

## 4

# Integrating Gender Justice into Social Movement Practice: Challenges and Tensions



A workshop on abortion at the Encuentro LesBiTransInterFeminista Venir al Sur. A safe space of solidarity, respect and empathy.

Photographer: Tamara Pels-Idrobo Tapia

This chapter draws on experiences from within social movements to look at common challenges and tensions that obstruct or prevent the full integration of feminist perspectives and gender justice concerns into progressive social movement vision and practice. It draws on experience shared by social movement actors themselves as well as research and analysis around tensions and barriers that exist in different movements and geographic spaces. The similarity in experiences across locations in itself points to how pervasive accepted gender norms and power relations are in the deep structure of our societies and hence our movements, and the extent to which these norms are often defended even if they contradict movements' ethics around equality, equity and participation. Chapter five goes on to explore ways in which movements have responded to these challenges and tensions as part of advancing and sustaining an integrated feminist and/or gender justice focus.



Although there is great diversity in social movement experience, there are still common recurring challenges that appear across different social movements and across cultural and geographic contexts. These challenges can be grouped into the following areas which are discussed below: recognition of gender equality as a key issue for movements; gendered attitudes and behaviours within the deep structure of movements; resistance to tackling gender power relations within the private sphere; de-prioritising of gender in movement agendas and allegiances; and the problems of sustaining gender-just changes in the longer term.

#### 4.1 Barriers around the recognition of gender equality and women's active roles as key issues within movements

Resistance to integrating women's rights and gender justice as a key movement priority can often take the form of dismissing the significance of gender equality as a political objective. For example, it may be argued that women already actively participate in a movement, which in turn suggests that they are satisfied with the movement's focus, or gender justice may be positioned as a divisive topic that detracts attention away from other issues perceived as more important or fundamental to the movement.

## 4.1.1

## Identifying inequalities among ‘equals’

Activists frequently come up against a challenge of making the case for gendered analysis and specific actions on women’s rights and gender justice because the movements they are part of are ostensibly already about democracy or inclusion. Taking a historical perspective, women in liberation and decolonisation movements in the global South and anti-racist and civil rights movements in the global North faced numerous barriers in persuading others to acknowledge gender power differentials within revolutionary movements. In Latin America for example, ‘most feminists – in the 1980s and before – belonged to left-wing political parties... [where people would argue that] we “are all equals, no racism, no sexism. Why do you include such a discussion in our parties?”’ (Elsa Duhagon, BRIDGE e-discussion, October 2011). This trend continues to be present, even in movements emerging in contexts where the ideas of gender equality and women’s rights are already widely accepted and supported. Indeed global progressive social movement spaces such as the Occupy movement, and the World Social Forum – a diverse movement space founded in 2001 – among others, have grappled with how to fully embrace women’s rights and gender justice in their internal dynamics and public politics.

#### World Social Forum – integrating feminism and women activists into visions and practices of ‘another world’

The World Social Forum (WSF) brings together activists and movement leaders from around the world who are fighting against neo-liberalism<sup>42</sup> and for economic and social justice. It began in 2001 in Brazil, when the forum’s phrase ‘Another World is Possible’ was born. It is ‘a place of experimentation, learning and expression of global social movements’ offering ‘a new utopian vision – a vision that has almost disappeared in recent decades’ (Vargas 2005: 107).

But women’s rights and gender equality have not naturally emerged within this vision. At the first forum, although women made up 54 per cent of the participants, 85 per cent of those in the most important ‘official’ panels were men (Vargas 2005). The fifth forum in 2005 was the first time that gender featured within the forum’s thematic axes, appearing as one of five cross-cutting axes (Navarro and Silva 2007). The idea of the WSF as an inclusive space was further undermined by incidents such as the sexual assault of young women in the youth camp of the fifth WSF in Brazil (Obando 2008), exposing the extent to which women’s safety had not been considered in planning the Forum space.

The most recent WSF took place in Tunisia in March 2013. There were 11 thematic axes, one of which explicitly mentioned gender. The Forum itself commenced with a plenary on women’s rights, which was full to capacity with delegates. There were also daily sessions on various women’s rights themes including women’s past and ongoing role in the revolutions in North Africa and Tunisian women’s struggles. The marked change in the visibility of feminist voices and women’s rights struggles was due to persistent advocacy by women in the forum planning process. As Gina Vargas, a member of the International Council commented, ‘It was very impressive to see how the Tunisian women managed to put gender issues in the centre of this forum since the beginning’ (Interview by author with Gina Vargas, 2013).

