feminists in the organised Left saw themselves as practicing ‘double militancy’, - in the party and within feminist groups. Others developed their own all-women organisations and founded NGOs working on women’s rights and policy issues often in very innovative and effective ways. In other contexts academic feminists worked on visibilising and theorising domestic labour, and later care, subjected democracy and citizenship to critique on gender lines. Some of these early second wave activists went on to become academics, professionals, joining international organisations, rising in Trade unions and government agencies as greater awareness spread in the 1970s of the need to represent women’s interests more broadly in policy —whether in UN frameworks or in pressing for the implementation of Equal Rights legislation - in Europe and in the United States.

Within the expanding arena of international development the UN Women’s Decade (1975-85) opened up a significant policy space to advance legal change and ‘gender mainstreaming’. It also provided opportunities for women’s employment within these arenas. In generational terms these recruits included some activists of the early second wave but also drew younger women into the activities around feminist campaigns and demands. These women would liaise across borders over strategies and action, some working in international organisations (NGOs, UN agencies) attending expert meetings and advising sympathetic donors and governments. 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 domestically—a key strategy adopted by Global South scholars, as one of our Brazilian interviewees emphasized.

One such network 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 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 a statistics 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. The case for seeing welfare as a
productive investment rather than a drain on the economy was taken up by some UN agencies in its arguments for expanding social protection.

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 sympathetic ‘femocrats’, feminist parliamentarians and lawyers who took up difficult policy issues such as reproductive rights in the legislature and in the courts.

Ambivalence and Disappointment

If the third wave of Feminism is associated with the struggles around rights and democracy, and was seen as a positive step forward by those active in these campaigns, this gave way to growing disappointment at the continuing ‘implementation gap’. It is striking that in assessments of the decades of legal activism former participants often share with today’s young feminists a sense of disappointment that more was not accomplished or that little real or substantive was accomplished. This may be an over-harsh verdict and can only be debated with evidence from within particular contexts but there are several more or less persuasive components that typically make up this view.

In the first place women continued to suffer discrimination in the labour market, and young people’s employment opportunities were limited as evidenced by the high levels of youth unemployment in many countries. Harassment at work and sexual violence continued virtually unabated. The laws and some policies may have helped to promote positive change in some areas but there was widespread disappointment at the failures of implementation which deepened the gap between expectations and accomplishments. Legal frameworks existed on the books but failed to be applied in the courts or make it into policy. 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. Governmental support was limited, and where external support was available from donors, it tended to be project based, short term, and in principle was not something that always aligned with national sentiments.

Moreover if, thanks to quota laws, the rising expectations of women themselves, and the heightened attention to gender equality measures, more women were now getting into positions of power, in parliament, in Ministries, they could now be blamed for the lack of progress—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

5 Interviews carried out by Maxine Molyneux with feminist activists mainly in Latin America and Europe have informed much of this discussion. More interview material will be incorporated from an intergenerational dialogues project on Latin American Feminism that she is working with in the final version.
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, (Watson and Kyomuhendo 2019).

There were political costs too. As gender issues were (nominally) absorbed within the mainstream, activists complained that feminist demands lost their radical edge. A Ugandan professional summed up what many thought: “We have technicalised gender—moved away from activism to expertise...mainstreaming is sort of mechanical, except for those of us who came in as activists. It’s become like a checklist approach without the passion’ (Watson and Kyomuhendo 2019).

Other consequences of the decline in activism was that those working on gender issues lost whatever contact they had with the grassroots, the very women who were meant to be the beneficiaries of the policies that were being 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 (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 sexual rights 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.

