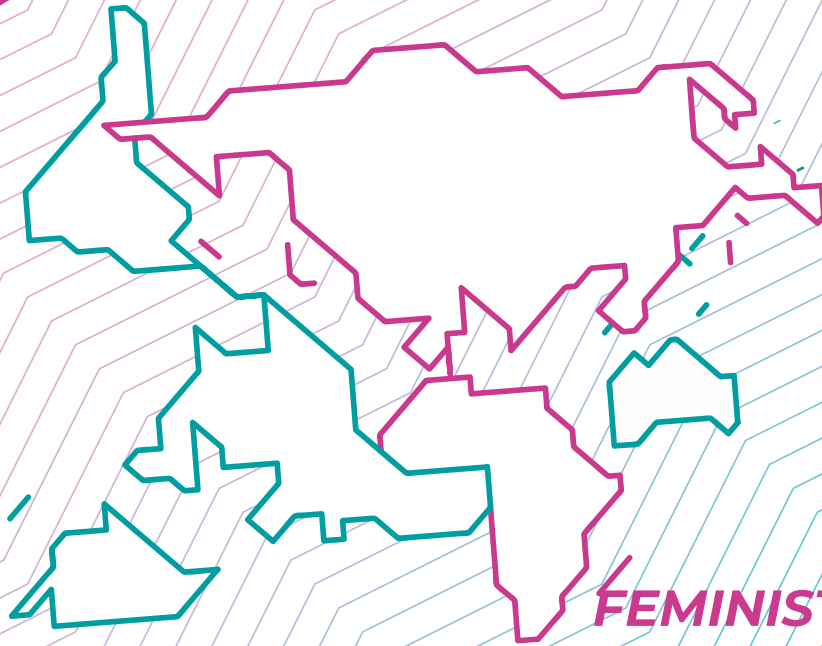


DE/CONSTRUCTING INTERNATIONALISM



**FEMINIST PRACTICES
IN CONVERSATION**

**DE/CONSTRUCTING
INTERNATIONALISM**

FEMINIST PRACTICES IN CONVERSATION

A FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL IN A MOMENT OF RADICAL OPENNESS

As I write these lines, we are still in the midst of the global Corona pandemic whose consequences for our personal lives, our societies and international relations are still completely unresolved. On the one hand, the crisis and, in particular, the governmental measures responding to it are aggravating pre-existing inequalities and oppression. Exposure to danger and access to support is determined by class, race and gender, as well as one's position in the global economy. On the other hand, feminists continue to organize worldwide to make these problems visible and to increase the attention currently paid to caring work and sustaining life and to use this for progressive initiatives.

The contributions collected in this volume have emerged from a debate on feminist expectations of internationalism at the Feminist Futures Festival in September 2019 in Essen, Germany. That debate took place in a context in which feminist movements in different countries of the world were becoming increasingly loud and numerous and were also internationally connected to one other. Is this debate still relevant in the current situation? The answer is clearly yes.

The contributions show that even in the past, of so-called normality, feminist struggles never took place without resistance and opposition, and yet movements and networks have developed that are no longer easily destroyed. That is why they continue to work even during this global pandemic. In these times, when the nation state is reappearing as it has not done for a long time and yet does not help many people, numerous feminist movements are exchanging experiences about local practices and are thus also giving impulses, inspiration and strength to more and more feminists. They act both locally and transnationally at the same time – as is repeatedly seen in the characterization of internationalism in the present texts, while, at the same time, deconstructing traditional ideas of what internationalism should look like.

In a moment as radically open as the present, the voices collected in this publication give hope and impetus for future debates and initiatives. We can use them!

*Alex Wischnewski
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March 2020*