42 Neo-liberalism refers to a political movement that promotes economic liberalisation – for example, promoting the reduction of trade barriers, such as import tariffs, as a means to promote international trade and cooperation – as a means of promoting economic growth and securing political liberty ([www.wiktionary.org/wiki/neoliberalism](http://www.wiktionary.org/wiki/neoliberalism)).

Looking broadly, however, the WSF continues to grapple with how to fully integrate women's rights and women's voices and participation in shaping definitions of 'another world' and in building gender-inclusive practices in its own conceptual outlook and organising methods. (Source: Birchall and Horn 2013)

#### 4.1.2

### Instrumentalising women's participation

In some social movements, movement leaders have actively encouraged the participation of women for instrumentalist reasons such as increasing movement membership or creating a critical mass to shift the balance in key negotiations (see Meer 2005). Women may also be held up by movements as symbols of community or national integrity and part of the moral rationale for fighting oppression. Attacks against women by authorities or repressive social actors may in turn be seen as justification for movements to scale up or take action against violations. This symbolic embrace of women tends to be predicated on normative stereotypes of what are deemed 'good' or 'respectable' women (for example, mothers or 'innocent girls'). Solidarity is less likely in the context of, for instance, attacks against women sex workers or other women who transgress gender norms.

However, this active inclusion of women as members does not in itself signify a willingness to consider their specific strategic needs or to include women's collective concerns as part of the politics or agendas of the respective movements. On the contrary, in many cases there is ongoing resistance to recognising and taking action on women's rights as part of core movement politics.

#### 4.1.3

### 'Divide and rule' tactics around gender and sexuality

External power dynamics around gender can influence if and how progressive movements take on and sustain a critique of gendered power internally. Given that norms and values around gender and related issues of sexuality lie at the core of how patriarchal societies are structured (see Ilkkaracan and Jolly 2006), they can also raise deep and complex questions and challenges. As discussed in section 1.2, conservative and fundamentalist forces continue to make strategic use of debates around gender and sexuality as entry points to rallying popular support for conservative agendas or as routes through which to implement laws and policies that impact on other progressive issues. Movement actors can find themselves facing new adversaries or unexpected challenges to their own legitimacy as members of their respective communities when they choose to show solidarity with particular minorities. This may lead to activists questioning the extent to which they support the full spectrum of gender justice agendas, particularly around women's bodily autonomy and on LGBTI rights.

## 4.2

### Gendered attitudes, behaviour and stereotypes ingrained within the 'deep structure' of a movement

The ideas, norms and behaviours existing at informal level within a movement's deep structure can create profound challenges for the realisation of women's rights and gender justice as an external and internal priority. Within movements many women face the expectation of playing caring roles – for example, the assumption that women will organise food for events and gatherings, provide emotional support for movement

members or take on the ‘back office’ administrative tasks. This can, in turn, frame limited roles for women’s participation with women seen as ‘tea makers rather than speech makers’ (Meer 2005: 37). Deeply ingrained ideas on gender roles can lead to – and allow impunity for – sexist, discriminatory and even violent behaviour towards women and minority groups.

## 4.2.1

## Stereotypes about and backlash toward feminism

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As some of the common arguments not to support women’s rights and gender justice illustrated at the beginning of this chapter show, there are a range of unhelpful stereotypes around feminism that serve to hinder the building of gender-just movements and alliances. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, there is, as mentioned in chapter three, ambivalence by some women’s rights actors about using the term ‘feminism’ as part of their activism. As the examples below show, some feminists and gender equality advocates within movements report forms of backlash towards the concept, which block their ability to push forward on women’s rights agendas.

‘One thing I have noticed with the youth groups working on gender in the [UN climate change] processes is a strong pull towards seeing gender equality as simply equality of the sexes – that it should be mainstreamed – a sort of revolt against women in development which is to mainstream gender everywhere and not speak specifically about women. It’s this knee-jerk reaction to say, well, this is about gender, not women, not feminism. And again, while I fully believe we need to understand all issues from an inter sectional lens – gender, race, class, socio-economic status, etc. – it is also important to find space to speak about women and equity – a balance which I think those who also have an understanding of feminist values can unpack a bit further’ (BRIDGE e-discussion participant, May 2012).