Political differences had emerged in the early days of second wave Feminism, and they continue to differentiate the various political currents of the movement. Among the most evident of the political divides found in movements across the world, were those between what was called ‘radical Feminism’ and more reform-oriented varieties, which influenced decisions over how to work (which spaces), with whom (which allies) and to what end (which priorities). In Chile the main opposing tendencies were the ‘Autonomists’ on the one hand and the ‘Integrationists’ on the other, which led to quite bitter disputes, in particular those involving SERNAM, the governmental office responsible for gender policy. Tensions were found elsewhere between those who advocated radical autonomy from all institutions associated with hegemonic masculine (and for some also ‘white’) power, and those who entered or worked with these arenas to bring about change. To these divides were added others in due course: the competing positions on, for example, cultural rights which some viewed favourably, to be worked with (as some indigenous or women’s groups maintained), or alternatively were to be replaced by more universalist approaches to rights. Multiple variations on these themes criss-crossed the activist currents of women’s movements.
Intergenerational and regional differences

In addition to the different currents of thought that gave shape to women’s and feminist movements, there were also generational differences 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. Older 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 appeared more secure and available with generous pensions at least for some.

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. From the mid-1960s through to the early 1980s 12 Latin American countries suffered under military rule forcing activists underground. 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 and which left women with little power to contest them. In most cases, women’s movements remained small, sporadic and single-issue based with successful activism around women’s rights only able to emerge and have any effect in less disabling contexts.

To gain a sense of some of the diverse struggles and challenges of the current wave of activism 3 cases are summarised below—the Brazil case looks at feminists involved in defending rights previously gained; the Indian case discusses the campaigning around gender based violence, and the African cases highlight the work of LGBT+ activists in particularly difficult contexts.

Brazil: Defending Rights Gained[10]

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. In recent years, the region has seen large scale demonstrations demanding action to end violence against women and in favour of reproductive rights, calling for an end to the criminalisation of abortion. In many ways, the Brazilian case is illustrative of broader regional patterns of Feminist activism.

After re-democratization in 1985, Brazil underwent significant political and societal changes which provided the conditions under which feminist activism was able to flourish. Particularly during the governments of the Worker’s Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT), feminist activists managed to
promote positive policy change. However, after 12 years of left-wing governments, Brazil faces a rise of conservatism and its first far-right president since the military dictatorship. This requires some reflection on the changes and continuities of feminist activism in Brazil. As this case study shows, a key finding that emerges is the following: while in the 1980s, feminist activists fought to gain rights, now, feminists are struggling to preserve them.

Feminist activists, perhaps, were the first to notice the rise of conservatism in Brazil—as well as the first to respond accordingly, a process that has reignited women’s movements across the country. Activists interviewed agree that some key events have marked the process of Feminist awakening in Brazil.

First, came the online sexual harassment. 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 (Pains 2015). Using #FirstHarassment (#PrimeiroAssédio), women responded to the episode by also using Twitter to recount their early experiences of sexual assault and harassment. In 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 (El País 2015; M. Rossi 2015b).

Then, came the institutional violence. Just a 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 responded 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. 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), which made the cover of one of Brazil’s most popular general interest magazines, Época, where women’s activism 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’[11](M. Rossi 2015a).

Indeed, gender inequalities in Brazil had long been dire. When protests broke off in 2015, Brazil ranked 8th in the world in femicide and officially registered over 500,000 cases of rape per year (M. Rossi 2015a)—a type of crime that is widely known to be underreported. There was, however, some progress being made. When Lula was elected and the PT came to office in 2003, it established the Secretariat for Women’s Policies, 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 meant to bring civil society into the policymaking process. In its first meeting, the Conference had 120 thousand attendees. It was also under Lula’s two terms that key legislation was enacted, most
notably, the Maria da Penha Law—considered to be one of the strongest laws on domestic violence, globally (Instituto Brasileiro de Direito de Família 2009).

When Dilma Rousseff, Brazil’s first woman president was instated in January 2015, she first nominated a PT-partisan, Iriny Lopes, to the Secretariat. When Lopes left office to run for a municipal council seat, Eleonora Menicucci took her place. The appointment of Menicucci was viewed favourably by the feminist movement, with leading activists endorsing her.[12] Menicucci was also more openly progressive on sexuality and reproductive rights than her predecessors, something that was also welcomed by feminist activists, since the PT’s strategy to build large coalitions had led them to make alignments with conservative parties and restricted the government from pursuing more progressive policy change. It was also under Rousseff that a law extending labour rights’ protection to domestic workers was approved, which aimed to promote the formalisation of domestic work and curb labour-related abuse of a previously largely unprotected class of workers composed of, in its overwhelmingly majority, women of colour.