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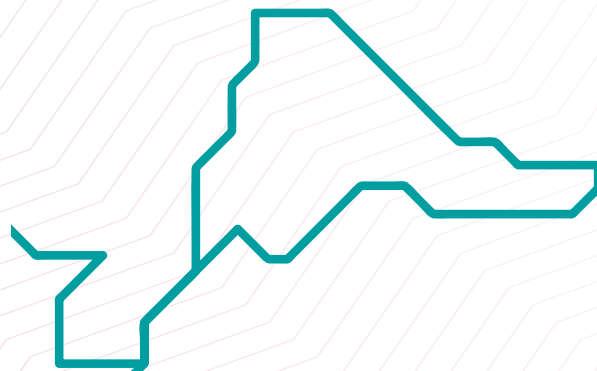
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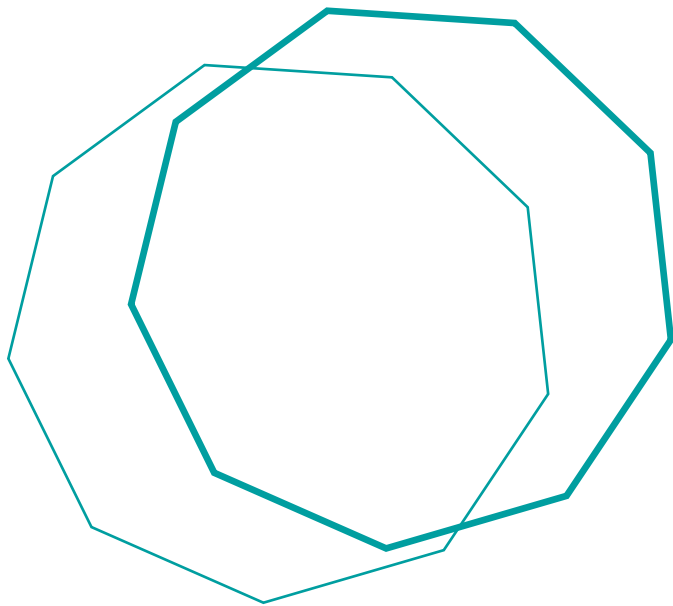
VICTORIA FURTADO | URUGUAY

In southern Latin America (Argentina, Uruguay and, more recently, Chile), the feminist struggle has shown an extraordinary force and an enormous capacity to expand. For the last three years, March 8, in addition to a day of struggle, has also meant a day of strike, a moment to stop and recover our time for ourselves.

In Uruguay, the first women's strike was called on March 8, 2017, in parallel with international and regional processes, but within a context of several years of organizing against violence at the local level. For example, *alertas feministas* (feminist alerts) have been organized by the Coordinadora de Feminismos del Uruguay since 2014 in response to each femicide. The first was held in Montevideo and since then, these public mobilizations against sexist violence have been maintained and extended to other cities in the country. Since 2015, we have insisted on reappropriating the date of March 8 as a day of struggle for women, prioritizing street mobilizations and calling for a march bringing together a broad articulation of feminist organizations in Montevideo. In 2016, the mobilization spread throughout the country. In 2017, we joined the call for an international women's strike and once again marches took place across the country. In addition to the movement's geographic expansion and public visi-

bility in the media, the march in Montevideo also grew in terms of massiveness: it brought together around three hundred thousand people in a city of one and a half million inhabitants, making it one of the largest demonstrations in the country's history. In 2018 and 2019, the marches once again were massive in Montevideo and spread even farther throughout the country. In 2018, a women's strike was called not only in workplaces, but also in care and consumption. In 2019, a feminist strike of women, lesbians and trans people was called, showing our commitment to recognizing the differences among us and making visible the fact that sexual dissidences are and always have been part of the struggle.





Each March 8 has involved sustained work of organization and political articulation, generating networks and organizational spaces that are maintained beyond the specific date. It is precisely this social fabric which is woven throughout the year, that allows feminism to continue to grow and combine radicalism with massiveness. It is massive because it has produced mass mobilizations of thousands of people, and because it has involved diverse women from different geographical points, different ages, and so on. It is radical because it

challenges important social institutions – such as work, the family, motherhood, and religion – but also because it has been able to place social reproduction and the sustainability of life at the center of the discussion.

In Uruguay, as well as in other countries in the region, the women's strike entails a resignification of the strike as a tool of struggle. On the one hand, because it overflows both the union structures and what is understood by work: as it is a strike in the productive sphere, but also of care and domestic work, the idea of work is expanded to necessarily include reproductive labor. On the other hand, as we know that not all women can stop, and strike, for example, those women responsible for care work are encouraged to meet their friends, neighbors, etc., prioritizing being among women, emphasizing that the main objective is to make time for ourselves outside of the rhythms set by capital. This way of understanding the strike, focused on time for us rather than on stopping activities, could help overcome difficulties in those countries where – as **Kerstin Wolter** points out in regards to Germany (p.21) – the possibility of striking in the productive sphere depends on legal frameworks or union organizations, or in other countries where the conditions of possibility are perhaps not ripe for a strike, as **Ndèye Fatou Kane** argues for Senegal (p.12).