‘We/feminists are accused of dividing movements and struggles if we raise the issues of women’s equality, equity, rights, etc. in mixed social movements. Part of the challenge here is that there is insufficient analytical work on how women in particular constituencies are differently affected by trends, laws, events, etc. But equally, there are patriarchal set-ups in the movements, and accepting a feminist analysis on issues will expose the contradictions within the movement itself’ (Shalmali Guttal, BRIDGE e-discussion, September 2012).

## 4.2.2

## Sexual harassment and violence within social movements

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One of the most extreme manifestations of gender inequality within progressive social movements is sexual harassment and sexual and/or physical violence against women by their fellow movement members and others participating in movement spaces. It is a recurring phenomenon across many movement contexts (see page 55 for examples). Young women face particular challenges given both age and gender power differentials that make them ‘easier’ targets for harassment. In many cases women who speak up against violation are themselves sidelined within the movements or face impunity on the part of other movement members.

Gender-based harassment and violation is political in its impact, with the effect of re-entrenching deeply held normative beliefs around gender roles, while impunity or lack of solidarity with women who are violated reinforces ideas of an 'appropriate' social order in which women do not challenge men's power. It also creates a dissonance between movement 'theory' and movement 'action', which can cause disillusionment or deep questioning within movements around the validity of a movements' politics.

### Sexual harassment and violence in progressive spaces

'The [Youth Camp, World Social Forum, 2005] tried to create a socially progressive microcosm of political relationships and life in society. It was supposed to be the space where the values of the WSF were practised. In this, much like the WSF it failed to include women in this safe and progressive space. There were 90 reported cases of violence against young women in the camp. These included harassment, intimidation, sexual harassment in bathrooms including men masturbating, looking at or filming naked women, and rape.

The lack of a gender analysis for the living space on site created an unsafe living space for women. For example, participants who were not registered with the forum had free access to the camp; there were no women only spaces or campsites, and no women only showers. Moreover, that only one of the perpetrators was detained by the police showed the lack of commitment and procedure on the part of law enforcement. [...] And still, some young men claimed it was the women's responsibility to prevent attacks, and they should have known it was risky to share public bathrooms with men.' (Adapted from Obando 2008: online)

'In the Salvadoran case, feminists supported the Movimiento de Marchas Blancas (Movement of White Marches) – for health rights and against privatisation – but it never incorporated women's demands. At the same time, feminists were openly critical regarding cases of [alleged] rape committed by principal leaders of the Marchas Blancas movement; however, they did not receive support from the rest of the movement. [...] Feminism is still stigmatised in social movements that resist dealing with imbalances in power relations and topics linked to equality and non-discrimination.' (Interview with El Salvadorian activists Gilda Parducci, Yanira Argueta, Emely Flores and Margarita Fernández; Ardón 2012)

## 4.3

### Barriers posed by ideas around gender, culture, tradition and the private sphere

Movement-based advocates for women's rights and gender justice face particular challenges around making gender inequality in the private sphere visible and a legitimate arena for movement intervention. Ideas about tradition, culture, religion and the sanctity of the 'private' sphere can be used to marginalise and silence those who speak up about gendered power in areas such as the family, making it extremely difficult for such areas to become accepted and common topics in movement agendas and discussions.

## 4.3.1

## Resistance to challenging power relations in the private sphere

Across social movements there is a recurring theme of resistance to tackling gender injustices in the private sphere. This resistance is often due to a reluctance to tackle issues such as relationships within families, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive rights. In global human rights movements, the struggle to affirm women's rights as a valid or even priority movement concern has been directly linked to a willingness and ability to consider injustice in the private sphere, as the following box explains.