It is undeniable that there were key advances during the PT years, but coalition politics constrained further gains (Gatto, dos Santos and Wylie, 2017). The declining popularity of Rousseff’s government led her to give in to the coalition and, by the end of her government, the Secretariat for Women’s Policies had vanished. In other words, the PT years saw both the creation and extinction of this ministerial-level institution. The PT’s years in government also seem to have weakened feminist 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 [...] through the creation of the Secretariat for Women’s Policies, the National Women’s Conferences [...], 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.[13]

As the Rousseff government began to decline, however, women’s activism re-emerged as a key political force. Since 2015, feminist activism has remained in the frontlines, as women continued to respond to the tumultuous (and particularly gendered) political times. In December 2015, proceedings to impeach Brazil’s first woman president began—and a lengthy process, characterised by its misogynistic nature, followed. When Rousseff was suspended from her duties in April, women went to the presidential palace to offer her flowers and staged a number of protests thereafter (Morais et al. 2016; Streit 2016).

Soon after Rousseff’s vice-president, Michel Temer, replaced her, it became clear that the new government agenda would be in stark contrast to that of the feminist movement. 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’[14](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).
Country-wide, women-led activism would re-emerge again in March 2018, when Congresswoman Marielle Franco was brutally assassinated after speaking at an event about Black Feminism (G1 2018). As women continued to mourn and demand answers about who was behind the murder 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 audiences (Blower 2018).

As the October 2018 elections approached, however, all eyes turned to presidential campaigns. As then-candidate Jair Bolsonaro, who became globally known 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 over 4 million members, all women (Gatto 2019). 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, Carneiro, and Gragnani 2018).

When asked about the differences between the priorities of feminist activists in the 1970s and 1980s and now, second wave feminist academic and activist Cecilia Sardenberg, Professor of Anthropology at Federal University of Bahia, conveyed in interview: ‘Back then, we fought to gain rights; now, we fight against them being taken away’. [15]

In the 1980s, a key strategy employed by feminist activists to influence policymaking and ensure the legal protection of women’s rights in Brazil was what Pinto describes as the ‘politics of presence’. As she recounts, during the process of writing the new Brazilian Constitution (adopted in 1988), there was at least one feminist activist present at every single meeting.[16] 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’. [17]

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, researcher and founder of the feminist online platform Casa da Mãe Joanna, does), young feminists are also using technology to increase their presence and pressure in policy debates. For example, the Facebook bot Beta, sends invites to users calling on them to take action and contact their representatives when bills limiting women’s rights are scheduled to be debated in Congress.[18] 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*).[19] Not only are women still engaged in international feminist networks through transnational organisations, but also, through the use of social media, they turn domestic issues into global trending topics that catch the attention of foreign media.

Burigo sees the urgency of current demands and the new tactics of organisation—greatly facilitated by emerging technologies—as crucial to the expansion and reach of Feminist messages and engagement in Brazil.[20] This reverberates in newly-collected data. In an original survey 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).[21]

With this expansion in activism, the focus on democratising Feminism has been brought to the forefront, but also intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) now rests at the core of the movement. As mentioned in all interviews, Black Feminism has always been strong in Brazil, producing innovative and ground-breaking contributions to feminist theory and the study of women in Brazil, but, as Pinto contends: ‘Some more radical groups [of young feminists] criticise us [second-wave feminists] because we were white, middle class, and heterosexual. So, there is this criticism, and this is not an invalid criticism. To a large extent, we were indeed mostly [white, middle class, and heterosexual].’[22]

Yet now, it is not possible to speak of ‘Feminism’ in Brazil, only ‘Feminisms’, as women work to understand the differences between women. This is reflected in the popularity and success of the book series *Plural Feminisms* (*Feminismos Plurais*), curated by feminist philosopher Djamila Ribeiro (Galvani 2019). In this sense, a key characteristic of current feminist movements, has also been their capacity to incorporate various political agendas, including struggles against racism, for LGBTQ+ rights, and in defence of environmental protection.

