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Locating Women's Rights and Gender Justice in Social Movement Practice



Bhopali activist Tulsa Bai, protesting against the Dow chemical company.

Photographer: Reena Shadaan

Leading on from the broad analysis of social movements in chapter two, this chapter begins to focus more specifically on mobilisation around women's rights and gender justice. It starts with a discussion of women's and feminist movements, the vision and concepts behind the different strands of activism within such movements, and the gains made by these movements over recent decades. The chapter then goes on to consider how women's rights and gender justice issues have been approached more broadly in movements with different gendered constituencies³⁰ and political foci. It outlines the ways that different social movement formations have responded to women's rights and gender justice, looking at both the gender identity of the actors involved and the political agendas of the movements. The concepts of deep structure, intersectionality and questions of who can speak for whom introduced in chapter two are particularly pertinent to this analysis.

30 The term constituencies describes the individuals and groups that make up the membership of a social movement.

3.1

What are the defining features of women's and feminist movements?

Progressive women's movements are united around a common cause of challenging gender inequalities and injustices in society with a view to ending patriarchal domination.³¹ They may focus on a particular issue (such as girls' education, housing, the vote, environment, peace, decolonisation), a particular constituency (for example, indigenous women, workers or young women) or frame their agendas more broadly as struggles against all forms of oppression on the basis of gender.

Not all women's movements or activists allied with movements for women's rights and ending patriarchy identify with the term 'feminism'. However, it is useful to consider that 'the consciousness of sexism and sexist oppression is the essence of feminist politics, and it is this politics that energises women's movements, whether or not the word "feminist" is used' (Antrobus 2004: 16). Feminism as a politics proposes that the systematic exclusion and marginalisation of women in society is not natural but, rather, is based on patriarchal gender power relations that systematically privilege the collective interests of men and boys over those of women and girls in all spheres of life. Different strands of feminism also analyse how other axes of power including capitalism, racism and ethnic privilege, heterosexism and ableism (privileging the able-bodied) interact with patriarchal power to marginalise different groups of women and also create hierarchies of privilege between women (for examples of these different strands and standpoints see Abu-Lughod 2001; Duatre 2012; Imam, Mama and Sow 1997; Mohanty 2003; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Simmonds 2011; Price 2009; Wilson, Sengupta and Evans 2006; Shah 2011).

Feminist and women's movements have led the way in activism to address gender inequality across social, economic, political and cultural spheres, including engaging the body itself as a site of struggle, and seeking shifts in power around issues such as sexuality and reproduction at individual and collective levels through their engagement in social movements (Harcourt 2009; Harcourt and Escobar 2005). For example, activist campaigns such as Women in Black – allied to feminist and peace movements – have used the symbolism of occupying public space with their bodies to assert solidarity against the physical occupation of territory.

Women in Black

Women in Black was founded by a group of Israeli women in 1988 to protest against human rights abuses by Israeli soldiers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It has since become a transnational network of activists for peace and against violence against women, militarism and war. Women in Black groups protest by staging public vigils where protesters use their bodies and public presence as a tool of protest, dressing in black and carrying placards and leaflets expressing their political views. Some groups focus on transnational solidarity with ending conflict in Israel/Palestine, while others focus on conflict in their own communities and countries. (Source: <http://www.womeninblack.org/>)

³¹ The term patriarchy describes systemic and institutionalised male domination and the cultural, political, economic and social structures and ideologies that perpetuate gender inequality and women's subordination (Just Associates 2012).

Feminist movements are thus focused on the transformation of gender power relations in all domains of life, including cultural norms and practices, laws and policies, the structure of the family, media and representation, work and labour, religious institutions, the body and people's own perceptions of themselves as gendered beings.

3.2

How have feminist and women's movements evolved?

Feminism in its various forms has been a central political framework for many strands of women's mass mobilisation and demands for equality, rights and social change in all global regions. Although the origin of feminist political analysis tends to be placed in the writings and collective actions of women in Europe and North American, history shows that there is in fact a rich history of feminist critique and collective action across the world.³² From the onset of feminist politics in the North itself, women of colour have also challenged what they saw as a limited discourse of white feminism in not engaging intersecting questions of race, class, heteronormativity³³ and colonisation as axes of inequality between women as well as critical concerns for feminist action (Amos and Parmar 2001; Moraga, Anzaldúa and Bambara 1984).