### Arguing the case for women's rights in global human rights movements

With the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) human rights movements globally campaigned and litigated for an end to public violations by state actors, including torture and arbitrary detention. Although the Declaration denounced discrimination on the basis of 'sex', a deep enquiry into the status of the world's women came much later with the UN Decade of Women (1975–1985), with the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and in the midst of rising numbers of feminist activists convening over three world conferences. Inspiring this initiative were radical new ideas put forth by feminist voices illustrating that: women in all cultures along their lifecycle experience abuse not only because of actions challenging the State, but simply because they are women; domestic violence was another form of torture; and that by ignoring the private sphere (the family or the market) or non-state actors, 'human rights' had been blind to violations of the rights of women. (Adapted from Bhattacharjya 2013)

## 4.3.2

## Using notions of culture, tradition and religion to silence gendered dissent

Narratives of what constitutes accepted culture, tradition and/or religion are powerful in forging a sense of movement ethics and common identity but can also be deployed as reasons to maintain the status quo. Feminists and gender justice activists often face the argument that changes in the domestic sphere go against cultural, religious or traditional values or are being imposed by external oppressors or majority cultures. This is a particularly powerful challenge in identity-based movements where belonging and identification with a collective is central to movement membership and sense of solidarity. The quote below explores this tension in the context of indigenous people's activism in Guatemala:

**'When we have to denounce our male colleagues we feel like traitors because the [belief is that the] only way to fight against racism and discrimination is by fighting together as Mayan people. However, some say that since there is complementarity in the Mayan worldview, there is no machismo. This isn't true. There is machismo and there is violence, but we are always thinking that when we say it out loud, the ladinos [mestizo] who look down on us take advantage of it to say that it is our culture to lie. Do you understand? It is very difficult to speak publicly about the internal problems we have among us (male and female) in the movement or in communities because we feel that the dominant culture takes advantage of it.'** (Interview with Catalina, Mayan activist; Ardón 2012)

Ageism can combine with gender bias in appeals around ideas of culture and tradition, and the notion of respecting elders. As newer members of movements, young people and in particular young women face the combined challenges of being women and being young and thus expected to ‘listen and learn’ rather than propose and lead. The following reflections from movement activists explore power relations around age in movements, and also how they intersect with other forms of privilege and exclusion:

‘Young women are routinely denied opportunity and access to speak on behalf of their religion or religious community because they are women (within highly patriarchal religious structures in which the platform is primarily given to official, i.e. male, religious leaders) and young (in my experience, the women who are given a platform to speak are primarily older and, often, connected to a male religious leader – like the rabbi or imam’s wife, or a woman who has proven herself after decades of volunteer work in her church, etc.)’ (Sheherazade Jafari, BRIDGE e-discussion, May 2012).

‘When we were working with the anti-displacement movement in India as 20-year-olds, it was very difficult to work through our own privileged positions as young urban middle class fluent in English activists to fight for what we believed was right. [However] we were also very disappointed by the patronising attitude of some of the older male activists towards young female activists in comparison to male activists, while we were “little girls”, the young men were “adults”’ (Devangana Kalita, BRIDGE e-discussion, May 2012).

Power relations around age are dynamic. As younger activists take on leadership roles themselves or are encouraged by movements to claim greater space, older activists may also feel that their knowledge and experience is no longer being drawn on, even to the extent of feeling excluded from movement spaces.

## 4.4 Disparities and competition in movement priorities, allegiances and alliances

Integrating women’s rights and gender justice into movement agendas is made more difficult where gender equality is seen as a moveable priority – something that can be put aside in order to tackle a more immediate issue or ‘traded off’ to build alliances between movements on another area of focus.

### 4.4.1 Hierarchies in movement priorities

Across history, women who have participated in community struggles have faced the suggestion that women’s rights are issues to be dealt with ‘after the revolution’, when the priority issue – for example, class, decolonisation or political reform – has been achieved. Women’s rights and gender-specific concerns, as well as other intersecting identities, may consequently be framed as ‘secondary’ in movement politics in the face of identities such as class, ethnicity or race. In the Latin American left, for example:

‘The end of the Cold War helped usher in the following discussion: “my first sense of self is as a union member, then as woman, then as indigenous.” Many years passed after the end of the Cold War before [people] were able to say “we are women, indigenous and peasant.” Still today there is no agreed consensus.’ (Interview with Sariah Acevedo: Ardón 2012)

Raising issues of inequality that shine a light on discriminatory attitudes held within social movements is a challenge for other social groups as well, as the following quote suggests:

‘Gender is often regarded as divisive, but I don’t think it’s the only identity that comes under fire. Having worked for many years with indigenous people (mainly in Guatemala), I have observed that when they confront racism and internal colonialism, that also is countered as divisive (and those who denounce are often accused of “reverse racism”). When it’s an issue of class, it’s easy [for movements]: the State and the system are the villains, it’s “them, out there”. It is so much more difficult when the attitudes are in “us” as social movements’ (Morna Macleod, BRIDGE e-discussion, September 2012).