Feminists have been under a state of alert since the election of Jair Bolsonaro—and all interviewees agree on the importance of women’s movements at this time, when there are signs that cases of domestic violence and sexual assault are increasing in the country (Mena and Barbon). In this context, intergenerational learning and exchange may become particularly key in the fight to maintain previously secured rights. In the words of Sardenberg:

> 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.[23]

**India: Gender Based Violence[24]**
Ending violence against women has been a central and a long-standing campaign issue in India. The 1960s and 1970s saw wide political and social changes with protest movements throughout the world and India was no exception. The year 1975 was declared by the UN as the International Women’s Year and the government of India commissioned a report on the status of women called ‘Towards Equality’ (Kelly & Slaughter, 1992). This report played a catalytic role in the emergence of the contemporary women’s movement. Published in 1975 the report dramatically highlighted not only existing stark gender inequalities like declining sex ratios but also highlighted inequalities in education, access to health care, income and political representation (Katzenstein 1989). The report mobilised activists and academics alike resulting in a series of conferences related to gender discrimination and violence.

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 discourse in 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 (Gandhi & Shah, 1992; Kumar, 1989). Since the 1970s the feminist campaign against violence against women can be categorised under 3 landmark cases—The Mathura case which introduced the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act 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 first comprehensive law against sexual harassment in the workplace called the Vishakha Guidelines in 1997 and the Nirbhaya case which led to quickest and most substantive overhaul of Criminal Law in 2013 resulting in far-reaching changes.

On 16 December 2012, Jyoti Singh, a female physiotherapy student, was gang raped by six men on a moving bus in New Delhi while making her way home with a male friend. Her male companion was also gagged and beaten and the half-naked bodies of both victims were thrown from the bus into the street. They were discovered by a passer-by and immediately taken to the hospital. After 13 days spent fighting for her life, Jyoti Singh passed away. Abiding by Indian law, the real name of the victim was never used by the media and pseudonyms such as ‘Damini’ (transl. lightning), ‘Jagruti’ (transl. awareness), ‘Amanat’ (transl. treasure), or, most commonly, ‘Nirbhaya’ (transl. fearless) were used and the case came to be popularly known as the Nirbhaya case (CNN-IBN, 2 January 2013).

The Nirbhaya case has often been seen as the turning point of gender justice in India. As soon as the case 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. What was remarkable about the Nirbhaya case was how 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 intent to fight for gender justice (Chaudhuri, 2017). This was unusual as previously the work of organising and spreading awareness around gender related issues was mostly carried out by women’s organisations, collectives and NGOs.
The Nirbhaya case triggered, as Simon-Kumar (2014, p. 452) states, ‘both the publicness and the personalisation of rape’ in a way that had not happened before and the media (both mainstream media and social media) played a significant role in altering the public discourse. According to Anwer & Shrinivasan (2012), 2012 saw the rise of the virtually connected Indian youth beginning to redraw the terms of engagement between the state and its urban population. In the digital sphere, women in India started their fight by taking power back into their own hands through telling their stories, inspiring other women to do the same and demanding justice for the crimes committed against them. Hence they started establishing a counter-narrative to the mainstream silencing mechanisms experienced by victim/survivors and challenging dominant understandings of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) (Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Fileborn, 2014). This ‘testimonial’ practice appeared in the 1980s when the feminist movement in India used public discourse to ‘break the silence’ in cases of SGBV (Sen, 2017). However, after the Nirbhaya case this approach was reinvented when young women across India started sharing their stories of abuse resulting in the creation of communities of solidarity (Dey, 2018).