In their politics, women's and feminist movements have approached the question of naming and confronting patriarchal power in many different ways, drawing on varied political traditions (such as liberalism, Marxism and anarchism). They situate themselves within political visions and movement commitments around challenging other axes of oppression such as race/ethnicity, class, religion and sexual orientation. There is in fact no monolithic 'women's movement'. Strategies and tactics in movement activism also vary, even within the same movements, as movements take on different approaches at different times in light of opportunities presented, in responses to spaces opened up within activism, and in assessing the efficacy of past strategies (Salo 2005).

Some women's movements originally started as part of mixed-gender movements, but the failure to redress their particular form of discrimination spurred them on to create their own social movement, as with this example of the Dalit women's movement:

'In the south Indian context during caste riots, the human rights movements and Dalit movements did not register the atrocities on Dalit women, and these were excluded in their fact finding reports. It was the Dalit women who stayed back and faced the violence by other castes but the issue of the rights violations of Dalit women and school-going children was absent in the documentation reports. That is why a separate Dalit women's movement was promoted. The Dalit women's movement condemned such ignorance and exposed the atrocities on Dalit women during caste riots' (Burnad Fatima Natesan, BRIDGE e-discussion, September 2012).

As mentioned above, there is still contention around the use of the label 'feminist' within women's movements, notably among constituencies that do not see their own realities reflected in Western feminist discourse (for example, some indigenous women and women of colour). Dividing lines also appear around the degree of

32 Examples include the Egyptian Feminist Union which was founded in 1923.

33 Heteronormativity is a term used to describe the assumption of universal heterosexuality.

willingness to challenge patriarchal power in the private sphere, particularly around the construction of the family, sexuality and reproduction and related discourses of culture and tradition that shape these. In addition there are areas of disagreement and debate in relation to different positions on meta issues such as the economy and the State.

3.3 Intersectionality and inclusion in women's movements

Women's movements, as social phenomena, inevitably have to confront hierarchies and inequalities among movement members that stem from mainstream norms and social practices. Indeed discrimination within women's movements, by members representing social majorities, has itself spurred the creation of new movement politics from the perspective of different subjectivities and identity groups. Some of the key areas in this respect are discussed below.

3.3.1 Sexual orientation, gender identity and evolving understandings of gendered power

The debate around gender norms and gender power relations instigated by women's and feminist activism has raised questions around the underlying heteronormativity in both progressive politics and in law and policy around gender equality (see Cornwall, Correa and Jolly 2008). Feminist theory and activism has been central to naming and raising visibility around the ways in which lesbian and bisexual women face discrimination both due to their identity as women and their sexual orientation (CREA 2012; Rich 1980), pointing to a need to acknowledge different forms of gendered experience and hence different social, legal and service demands for different constituencies of women.

Transgender and intersex activists as well as queer theorists³⁴ and activists have posed a challenge to those women's movements that still rest on a binary or biological understanding of gender. Requests by women-identified trans and intersex people for inclusion in women's activist spaces has pushed the discussion around gender as social rather than biological further, as the existence of more diverse gender expressions and identities, including transgender and place-based identities such as *hijras*³⁵ is emphasised. These debates continue to provoke questions around who can claim the identity 'woman' and participate in and use 'women's spaces' and resources.³⁶ Queer theory also raises questions around the utility of continuing to organise as 'women' when so many people do not see themselves as fitting neatly into 'male' or 'female' definitions or bodies – a debate that is ongoing in feminist and women's rights communities in both theory and practice (see Jolly 2000).

34 Queer refers to a theoretical framework and an identity that questions the norms of heterosexuality and the idea of binary gender (only two static forms of gender identity). It is increasingly used in addition to, or in the place of, the category 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex'.

35 *Hijras* are a long-standing community of people in the Indian sub-continent who adopt a female gender identity but are born physiologically male or intersex.

36 An example is the successful advocacy by transgender feminists to be included in the regional feminist movement forum the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro. The statement presented to the Encuentro in 2005 is available at <http://www.iglhr.org/content/brazil-transgender-inclusion-feminist-encuentro>.