All of us who have lived through these intense years of struggle in our territories dream of feminism reaching every corner of the world, we long for a general revolt, we want to share the sensation of altered time and life with others. We hope to find more and more comrades in struggle to continue learning from the experiences of the others. But what do we understand by internatio-

nalism? What do we dream of when we think of another, larger, scale? What do we imagine a Feminist International would look like?

When we think of a Feminist International we do so hoping that it is either a space for political articulation, maybe for the construction of agreements (although not necessarily), or as a tool for taking feminism to places where it has not yet arrived. This gives rise to the following problems.

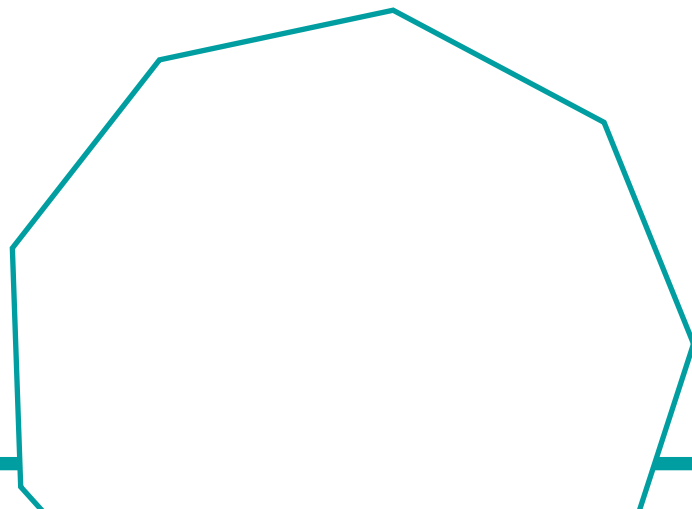
THE PROBLEM OF STRUCTURES OR HOW WE ARE AMONG OURSELVES

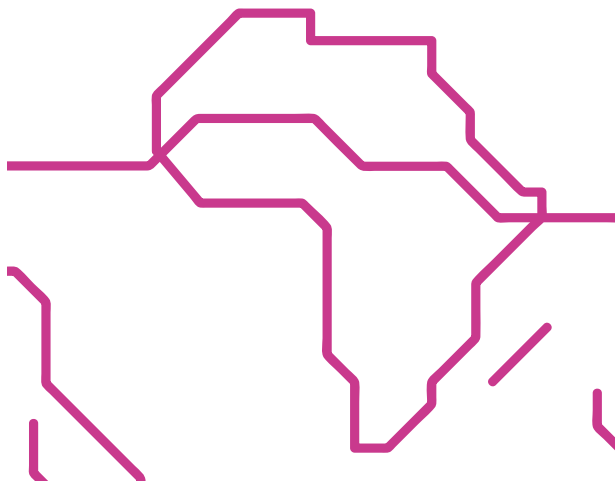
A central challenge for keeping this time of rebellion open is thinking about how we build internationalism in a feminist way and how we do so from below. We need to find forms and ways of doing feminist politics, including making shifts regarding what types of problems are considered relevant and how decisions are made or agreements are built. We need to find ways of connecting that do not establish a bureaucratic logic of political representation. We need to find forms of exchange without allowing those aspirations for expanding the scale to paralyze us or turn into structures in which only a few participate. And, this is very important, we must not allow expanding the scale to become a new form of abstract universalism that dissolves our differences and the particularities of each context. It's not surprising that the other feminist voices in this booklet are sharing this point.

We have to start recognizing the power of what we are already able to do. The international women's strikes of recent years show a new way of understanding interna-

tionalism from a feminist perspective. It is a shared synergy of common desires and organizational forms that are in tune with one another, but without a central or centralized organization in which decisions and political senses are condensed. As **Kerstin Wolter** says in her text (p.22), this singularity provides the opportunity to express different struggles and to share different experiences in a common practice, and I agree with her that it is this particularity that made the transnationalization of the feminist movement possible.