The Nirbhaya case however, not only had significant impact on public discourse and awareness but also had substantial legal impacts. On 23 December 2012, the Government set up a commission headed by Supreme Court Judge J. S. Verma to identify changes that needed to be made to the Criminal Law in relation to sexual assault and violence. The first few words of the report stated that ‘the constitution of this Committee is in response to the country-wide peaceful public outcry of civil society, led by the youth, against the failure of governance to provide a safe and dignified environment for the women of India, who are constantly exposed to sexual violence’ (Verma, 2013). Following the Verma Commission’s report, the quickest and most substantive overhaul of Criminal Law was implemented in India resulting in far-reaching changes.

However, the two most important recommendations that were excluded from the new law were marital rape and rape by armed forces. Marital rape was not included in the new 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 (Rana 26 March 2013). 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 Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. The Verma Committee noted that these laws legitimise impunity for systematic or isolated sexual violence by making government permission necessary before security forces can be prosecuted for criminal offences. Since permissions are rarely granted and these provisions in effect put security forces above the law, violating victims’ rights to remedy. Thus, the armed forces ‘benefit from the boys' club protections that are enhanced in situations of sanctioned violence, committed against communities they are seriously alienated from’ (BBC 28 March 2013).

Though many feminists pointed out that post-Nirbhaya the demand for the death penalty for perpetrators of rape diluted the movement and took attention away from larger questions of patriarchal oppression and structural violence, there was no doubt that this case and the mobilisations that followed succeeded in creating a gender-dominated agenda through public discourse in India. What followed for the next few years was a series of youth driven gender related campaigns largely emanating from the gender politics
of university campuses. Campaigns such as #HokKolorob (let there be noise), #PadsAgainstSexism, #HappytoBleed, #WeWillGoOut, #AintNoCinderella or larger movements such Pinjra Tod (Breaking the cage) have 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 started globally, 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 systems 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. A group of Indian feminists (who came to be referred to as the older feminists in the debate) voraciously disagreed with the politics of the ‘list’ and said that it devalued ‘due process’. In an open letter, they 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.

The letter was signed by over a dozen acclaimed feminists (https://kafila.online/2017/10/24/statement-by-feminists-on-facebook-campaign-to-name-and-shame/)

Debates raged on social media such as Facebook and Twitter and arguments were given both in favour of and against the ‘list’. Many feminists came out openly criticising the letter for its tone and positioning. When young feminist 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. To many, they lost their feminist heroes (Chadha, 2018). On the other hand, young feminists, failed to understand the need for institutional mechanisms. Many of the older feminists were involved in creating these institutional mechanisms and spent their lives helping survivors through both their research and activism.

It is important to keep in mind that open letter spoke of a specific kind of institutional mechanism. Most of the academics and activists who signed the letter are a part of the faculty at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), a public university and a premier centre of learning in India. In JNU an independent, elected sexual harassment committee, the Gender Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH), has existed since the Vishakha judgement, with both student and teacher representatives. People from across campus communities—students, administrative and academic staff and workers—can file complaints to GSCASH if they face any form of SGBV. To maintain autonomy from the institution the committee also consists of an external expert to oversee the enquiry process. GSCASH being independent of the institution also ensures that hierarchies in the university cannot influence its outcome or tamper with proceedings, even if the complaints are against someone in a position of power (Priyadarshini 2018). Once
the enquiry is completed the recommendations are passed on to the university administration. Apart from this, the committee also carries out sensitisation activities throughout the year. Many of the feminists who signed the letter have tirelessly fought to establish and maintain GSCASH for more than two decades.

Therefore as Lukose (2018, p.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 has focused on changes in law. This was the need of the time as laws on gang rape, custodial rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace were not only inadequate but in some cases 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 redressal of sexual and gender based violence. 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.

V Geetha (2017) states, ‘Many of us remain trapped by the “unspeakability” of it all and by an interiorised sense of trauma and hurt. When we do “come out” as political actors, we take to legal redressal (as indeed we must); sometimes we foreground our experiences of hurt to claim the attention of an indifferent civic culture. However, there are other ways of engaging with trauma’. This has been central to the political engagement of new Indian feminism where young activists are trying to find alternate forms of justice and healing along with addressing larger patriarchal issues and threats from neo-liberal capitalism.