3.3.2

Men, masculinities and challenging patriarchal power

In the process of identifying gender as a social construction, feminism inevitably opened questions around the place of men's and boys' roles in patriarchal society. This includes interrogating the construction of ideas around masculinity, and the ways in which these both re-entrench gender inequality as well as limit men's own expression, social roles and identities and relationships to violence. Men engaging in transformative work on gendered power have raised questions around how heteronormativity affects both women's and men's activism for equality:

'I think a big challenge is the heteronormative binary view of what gender is. Many in the women's movement focus on women as mothers, carers and workers but essentially different from men, and many in the men's movement focus on men as fathers, lovers and partners but essentially different from women, all within a very prescriptive heteronormative framework of the monogamous nuclear family... we all have investments in that binary system whether we are aware of it or not' (Interview with Jerker Edstrom; Nascimento 2012).

There are now active movements of men, working in men-only contexts as well as with mixed-gender constituencies around masculinities and gender inequality (see Cornwall, Edström and Greig 2011; Shefer et al. 2007). Theorists such as Castells (2010) see the emergence of men's movements and the engagement around gender norms and discourses outside women's movements as evidence of the success of feminism in popularising new ways of thinking about gender identities and social roles. Feminist and women's movements have varied positions on this. Many support the engagement of men and boys in challenging accepted ideas and practices around masculinities and are keen for them to work in solidarity towards the goal of gender equality and women's rights. However, concerns are often raised that the political analysis, strategies and resources allocated to work on men and masculinities will benefit men and boys without resulting in a positive transformation in the lives of women.

3.4

The impact of women's, feminist and gender justice movements

While there is still a long way to go toward the transformation of unequal gender power relations, the growing presence of women's and gender justice movements and feminist activism across the world is testimony to the continued prevalence of patriarchal power and related struggles. Significantly, the analyses and demands of women's rights and feminist movements have gradually influenced the analysis, frameworks, programming and priority lists of institutions mandated to advance equality, development and/or rights.

Looking historically, it is possible to trace the collective impact of women's and feminist movements' actions on dominant power relations. Although all social movement 'wins' are contingent and require vigilance in sustaining them against backlash,³⁷ it is still possible to identify important changes in society towards a more just and gender-equal world to which women's movements have made a key contribution. These changes include shifting attitudes, beliefs and understandings around women's and men's roles, behaviour, treatment and opportunities; changing institutional practices; and changing definitions of equality, freedom and justice.³⁸

While some activists have focused specifically on the experiences and needs of women and girls, and strategies to advance their rights, many have also been part of social movements that involve men, boys and trans people and have brought in analysis and created spaces to engage the specific concerns of women and girls within them. This includes movements around environment and climate change, sexual orientation and gender identity, race, caste and ethnic discrimination, labour rights, disability, peace and pro-democracy agendas. In fact women's activism has been instrumental in setting up new social movements, with broad social justice goals that hold gender justice at the core.

There is an increasingly diverse range of actors involved in demanding and defending women's rights and equality, including in social movements. In developing and articulating their political frameworks, women's and feminist movements have contributed a range of concepts to understandings of social, political and economic life, inequalities and gendered experience, many of which have been taken up by other social movements. This includes the development of important analytical concepts such as the public/private dichotomy, the 'triple burden' of productive, reproductive and care labour (see Moser 1993) and notions of patriarchy, bodily integrity and autonomy, gender identity and the framework of intersectionality (see Crenshaw 1991). These have been incorporated into the conceptual frameworks used by labour, disability, LGBTI, racial, ethnic and caste justice and other movements to generate a vision of social change and of justice. Similarly, feminist rallying cries of 'The personal is political' and 'Women's rights are human rights' have been taken up by other movements along with feminist practices, such as consciousness-raising and feminist leadership and movement-building approaches.

Significantly, feminist and women's movement activists have promoted the need for a gender-aware understanding of human rights, which has influenced the development of frameworks for law and policy worldwide (see the box on page 41).

37 Backlash refers to a strong negative response at a popular level or among an influential group to changes in society. Typically used to describe organised responses that seek to maintain unjust power relations or reverse positive gains made towards justice or equality.

38 Examples include legislation and policies around the world setting out women's right to equal and fair treatment in the workplace and public services, and accompanying shifts in attitudes and behaviours around gender equality and women's roles.