Every March 8 has involved a sustained work of organization and political articulation, generating networks and organizational spaces that are maintained beyond the specific date. The women's strike is an international framework, it gives us a date and an instrument. But the contents of the strike must be local, because we need to connect our struggle with the concrete problems of women around us,





as well as with our own problems and realities, because we are not only fighting for others, this is also about our own lives. Additionally, the ways of organizing the strike need to be local. However, I think sharing information with other feminists about this point is particularly important, because it allows us to learn about their difficulties and what they did to overcome them.

The axes traversing the strikes allow us to draw connections between general and shared problems in the different geographies, but without neglecting particularities, because they do not aspire to a universalization that unifies different realities, priorities, and experiences. Thus, feminist internationalism is built from the networks that sustain the strike event in each city and in each country, and extend beyond borders in links, messages, publications, and photos that travel to spread strength and share lessons. However,

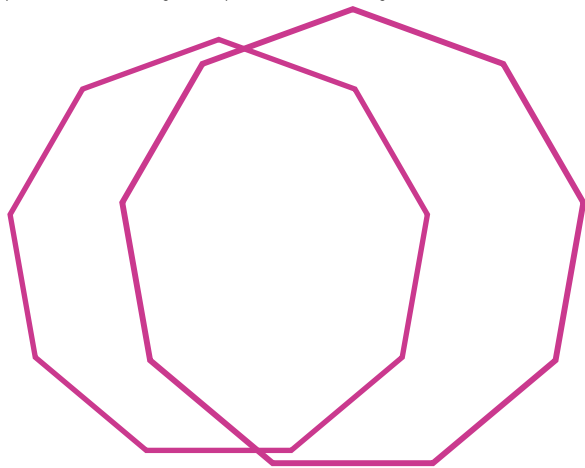
the starting point is always the local struggles, the issues that feminism raises in each territory, and starting from there, we enter into dialogue with others and connect our struggles.

In Minervas, we participate in broad international articulations, which meet virtually when the international context warrants it (moments of crisis, preparation for the strike, etc.), and also in smaller articulations with those who identify with the perspective of popular feminism. At the same time, we maintain constant exchanges with colleagues from different countries to share initiatives and be aware on what is being done in each place. As face-to-face meetings are very important to us, whenever we can, we invite colleagues to our country or we try to travel and experience the practices in person. For example, last year a feminist activist and author from Mexico spent a month with us in Montevideo, participating in the daily activities of Minervas and the demonstrations on March 8. We were also visited by activists from Bolivia, Paraguay and Guatemala. On the other hand, in 2019 activists from Minervas had visits lasting several days or weeks in Argentina, Bolivia, New York and Mexico. This kind of exchange requires, obviously, time and money, but no more time and money than is needed to organize large global meetings.

It should be noted that this form is in dialogue with and, at the same time, challenges the classic visions of the left, which traditionally conceived of internationalism based on nation-states and modes of production. Instead, we start from social reproduction and our feminism is expressed transnationally, rather than internationally. Therefore, for us the question is always how we can make local contributions to keep this transnational time of rebellion open.

Not only to resolve our own problems, but to organize our own indignation in a way that can be in tune with the problems and struggles of other women, while still making sense for us and our particular circumstances.

Speaking in organizational terms, for now, we only have some intuitions. We believe that it is not about taking a step up from the international networks that already exist (be they formal or informal, between people or organizations) to a Feminist International as a major structure – a question that **Cinzia Arruzza** also discusses (p.28). We do not believe that this kind of progressiveness necessarily implies a positive evolution. For us, the path is the multiplication and diversification of many international networks, of different types and at different scales (international, regional, by thematic affinity, by political affinity, etc.). It must always start from the



local, from our territories, to make multiple and diverse coalitions. It is in this way that we can build something like a tapestry, composed of many threads that taken as a whole constitute a colorful and resistant loom.


Additionally, our problems are already transnational because capitalism is a global system. Therefore, building an anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial feminism, that is, an intersectional feminism, is an internationalist way of acting, because local problems are understood in their global dimension and because our struggles start from the local expression of those interrelated systems of oppression to transform the whole world. Thus, our local responses do not ignore the global dimension nor the value of international articulations. On the contrary, we insist on the need to build networks and identify common problems. But we do it starting from ourselves, from our concrete reality, understanding that these differences are rich and necessary, and that we must find ways to act internationally that don't lose meaning in relation to local concerns.