This is indeed an interesting time to look at Indian feminist movements. Irrespective of many debates and disagreements, the Indian feminist movement has seen a recent revival. Several campaigns and collectives led by young feminists working on a grassroots level are focusing on challenging everyday normalised violence and empowering women. One such movement is Pinjra Tod. 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 an autonomous women’s collective called ‘Pinjra Tod’ (transl. ‘break the cage’). They demanded that the excuse of ‘safety’ and ‘security’ could no longer be used to silence women’s right to mobility and freedom. Their demands ranged from eliminating curfews for women, availability of affordable accommodation for all students, regularisation of paying guest accommodations, better lighting in university campuses and setting up of elected Internal Complaint Committees (ICC) in universities for addressing sexual harassment in the university space (Alluri, 2016; Pinjra Tod, 2016)

According to Roy (2016), the cage is perhaps an appropriate metaphor for describing women’s experiences of public spaces in India. Women’s experience of going out in public can range from being catcalled, stalked, harassed, labelled, beaten, or in the most extreme cases raped. Hence the easiest solution to protect women from public spaces, by families, institutions and governments, is to ‘cage’ them rather than address important questions concerning patriarchy and misogyny. When the movement
started, to reclaim the night, 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 Pinjra Tod activist said, ‘ours is a jubilant movement’. There are different ways to resist oppression and the celebration of women and their individual and collective voices is perhaps one of the best ways to resist against institutions which work every day to silence women. Their public meetings also reflect this spirit- colourful posters everywhere, women singing with makeshift mikes while others clapping to the beat. It's a celebration of women coming together against all odds and fighting for justice (Lochan, 2019).

It is these movements that should be considered as having opened a new phase in the Indian feminist movement, and young women we interviewed who are involved in them do see themselves as part of something new. Asked about what was new, and what were the differences with earlier movements in India, one young activist said [25]:

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 Me Too movement. The methods are very different. The new wave seems to be agreeing more with the methods of the Me Too movement than the older feminists. 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 particular, and 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.

Moving away from focusing mainly on legal or punitive approaches, the 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. They question ideas of freedom and extend it to mean ‘equal freedom for all’ but not forgetting to question caste, class, religion, sexuality and disability. They are looking for more creative and community-based solutions that result in a change of culture rather than simply changing laws. While these movements are not without their own shortcomings, the voices of dissent that emerge out of them are perhaps stronger than ever.

Africa: LGBTQI Activism and Feminism[26]

Consideration of sexuality and gender identity in human rights discourses on the international stage has been a comparatively recent development. In 1995, sexual orientation became a topic of debate in negotiations on the draft of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Although the proposed language on sexual orientation was dropped from the text, this was the first time LGBT rights had been formally considered. In the decades since, some important gains have been made across the Global South. Brazil and South Africa 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). That year, the UN Human Rights Council passed its first resolution recognising LGBT
rights, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report documenting a range of rights violations and hate crimes targeting LGBT people, after which the UN urged all countries to enact laws protecting the basic rights of LGBT people. Nevertheless, as of 2019, 14 countries still impose the death penalty for homosexuality and prohibit same sex marriages, many on the African continent.

Indeed, the first two decades of the 21st-century have seen a resurgence of anti-LGBTQI discrimination and legislation criminalising same sex relations and discrimination in many African countries. 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.

There has, however, been a growing ‘activist-scholarly engagement’ with ‘subaltern sexualities’ in Africa, as well as some historic moments of inclusion, such as the affirmation of the existence of lesbian identities in Kenyan society at the 1985 UN Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi (Salo; Dineo Gqola 2006). Indeed, non-Western countries have claimed much of the momentum of feminist and women’s rights advocacy globally, influencing rights-based and development-based approaches to activism (Tripp 2006). Alongside the increasing visibility and activism of African feminists and LGBTI people, there has also been a growing presence and intervention by what Massad (2007) termed the ‘Gay International’. Defined as ‘LGBT’, white, Northern-based NGOs and activists with an overt interest in searching for homophobia across the global South, this has hindered some efforts to integrate LGBT rights into human rights discourses without sidelining the complex colonial legacies and local contexts in countries where discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity remains strong (Ekine 2013, 85).