Shifts in human rights thinking on gender

At the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, there was a Women's Tribunal on the theme of violence against women. Radical new ideas were put forth, emphasising the importance of the private sphere and non-state actors in human rights abuses for women. The slogan 'Women's Rights are Human Rights' resonated as women's testimonies moved the UN General Assembly to pass the Declaration to End Violence Against Women. Next stop was Cairo in 1994, where sexuality and reproductive rights were put onto the agenda, then Beijing in 1995, where the concerns of women's movements were cemented into a plan of action for governments to take back and translate into policy and legal reform. Continuing lobbying and advocacy by feminist activists meant that, as the 1990s drew to an end, an unmistakable feminist presence made its way into international human rights law. With evidence of mass sexual violence in conflicts, rape was recognised as a weapon of war. Women's rights advocates ensured the inclusion of gender-based crimes in the Rome Statute of 1998 that set up the International Criminal Court. Other successes included Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, which established women's rights as a matter of national and international security, and a re-defining of the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders to include the specific retaliation faced by 'women human rights defenders'. (Adapted from Bhattacharjya 2013)

3.5

How are women's rights and gender justice included across the broader social movement spectrum?

Even taking into account the considerable gains discussed above, for a complete transformation of patriarchal power to take place, alongside a dismantling of unequal power relations more broadly, activism on women's rights and gender justice cannot be limited to women's movements alone. The following section maps out the responses of different social movement formations to women's rights and gender justice. While categorising movements in this way facilitates comparison and analysis, it is critical to remember that social movements are porous and movement members or groups may see themselves as belonging to many movements simultaneously, particularly in the context of an intersectional analysis of their identities and politics.

3.5.1

Women-led movements for broad social change agendas

Women's movements may act as instigators for the birth of social movements not focused exclusively on confronting gender inequalities, or for generating popular support to tackle issues facing society. In these cases, women mobilise both as women and in the name of societal-level change on specific agendas. The political vision of equality for women is seen as being integral to the broader change being sought.

There are many historical and contemporary examples of women's activism instigating broad social and political action that has resulted in both increased rights and justice for women and societal or political change on a particular issue. For example, in 1917 Russian women workers gathered on International Women's Day in St. Petersburg to protest against bread shortages. The demonstrations grew as they rallied other workers to join, and were a contributing factor in the Russian

Revolution and the fall of Tsar Nicholas II. The post-revolution provisional government granted women the right to vote (United Nations, 2008). The example of women's peace activism in the Liberian civil war below elaborates this point further.

Women's leadership to end the Liberian civil war

The Mass Action for Peace was a grassroots movement of women that contributed significantly to the ending of the second Liberian civil war (1999–2003). In the face of escalating violence against civilians, women began to mobilise through churches, mosques, links to the regional NGO Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), and using personal connections with one of the wives of the then President Charles Taylor. Dressed in white, the women used non-violent protest strategies including public demonstrations, silence and songs. Although women were not included in formal peace talks in Accra, Ghana, women from the Mass Action for Peace organised to travel so that they could stand in protest outside the building where the talks were taking place. During the peace talks, one of the movement founders, Leymah Gbowee, threatened to strip naked in front of men (a traditional form of women's protest which was understood by the West African men in the peace talks process). This strong cultural symbol of resistance was instrumental in persuading the rebels, the President and negotiators to come to an agreement. While the Mass Action for Peace's primary goal was to end the war, its activism also laid the ground for a historic step in women's rights. The first woman President in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was elected in post-war Liberia with support from the Liberian women who had mobilised for peace. She in turn committed to prioritising gender equality during her Presidency. (Source: Horn 2011)

The following example of women's activism against nuclear missiles from the 1980s onwards in the United Kingdom also demonstrates the broad and multifaceted impact that women-led activism can have.