Amnesty International’s journey on women’s rights illustrates many of these tensions. Early discussions were influenced and supported by women’s rights activists outside Amnesty who provided important thinking, but at the same time there was mistrust by some staff and members. They worried that Amnesty’s impartiality and objectivity would be suspect if the agenda were influenced by a particular group (in this case feminists), and feared that a focus on women’s rights would dilute Amnesty’s agenda. A landmark campaign on women’s rights in 1994 was ‘done with considerable opposition from more conservative members of the Amnesty International Secretariat who were concerned that women’s rights activists were trying to hijack Amnesty’s voice’ (Kelleher and Bhattacharjya 2013: 3). At times, it is not just about hierarchies of priorities, but the clashing of fundamental, political positions, as in the example below.

#### When political positions clash

In 2009 there was a public confrontation between Amnesty senior management and a staff member who had led the gender unit for almost a decade. Amnesty made the decision to put on a public platform a survivor of torture at Guantanamo Bay who was also alleged to be affiliated with violent, fundamentalist groups. The question posed was: How could Amnesty associate itself with a person or group that was against the fundamental rights of women and sexual minorities? In response, women’s rights activists drew up a global petition decrying the ‘selling out’ on women’s rights and demanded accountability from Amnesty.

(Sources: Kelleher and Bhattacharjya 2013; Sawney and Daniel 2010)

All in all, this stance on deferring women’s rights, or sidelining them as lesser priorities, represents a failure to fully engage an intersectional analysis around challenging inequalities, appreciating the ways in which different forms of oppression and injustice are connected and thus the necessity and utility of challenging multiple forms of injustice to achieve change for all. Deferring a challenge to patriarchal power also shows a failure to provide full justice as defined by the people experiencing oppression, and in turn calls very directly for an acknowledgement of how entrenched gendered power is in all systems of inequality.

## 4.4.2

## Negotiating competing allegiances

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In practising solidarity and forming alliances, social movements may contend with managing competing allegiances, where solidarity with one constituency or political demand means unsettling social or political capital or solidarities with another constituency or demand. For women's rights and gender justice, this challenge tends to emerge where movements are called to stand in solidarity against prevailing cultural, traditional or religious norms and the institutions that perpetuate them. This is common in dealing with questions of rights and freedoms around sexuality, reproduction and the family as described in the following experience from the Philippines:

**'In the Philippines, the Catholic Church has been a vocal and reliable ally of social movements on the issue of land, corruption, poverty, etc. But it is a consistent and vociferous enemy of reproductive health and rights and therefore of women's groups. As such, we are witness to the reality where some social movements will not take a stand on the issue of reproductive rights, not because they are against it (in fact, they are for it), but because they would not want to antagonise the Catholic Church. In this context, they argue that it is important not to hurt the broad alliance they have built with powerful groups like the Church, but others ask "at what cost to women's rights?" This is a very real and ongoing dilemma for many of us' (Marivic Raquiza, BRIDGE e-discussion, October 2011).**

## 4.4.3

## Differences within and between women's movements

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While women's and feminist movements of various politics and constituencies share common ground in seeking transformation of gendered power, there are also disagreements and gaps between different women's movements, typically around axes of identity and around political vision and strategy. This can prevent the development of productive alliances. Approaches to sex work are one striking case in point, where there is complex and active disagreement in different schools of feminist political thought as well as between movements of women-identified sex workers and women's movements taking a variety of stances – from abolitionist advocacy for an end to sex work, to advocating for the recognition of sex workers' rights as workers (Shah 2011).