African feminists have often taken ambivalent positions on LGBTI issues. In the wake of the 1995 Beijing Women’s conference, many activists felt that sexual matters were ‘not a priority’ (Jolly 2000). Sexuality and gender identity remains highly contested in post-colonial and post-apartheid contexts, while visibility is still a complex issue both for feminists and LGBTI activists, particularly as renewed attacks on sexual minorities “in the name of national or African or traditional values” have often been part of more generalised attacks on Feminism, gender equality, and religious and civil freedoms (Epprecht 2013, 5).

In 2010, a Malawian transgender woman, Tiwonge Chimalanga, and her male partner, Steven Monjeza, 26, were put on trial and found guilty of ‘gross indecency,’ following their public wedding engagement ceremony. Although Chimalanga 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 homosexuality 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. Complex pressures underpin decisions to publicly foreground certain facets of identity in order to achieve political goals, and these have been particularly apparent in much African
feminist engagement with LGBTQI rights. African feminist and academic Sylvia Tamale, like many others, experienced personal and professional ostracism related to her public defense of LGBTQI rights in Uganda (Currier; Migraine-George 2017).

Even so, many young feminists have energetically mobilised in direct response to the backlash against LGBTQI rights, and women’s bodily autonomy. Collaboration and organising between feminist activists, LGBTQI activists, and self-identified LGBTQI feminists has drawn on overlapping questions about reproductive rights, sexual violence, and social justice, particularly in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. 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 [1995 Beijing conference], many African feminist organisations have crafted a more inclusive platform. Despite heightened violence, discrimination, and criminalisation there has been ‘assertive’ intergenerational engagement with the state, civil society, queer communities, and international NGOs.[30] One powerful example of this can be found in the work of Sister Namibia, the first feminist organisation to support LGBT 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’ (Frank; Khaxas 2006). Comparably, the African Feminist Forum’s ‘African Feminist Ancestors’ project is based on a commitment to ground feminist activism, movement-building, and strategies in lessons from previous generations and the ways feminist activists and African women in the past have negotiated power.

In 2018, Kenyan director Wanuri Kahiu contributed to an important conversation about the experiences of queer Kenyan youth with the release of her fourth film, Rafiki, focusing on the romantic story of two young women amidst pressures from their families and political pressures surrounding LGBTQI rights in Kenya. Directly inspired by environmental feminist and environmental 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) for “promoting lesbianism”, but its appearance at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival as the first Kenyan film in the festival’s history provided a platform for the need for greater visibility and representation. Wanuri Kahiu sued the KFCB and, after winning the case, was then allowed to screen the film in Kenya for seven days only. None on Record, a digital media organisation that works with LGBT communities across the African continent and diaspora, recorded a special episode of their AfroQueer Podcast to report on the first screening of Rafiki in Nairobi, detailing the ways that the dynamic characters in the film challenge simplistic narratives of African homophobia.

At a 2014 African Women’s Rights and Resilience Forum panel on intergenerational organising at Barnard College, some activists expressed the view that younger African feminists have found common ground with older activists in spaces like the African Feminist Forum and Nigerian Feminist Forum, but often feel alienated by a sense that the mainstream spaces of feminist interaction are often privileged academic spaces (Johnson 2014). One of the clearest axes of division among feminists and LGBTQI activists in Africa 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).

In a similar way, 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). Social media has afforded new and dynamic platforms for organising and activism, although this has also exposed fault lines of access and class. 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. While there are certain dynamics within and across feminist and LGBTQI organisations that ‘generation,’ as an analytical frame, can illuminate, critical attention should also be paid to the ways that the idea of generation, and ‘newness’, itself has been invoked in complex ways within nationalist anti-LGBT arguments across the African continent.