Greenham Common and the British peace movement

In the 1980s the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) decision to deploy new intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe sparked the largest peace movement in the continent's modern history. Within it, the women's peace camp at Greenham Common in Berkshire, England, was one of the most significant mobilisations for peace and nuclear disarmament. In 1981 a Welsh peace group, Women for Life on Earth, embarked on a march from Cardiff, Wales, to Greenham Common to protest against plans to relocate American missiles to the US air base there. They eventually formed the Women's Peace Camp outside the base. Protesters identified as feminists and retained a strictly women-only camp, arguing that men were likely to become violent in the demonstrations. Over time they staged non-violent direct action campaigns, including chaining themselves to and/or cutting the fences of the base and blocking roads. Greenham women themselves became symbols of an alternative to accepted gender norms and roles, as they had relocated from their homes to the camp for long periods. Greenham women also became involved in a range of issues in a number of countries, including solidarity with workers around the UK miners' strike, anti-apartheid and the movement against pornography. The missiles were removed from Greenham Common in the early 1990s following the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty between the US and USSR, however the camp remained until 2000. (Sources: Harford and Hopkins 1984; McGuffin 2007)

3.5.2

Men's movements for women's rights and/or gender justice

As feminists have raised questions around gendered social norms, activist men have also developed theoretical and practical approaches to interrogating how patriarchal power affects men and boys (see section 3.3.2). Male actors in movements allied to feminist and women's movements argue that:

'If we really want to make gender and women's rights an integral part of the agenda of everyone, not just women, we need to be prepared to empower other actors, particularly men, to speak with authority about women's issues' (Atila Roque, BRIDGE e-discussion, October 2011).

One strand of this activism focuses on men mobilising in solidarity with women and for women's rights agendas. Much of this solidarity and activism thus far has focused around ending violence against women, in initiatives such as the White Ribbon Campaign.

Mobilising men against violence against women

The White Ribbon Campaign, established in response to the Montreal Massacre of 1991, claims to be the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end violence against women, having spread to over 60 countries. It combines education, outreach and institutional support in an effort to engage and inspire men toward positive change. The wearing of a white ribbon symbolises a pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.
(Source: <http://www.whiteribbon.ca>)

Individual men play a role as allies, sometimes against the grain of other men in the movement, in redefining movement politics to be inclusive of gender justice, and pressing for change in social movement practices at all levels. Taking a generational view, younger men's exposure to activism by women in their communities may in turn generate new activism in support of women's rights, a point explained in the following example from the Canadian migrant care worker's movement:

'With respect to the migrant care workers' movement in Canada, it is interesting to witness how the sons of former care givers have become quite active in the movement. Their personal experiences with family separation have compelled them to seek changes on behalf of other migrant care workers and other migrant families. Thus, I think men who have directly witnessed the extent to which their mothers, wives, and sisters have struggled economically, socially, and politically are more likely to be involved' (Ethel Tungohan, BRIDGE e-discussion, October 2011).

Another strand of men's activism focuses on men themselves, looking in particular at how mainstream ideas of masculinity expose men themselves to harm and encourage male violence (see Barker et al. 2011). Similar to investments that women's groups have made in consciousness-raising, some men's groups are working on engaging individual men in processes of questioning and transforming learned patriarchal behaviour in all domains, as the example in the box on page 44 shows.

Men challenging male supremacy

The Study into Action project on challenging male supremacy, based in New York City, USA, brings together individual activist men in a nine-stage curriculum, 'exploring the workings of male supremacy as it interacts with other systems of oppression in the US context and looking at and practicing the ways in which men can be challenging male supremacy in their own relationships and friendships, as well as in their organisations and activist formations, and movement spaces more generally' (Alan Greig, BRIDGE e-discussion, October 2011; see also Jashnani, Maccani, and Greig 2011).

3.5.3

Mixed-gender movements that do not have women's rights or gender justice as a foundational focus

Historically, most progressive social movements have not embraced a commitment to consider gender inequality or challenge patriarchy from the outset. Often gender analysis and action begin in such movements when women activists start to question why they are being left out of movement visions or not acknowledged in movement leadership when they have risked their lives and/or worked just as actively for movement goals (for example, D'Atri and Escati 2008; Meer 2005). As such, many mixed-gender movements are in the process of transformation, albeit slow. In the Occupy³⁹ movement, despite a proclaimed focus on democracy and flat leadership structures, tensions quickly emerged over the movement's degree of inclusiveness and the diversity of its leadership. To highlight women's demands, feminists created new spaces within Occupy, such as feminist general assemblies and caucuses (Sahasranaman 2013).