Another challenge emerges with progressive movements comprised solely or predominantly of women but which do not articulate a gendered vision or approach to their political agenda. Here solidarities between movements that have a gendered politics, and movements comprised of women need to be actively built, as has been the case in the domestic worker movement in India:

**'The domestic workers movement in India on the whole did not have gender equality as one of its key principles or question the gendered and class division of labour; it is only in the last decade or so since feminist groups have been doing research on the issue and collaborating with domestic workers groups that there has been a sense of feminist articulation of issues. I wonder if this has something to do with who these**

organisations/individuals are and what is the ideological framework they are operating in is. The domestic workers movement is comprised largely of Christian missionary organisations and alliances (because many domestic workers are internal migrants from tribal areas with strong Christian missionary presence), and it would be interesting to look into what the implications of this have been [on the politics of women domestic worker activists] (Manjima Bhattacharjya, BRIDGE e-discussion, October 2011).

## 4.5 Difficulties maintaining change and achievements in the longer term

Even as some social movements succeed in attracting women members, building women's leadership and encouraging thinking about what gender equality means in the context of their agendas, challenges arise in keeping up this work – in sustaining progress 'after the revolution' or building on initial achievements to ensure that women's rights and gender justice remain a constant area of focus.

### 4.5.1 Sustaining an intersectional approach

While the power of an intersectional approach in politics and practice has been demonstrated, movements nevertheless still grapple with building and acting in intersectional ways, particularly in movements made up of people with diverse identities and social positionings. At the level of political vision, a focus on single-issue politics and arguments regarding 'prioritising' struggles persists in many contexts. Issues faced by majorities, including 'majorities within minorities', tend to override those of the full movement constituency and membership, in particular those affected by multiple axes of discrimination, as the following quotes describe.

'Our lives as disabled women can grow as, stronger in ourselves, we look to strengthen coalitions with a diversity of others, groups that can open up new spaces – with those campaigning around climate change; those who address militarisation; those working to end violence against women; with those who struggle for sexual rights and sexual health. We need to acknowledge the impact of these and of much else upon the lives of women, already disabled and potentially disabled in the time to come' (Price 2011: 20).

'Many people are hopeful that a wider base of solidarity of people in the [Middle East and North Africa] region with the plight of domestic workers will become a reality in close association with the people's uprisings around the region. Yet in the elongated change process,... issues that are considered "the pressing priorities" the agenda for securing the rights of domestic workers may yet again be deferred. The intersectionality between gender, race, class, national origin create a dynamic of power hierarchies, and the migrant domestic workers' demand for rights keep staying at the bottom of that ordering in the region' (Simel Esim, BRIDGE e-discussion, October 2011).

**‘Some feminists are still reticent on how to act on transgender persons. [This means that] the alliance between the queer movement and feminism is not happening. What a loss; we could strengthen each other’s voice’ (Leticia Zenevich, BRIDGE e-discussion, May 2012).**

In terms of actions and strategies, movements may adopt forms of protest which have exclusionary impacts. For example, during activism in the Y’en a Marre (‘We have had enough’) movement against an unconstitutional third term in office for Senegalese President Adboulaye Wade in 2011 /2012, disabled women questioned how street-based protest styles and police responses to this prohibited disabled people’s participation, as they were not able to run from police attacks or move easily in streets filled with physical barriers:

**‘People with disabilities have lamented the fact that they can no longer move through the streets as protesters, despite the realities of their lives as vulnerable minorities who live primarily by begging on the streets of Dakar’ (Cisse 2012: online).**

#### 4.5.2

### Sustaining gender transformation ‘after the revolution’

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As discussed in section 3.5.4, in the process of movement creation and movement-building women may take on a broader range of roles and social identities than are supported in existing social norms. These acts of challenging gender norms and of creating new activist or ‘revolutionary’ identities may include increased public participation or public voice, new modes of dress, and roles in decision-making or action not previously deemed ‘acceptable’ for women. This is particularly so in the case of uprisings or targeted mobilisations against a specific adversary (for example, a dictatorial regime, colonial force or specific set of economic policies). However, a recurring theme across the diverse history of social movements is the difficulty of sustaining these new, broader ‘ways of being’ and gendered norms after the immediate change goal has been achieved. Indeed patriarchal gender norms tend to be the first normative practices to be re-asserted ‘after the revolution’. The following examples describe these dynamics in the context of Nicaraguan revolutionary movements that led to the end of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, and the popular uprisings beginning in 2011 against the regime of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, respectively.