THE PROBLEM OF EXPANSION OR HOW WE TAKE FEMINISM EVERYWHERE

Building a Feminist International starting from the territories is not only a political aspiration but also a necessity. Rosa Luxemburg's reflections on the strike and its link to revolutionary processes remind us that it would be in vain to lose oneself in mental gymnastics about the possibility or impossibility of the strike in a mass sense. Talking about the Russian proletariat in the context of the revolution, Luxemburg said that the class instinct was so strong that any partial problem that affected a group concerned every-

one as a general problem, so it was taken as a class issue, provoking a reaction from everyone as a whole. Thus, her ideas help us to imagine the strike as a spillover effect, not forgetting that she insists on the idea that the mass strike cannot be artificially manufactured or decided on from an abstract immaterial place.

In the Russian Revolution, the mass strike creates the conditions for political struggle, overcoming the opposition between those who believe that the revolution is triggered by the general strike and those who consider that it is triggered by the daily political struggle of the working class. Luxemburg criticizes both positions, because both deny the historicity of the mass strike, either because they want to promote it, or because they want to avoid it. Luxemburg insists that the mass strike is a historical product, not external to the process of social revolution, therefore it cannot be speculated with as if it were an abstract and ahistorical fact that could be predetermined. It is a phenomenon that emerges from social conditions as an inevitable historical necessity (which doesn't mean denying the importance of being organized). These ideas lead us to no longer ask ourselves how we can contribute to organizing others, how we can take the revolt to where it has not yet arrived, but rather how we start our own germ of revolt in each place, how we create locally, in our big cities or small towns, a powerful feminist rebellion that inspires others. In this sense, it is necessary to recognize that actions such as, for example, #MeToo inspired debates in countries like Senegal – as **Ndèye Fatou Kane** points out in her text (p.15). In the same way, the international women's strikes were an encouragement for the feminist movement in Germany – as **Kerstin Wolter** proposes (p.19). But this is very different from thinking that a supranational structure can replace



processes that are necessarily local, particular and contingent. So, for us, the question is: How can we keep the flame of the feminist revolution lit, how can we contribute locally to keeping the time of rebellion open? As Luxemburg says, the strike is a living body connected by thousands of communicating vessels, is polymorphic, it combines diverse, changing, and incessant phenomena in movement. Therefore, it cannot be fixed, its form and the moment in which it occurs cannot be determined by structures from above.

On the other hand, it is important to problematize how the time or synchrony of the rebellion is understood. The current deployment of feminist struggle has an international dimension, but that does not mean that its scale is

global. There are places that the feminist revolt has not yet reached. I do not think that simultaneity is necessarily the only temporal arrangement for a feminist revolution. That is how revolution has been conceived at other moments in history, but as women we know that the most important thing is to cultivate the capacity to be supportive and provide strength for others so that their processes happen when they have to happen, according to the rhythms and conjunctures of each place. Therefore, I invite us to conceptualize the rhythms of the feminist revolution differently.

A fundamental element, then, is to be able to be a source of strength for one another. Or, as Verónica Gago says, to be a fabric of time and strength, to find ways of exchanging and weaving articulations that allow us to deploy the struggle in each place, without allowing the aspiration for expanding the scale to paralyze us or prevent us from

assessing what each person can do in their own space and time. In this sense, it is important to distinguish the international from the global and also problematize how the time/synchrony of the rebellion is understood.

WHAT WE WANT TO DO

Looking into the future, international meetings should serve to exchange ideas, to share experiences, but not to make decisions. We have to learn about others' feminist struggles, so that they can inspire us. We have to learn about the different realities of women around the world, because the system of domination is global. But our struggles need to be local, and from that starting point, we make connections through our force and desires, not structures, even if we need face-to-face meetings. Thus, starting from each person, taking into account each concrete and local reality, contrary to what can be thought of as fragmentation, is what has allowed us to amplify the international women's strike in recent years and that must be our starting point.

Finally, I also think that an important question is how do we create international instances to share informal talks, meals, and parties? We need more time for us, to be among us, to share experiences, to listen to each other. We need to share not only our perspectives and analysis, but also the "kitchen" of the struggle, how we cook up the strike. I believe this is how to generate international exchanges that allow for spending a significant amount of time with other feminist activists and organizations, learning about other realities in the first person, and creating personal links that are both political and affective.