Feminist perspectives on Occupy

'Now, feminists must take on the challenging task of placing women's demands at the centre of Occupy. Demands should not be restricted to issues of safety and prevention of inter-personal violence; they must be built by re-imagining the idea of economic justice from the perspective of women, as well as people who are otherwise excluded: the disabled, queer, homeless and those of colour. Only then can the movement claim to represent the 99%.' (Sahasranaman 2013: 4)

In the case of Amnesty International, a key member-based organisation within the international human rights movement, the last 25 years have seen progress on 'take-up' of women's human rights. Critical to its progress on gender equality was the re-thinking of Amnesty's approach to human rights to include women's rights, as a result of internal pressure from members and staff and external pressure from feminist activists and colleagues from the broader human rights movement. The box on page 45 outlines the challenges and tensions of this process, the gains and the road yet to travel.

³⁹ Occupy is an international movement that protests against the current economic structures that distribute wealth unevenly, with the vast majority of resources owned by 1 per cent of the world's population, leaving 99 per cent without an equal share. It began in the USA in 2011 with protests in the financial centre of Wall Street in New York City (Sahasranaman 2013).

Amnesty International – the road to women’s human rights

Amnesty International (Amnesty or AI) was founded in 1961 to promote and protect human rights. The organisation now has 3 million members and supporters in 75 national sections and structures and is a key actor in the global human rights movement. Amnesty’s engagement with women’s rights began in the period following the first UN Decade for Women (1975–1985) when advocates within Amnesty and outside began pushing Amnesty to work on women’s rights and move beyond an exclusive focus on political prisoners. With the international recognition of women’s rights as human rights in the 1990s, Amnesty’s Secretary General took a leading role in stating Amnesty’s support for women’s rights.

However, active internal debates persist around the political and conceptual implications of women’s rights, including the idea of advocating for a ‘specific group’ in the context of universal human rights; agreements on approaches to contentious issues such as abortion; and addressing rights violations by non-state actors in the name of religion and culture. Amnesty’s Stop Violence Against Women Campaign (2004–2010), its adoption of a gender mainstreaming policy (2009) and the creation of staff positions focused on gender signify important steps in the process of embracing of women’s rights. (Adapted from Kelleher and Bhattachariya 2013)

In calls for inclusion, women’s rights and gender equality activists may bring an intersectional analysis to the struggle; for example, in anti-racist movements women have argued that race and gender cannot be considered separately and have pointed to the ways racism differently affects men and women, or climate change and environmental movements that highlight how environmental injustices have different gender impacts⁴⁰ (Stein 2004; Zimmerman, Mial and Khan 2009). Women in indigenous people’s movements have asserted the interconnectedness of gender relations, environmental justice, land rights and indigenous self-determination (Caro 2013). Equality activists in the human rights movement have argued that the concept of human rights must be flexible enough to address intersectional identities and the specific needs of different groups (Bhattacharjya 2013; Kelleher and Bhattacharjya 2013). By bringing women’s rights into the picture, movement activists assert a vision of change in their own communities which is inclusive of their own lived realities of injustice and hence visions of positive transformation. A Roma woman activist expresses this point as follows:

‘I’m convinced that always when I advocate for Romani women’s rights, I advocate for the rights of Roma! We cannot achieve much in our struggle if we don’t recognise that Romani women are victims of intersectional discrimination based on sex as well as ethnicity. Therefore, we have to overcome the existing misunderstanding between the Romani women’s rights defenders and Romani men (and in some cases women) activists who think that Romani women’s rights... do not need separate attention’ (Memedova 2004: online).

40 For example see GenderCC: <http://www.gendercc.net/>

3.5.4

Mixed-gender movements with women as active leaders and members but without a central focus on gender justice

'The presence of women even in active roles does not necessarily imply that women in that movement have decision-making power or leading political status. I have noticed that in some meetings and events, there are many women doing the logistics, note-taking, interpretation and other support work. But on the plenaries, panels and other public representation, speaking and moderating slots are dominated by men from these movements. When I have insisted/asked for women to be on these panels or represent the movement, I am told "women in our movement do not have the capacity..." Subsequently, I have also tried to organise "capacity building" activities for women in these movements and met with a lot of resistance. The movement leaders say they don't have time and resources, other issues are more urgent, struggles have to be strengthened, deadlines have to be met, etc.' (Shalmali Guttal, BRIDGE e-discussion, September 2012)

There are many examples of progressive social movements where women play active roles by making up the majority of movement membership or acting as movement leaders, and yet they do not have an explicit gendered focus. This underscores the point that the presence of women in a movement does not guarantee that they or the movement will have an explicit focus on women's rights and gender justice. Gendered politics in a movement need to be built.