### Views on gender during and after the Nicaraguan revolution

'[During the revolutionary decade], the roles women traditionally assumed began to be questioned. For the first time in Nicaragua women could be seen working successfully in the armed forces or in production, driving tractors, being leaders in their particular functions and specific tasks, some more effectively than some men. All of this amounted to a revolution in itself. But these changes didn't translate into public policies to strengthen them and make them more stable over time. So when the war wound down the roles reversed again and the tendency to send women back to the home prevailed. There was no profound reflection about what the changes had meant. There was no questioning of why women had new abilities added on, yet were still responsible for caring for children, the sick and the elderly and doing domestic chores alone.'

(Source: Ana Criquillion; in Vergara 2012: online)

### From revolutionary solidarity to violence and exclusion in Egypt

The millions who ended the 30-year rule of Hosni Mubarak were collections of individuals who had long waited for a chance to mobilise and effect real political change. Women were equal partners in the organisation and enactment of this social struggle. Public spaces were occupied by equal numbers of men and women. Public protests were instigated by women bloggers as well as by young women and men who had long been engaged in organising protests amongst workers, youth and victims of gross injustices and brutal transgressions. However, a few weeks after Mubarak left power, protesters who remained in Tahrir Square were attacked, and some of the women among them were subjected to 'virginity tests' by the army. The demonstrations by women in Tahrir Square commemorating International Women's Day on 8 March 2011 were attacked by passers-by and by other demonstrators. During further protests later that year security forces dragged and undressed a young woman who subsequently came to be known as the 'blue bra girl' by national and international media. The culmination of these transgressions against women happened on 25 January 2013 in Tahrir Square, when 19 separate incidents of sexual violence and harassment took place.

In terms of political reform, solidarity with women's rights in the still evolving new political landscape has been very mixed. Women voted in the parliamentary elections of November–December 2011 in record numbers, but the rate of female participation in the elected parliament was one of the lowest in the world, with women making up barely 2 per cent of parliamentarians. Only six of the 100 people selected to draw up a new constitution in the Constitutional Assembly were women, despite lists of women candidates provided by activist platforms. (Adapted from Sholkamy 2013)

## 4.5.3

## Scaling up from initial change to movement-wide transformation

Often a movement makes initial progress on women's rights and gender justice, for example, by developing a strategy on gender equality or developing training schools for women members. The difficulty comes, however, in translating strategic commitments into movement-wide actions or developing a culture where women trainees can go on to flourish or emerge as movement leaders. The examples below illustrate some challenges of this type.

### Challenges to long-term progress at Amnesty International and CLOC-Via Campesina

Amnesty International has a complex structure and multiple power centres involving country sections, members, and executive staff at the international headquarters. Internal change appears to have been uneven, despite a commitment to gender mainstreaming at strategic level. In some countries there has been considerable progress, while there has been less in other parts of the movement. There has been a gap between priority setting at governance level and implementation, and the difficult but necessary work of creating a culture of valuing women's rights and gender justice work has begun in many quarters but is far from accomplished. (Adapted from Kelleher and Bhattacharjya 2013; Bhattacharjya et al. 2013)

The women leaders of the CLOC-Via Campesina movement have made considerable gains; not least establishing gender parity in decision-making spaces. However, women continue to face difficulties, the most visible of which are in the mixed organisations. Masculine organisational models persist, and these limit advances made in achieving gender parity, and reproduce discriminatory practices towards women and expressions of explicit sexism. For example, there is still a difference in the way opinions are valued, and in mixed spaces it is very difficult for women to speak and put their problems on the table – men restrict women's dialogue. In other words, there are still practices that exclude. Gender parity ensures participation but not the role of women as protagonists or women's empowerment. Men's words continue to be worth more and women are seen as 'complementary'. (Adapted from Caro 2013; Bhattacharjya et al. 2013)

This chapter has looked at the common challenges faced in raising the question and mobilising for the inclusion of women's rights and gender justice concerns in social movements. Chapter five now moves to considering strategies to respond to these challenges, and mapping out some broad routes to shaping progressive social movements that advance the goal of gender justice and transformed gender power relations in their politics and practice.