Arguably, one of the most contentious debates between different generations of African feminists has been over gender identity and expression, which cuts right to the heart of feminist theorising about what ‘makes’ a woman. Prominent 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’. Her comments sparked a passionate online debate, bringing into sharp relief disputes between older feminists advocating for a more essentialist definition of gender based on biological sex, and younger LGBTQI feminists. One Nigerian trans woman, Miss Sahhara, responded to the controversy by setting up an online support community. When asked if she identifies as a feminist, she expressed feelings of alienation and said that ‘Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists’ discouraged her from ‘wanting to be part of Feminism’ (BBC 16 March 2017). In the same way, media coverage of the ‘sex testing’ controversy surrounding South African middle-distance runner and Olympic medalist Caster Semenya exposed divides about race, gender identity, and the status of intersex people.
LGBTQI activism in Africa is characterised by different styles of politics and varying priorities, some which center on the achievement of legal rights, and others which prioritise visibility, community-building, and storytelling. 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...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 a particular sense of urgency.

Conclusions

This review of Feminism’s recent decades and the three discussions of feminist activism in Brazil, India and Africa, indicate that as part of historical record and enquiry, 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 Brazil 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.

At the beginning of this paper we posed some questions about the new activism, about whether we could speak of a ‘new wave’ or a ‘new generation’. A decade or so ago Feminism was declared ‘dead’ and passe, as the ‘Post Feminist Age’ was confidently asserted. How wrong these claims have proven to be. At the time of writing, it seems clear, on the basis of the available and analysed evidence, that feminism has seen a remarkable revival in a good number of regions. Moreover, 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 and equality agendas, but nor are the African cases analysed the optimal environments for struggles around sexual rights and diversity agendas. In other words, these analyses show 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. In all three discussions we see the importance of social media for contemporary movements, both in terms of providing an invaluable resource, but also, in the wrong hands, as a new weapon of opposition.

Several further points emerge from this overview of Feminism’s evolution since the early Second Wave. First, there has been a notable consistency in the demands that feminists have campaigned around
despite varying emphases and interpretations. 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 high levels of gender-based violence, the lack of adequate sexual and reproductive rights and services in many countries, 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—for example Latin American feminists were active in the drafting of the Human Rights Convention and took a leading role 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 further contest (and preserve) rights. Their work in defending human rights has become particularly urgent a time when powerful states place efforts 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.

This view is supported by Mazur’s research which tracks gender policy advances and institutionalisation.

A number of authors have raised this question. In fact, according to data retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection (on 03 September 2019), 15 articles using the terms ‘fourth wave’ and ‘feminism’ have been published since 2010.

The aggregate analyses provided have a number of limitations, so they are used for illustrative purposes only.

These are: Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe.

Respondents from the following Asian countries are included in the analyses: Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

Respondents from the following Asian countries are included in the analyses: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay.

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

In the original Portuguese, it reads: ‘Mulheres brasileiras dizem basta: Os motivos nunca faltaram, mas, na última semana, o grito foi às ruas’.

For instance, both Sardenberg and Pinto speak of Menicucci as a fellow second-wave feminist activist.

Interview by M Gatto conducted on 09 September 2019.

In the original Portuguese, it reads: ‘Bela, recatada, e “do lar”’.

Author interview conducted on 09 September 2019.

Author interview conducted on 09 September 2019.

Author interview conducted on 09 September 2019.

See more here: https://www.beta.org.br

See more here: https://universidadefeminista.org.br

Author interview conducted on 09 September 2019.

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

Author interview conducted on 09 September 2019.

Author interview conducted on 09 September 2019.

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

Interviews carried out in September 20

Holly Rowden is the author of the African case study and has conducted the relevant interviews.

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**Generation**


Women’s movements


**Brazil - Defending Rights Gained**


**India: Gender Based Violence**


African LGBTQI Activism and Feminism