The pro-democracy movement in Libya is one example where women's activism was catalytic in igniting an uprising and making moral claims against the government of Muammar Gaddafi but was not integrated into the vision of the movement or followed up in the immediate post-revolution period:

'It was women who ignited the Libyan revolution. Two days before it broke out a number of mothers of Libyan political prisoners held a demonstration outside Benghazi's main prison to protest the detention of their lawyer, Fathi Tuhail. The brutal response to this action brought Libyans into the street to demand the fall of Gaddafi. Female attendance at these initial protests varied between 10 and 20 per cent, and the women marched separately from the men... The most widely known symbol of the Libyan revolution was, however, Iman al-Abeidi, who had the extraordinary courage to enter a Tripolitan hotel packed with security agents and expose her rape by a group of Gaddafi cadres' (Al-Bizri 2011: online).

Some movements – commonly nationalist movements – may actively include women in roles that transgress accepted female roles, such as in armed combat. However, women are usually expected to revert to traditional gender norms once liberation has been achieved.⁴¹ Women who were once celebrated for non-gender-conforming roles in the battlefield and in public may find themselves ostracised in the post-liberation period when they continue to 'behave like men' in the way they dress and social roles (Connell 2001).

41 Examples include the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka (Basu 2005) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in Eritrea.

Women who are active within movements do not themselves intrinsically adopt a gendered politics. This needs to be built or is instigated when it becomes unavoidable not to address gendered axes of power, either in the face of external challenges (such as targeting of women) or internal challenges (such as sexist statements or acts of violence against women by members). As such, movements with women as active members represent fertile ground for questions about where women's rights and gender equality stands. This may be sparked by consciousness-raising and exposure to feminist politics, by active outreach by feminist and women's rights movements to women within these movements, or experiences of gender discrimination which demonstrate the need to consider women's strategic concerns. It may also be instigated by women members within these movements who recognise a need to build up women's voice and gendered analysis, as in the case of Via Campesina's regional Coordinating Network for Latin American Rural Organisations (Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo – CLOC).

Integrating a feminist perspective into CLOC-Via Campesina

Since the CLOC – the regional wing of the international peasant movement Via Campesina – was founded, women members have worked to fully integrate feminist and women's rights concerns into its visions and practices. The first Women's Assembly in 1997 secured a commitment to women's equal representation in the CLOC's decision-making processes. From there it built women's own political analysis and internal solidarity through training schools focused on gender and class equality, encouraged women's leadership in member organisations and formed an alliance between the CLOC and another global network, the World March of Women. To date these strategies have created visibility for the CLOC's Women's Network, including by increasing women's leadership in member organisations and delegations; a strong position against sexual harassment within; and successful campaigns 'From Seeds', 'Food Sovereignty' and 'Enough Violence', which were begun by women members but later taken up by the whole organisation. (Source: Caro 2013)

3.5.5

Mixed-gender movements with gender justice as a foundational axis

Progressive social movements that bring gender perspectives into broad-ranging social, political, economic and environment struggles and embrace women's rights and gender justice within their external- and internal-facing strategies and dynamics will be more effective, impactful and representative. Yet, as social movements emerge in the context of contemporary feminist and women's rights politics and widespread recognition of the need to tackle gender inequality, it is surprising how few movements actively incorporate gender justice as a foundational axis from the onset of their development.

There are, nevertheless, some examples of mixed-gender movements taking an intersectional approach to their politics, which includes analysis and action on gender inequalities as central. These tend to be movements that have taken up aspects of feminist-inspired analysis, notably movements focused on bodily integrity and autonomy, as well as on gender identities. In other cases, when women have been central actors and leaders in founding movements, they have framed the movement's

agenda and strategies in gender equality terms without making explicit reference to a 'women's movement'. This is the case with the international movement of slum and shack dwellers.

Women's leadership in the international movement of slum and shack dwellers

'It is always women who dream of tree-lined streets, brick houses, and safe places for their children to play. And women are willing to save incrementally to turn this dream into a reality. Thus, women's savings and loan schemes are the foundation for all collective action.' (Shack/Slum Dwellers International: online)

Slum and Shack Dwellers International (SDI) is the organisational face of a transnational movement of the urban poor. It is made up of city-level federations of self-organised groups of urban poor living in slums, informal settlements and on the streets in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Women have played a central role from the onset of the movement, as active members of the local groups organising for land, housing and greater economic autonomy through savings schemes, as well as in the federation's leadership at local, national and international levels. Women active in local federations have helped organise poor urban women and men in other neighbourhoods, cities and countries, provided technical assistance to emerging groups in developing strategies around savings, negotiating with city authorities and learning about effective, affordable construction techniques. Women's leadership and participation are explicit pillars of SDI's strategy to both build inclusive cities and positively transform women's position in society. (Source: Patel, Burra and D'Cruz 2001)

In the few contexts where feminism has become an integral part of progressive politics, young women may see themselves not solely as part of a women's movement but rather as allied to social movements that are fully inclusive of a challenge to patriarchal power. As a young French feminist expresses: 'I don't only fight for women's rights, I feel myself in a fight against social norms which reinforce unequal power relationships' (Charlotte Soulayr, BRIDGE e-discussion, May 2012). This represents a political step forward and needs to be sustained, including by listening to and being guided by the integrated analysis of newer generations of activists.

3.5.6

Alliances between women's movements and other social justice movements

Women's movements may form short- or long-term alliances with other social movements in the context of campaigns, uprisings and protests or as part of general solidarity and seeking common cause. These alliances may be based on intersectional politics – for example, alliances between women's movements and anti-racist or ethnic minority movements or movements of the urban poor – or they may occur when women's movements situate themselves as an integral part of other social movements – for example, peace, environment, labour, housing or democracy movements.

There are several examples of positive and fruitful alliances between women's and other progressive social movements. In the East African region feminist, LGBTIQ and sex worker movements have joined forces to fight against conservative and regressive policies and laws affecting minority groups. Building relationships and links between movements has resulted in the concerns of sex workers and LGBTIQ people being included in the macro-level goals of feminist and other social justice movements:

‘There are plenty of people who do not identify as LGBTIQ or as sex workers but are interested in human rights, and are engaged with the movements. These people [...] do not want to see their friends, families, allies or co-workers discriminated against. They have realised the power of building on commonalities between movements’ (Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe with Chigudu 2013: 5).

The acknowledgement of women’s and feminist movements as full participants in other social movements, however, varies by context. Women’s movements often face the challenge of reciprocal solidarity, whereby women’s movement actors will stand ‘side by side’ with broader movements, but other social movement actors will not always step up in defence of women’s movement agendas in return. This point is explored below:

‘For years the Zambian civil society has been demanding for a people driven constitution. We have fought running battles with the politicians and the police on this issue. But when it comes to the content of the constitution that we desire, issues of women’s rights, and social economic rights being enshrined in the constitution realising that the majority of the poor are women and as we say poverty has a woman’s face, we are left alone in the ring. Our comrades would rather focus on corruption’ (Emily Sikazwe, BRIDGE e-discussion, September 2012).

Women’s movement activists engaged in recent pro-democracy movements in North Africa have faced similar experiences as women’s rights demands are silenced during and after protests. In Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egyptian women activists point out that:

‘[No others were]... told that their demands are unjustified, unnecessary, a threat to the gains of the revolution, out of time, out of place and/or the product of a foreign agenda! No other demonstrators were told to go back home and to the kitchen! No others were heckled for how they look and what they were wearing!’ (Hania Sholkamy, BRIDGE e-discussion October, 2011).

Mutual solidarity is not automatic. Women’s movement actors may find that they have to make the case for solidarity by ‘proving their contribution’ to the community first. In the case of a single women’s group in a low-income area in Delhi, India, for example, ‘the group gained a certain legitimacy in the [eyes of the] neighbourhood only after they started taking up community problems (water, corruption, electricity, demolitions) with the state that resulted in obvious changes in the community’ (Manjima Bhattacharjya, BRIDGE e-discussion, March 2012).

In this chapter the focus has sharpened to look at women’s, feminist and gender justice movements, and their history, politics and strategies, before moving on to consider the ways that different social movement formations have responded to gender equality issues. In chapter four, the discussion moves to some of the challenges and tensions experienced by women’s rights and gender justice advocates when attempting to integrate a gender perspective into the internal and external work and dynamics of their movements.