These notes are the product of exchanges with my compañeras (comrades) of Minervas, a feminist collective from Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. Our collective belongs to a popular feminism network made up of feminist organizations from different cities in the country. Since 2015, we have participated in organizing the March 8 demonstrations in our city, Montevideo, and, since 2017, we have also helped organize the feminist strike in Uruguay. On an international level, we have strong ties with organizations and activists from across Latin America, as well as in New York, Italy and Spain.

WHAT DOES A FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL LOOK LIKE?

NDÈYE FATOU KANE | SENEGAL

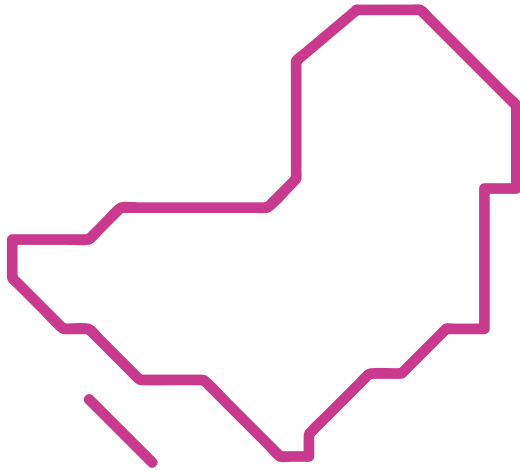
To talk about transnational or international feminist solidarity, the most important prerequisite for me is to contextualize. Before I try to understand the feminist perspectives of other countries, I must try and comprehend that of my own. In some countries, women have achieved high levels of freedom and the word is free, but in my country everything just falls in line. In line with **Victoria Furtado's** argument about different temporal arrangements (p.9), we must allow ourselves time to reclaim these feminist issues, to reclaim freedom before we can fully consider feminism and think about international solidarity.

It is often said that the feminists of Senegal are westernized feminists, because they assimilated theories of the north. Senegalese feminism has a hard time today, because it was said that they were a little white. The archetype of the Senegalese feminist is that she has been to university, that she has a certain level of education, while, at the same time, there are many women living in villages, who have not been to school. These women do a lot for the community, they are feminists, but they do not use the term “feminist,” because for them, a feminist is someone who is Europeanized. That is why it is difficult to talk about feminism in Senegal. We see, that northern feminism tries to be all-encompassing and hegemonic. But its logics are not ours. Talking about the feminist strike – which **Victoria Furtado** (p.4), **Kerstin Wolter** (p.18) and **Cinzia Arruzza** (p.24) do in this booklet – I think con-

textualization is important. When I arrived in France, I was surprised to see that there were strikes on March 8. On the other hand, in Senegal, March 8 is a celebration; women dress up. March 8 is not Women's Day, but Women's Rights Day. A strike would simply not work.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FEMINISM IN SENEGAL

To understand the situation of the feminist movement in Senegal and the possibilities for transnational solidarity, it is also important to draw historical lines and analyze the socio-political context – as **Kerstin Wolter** does for Germany (p.20). When I returned to Senegal after a decade in France, I wondered about the feminist movement's loss of momentum, because most of the feminist leaders who were known and recognized in French-speaking Africa for having promoted the feminist movement had become voiceless. As Senegal was at the forefront of feminist struggles in Francophone Africa in the broad sense, I could not understand why these Senegalese feminist activists had lost their voice, which was now only occasionally heard on International Women's Rights Day (March 8).



Independence can be used as a historical reference point to situate women's struggles. Because before feminism was considered a political ideology, African and particularly Senegalese women tried to overturn the established order by participating in the fight for their countries' national sovereignty.

For most African countries, 1960 is the starting point of the struggles to establish themselves as nations and to escape the yoke of the colonizer, particularly France. But in societies where men gained leadership positions and

formed their countries, where were the women? In the case of Senegal, a country that directly concerns me, women fought alongside men to demand independence. Women were at all the rallies, carried signs with the men, walked alongside the men, but they were gradually made invisible or were considered only to be the companions of male politicians: they are „the mothers of independence“. Even if timid tributes remain to bring their struggles to light, these women have faded out of public memory. These women certainly did not hold the pen of African historiography, but they were physically and mentally involved in these struggles. Rural and urban women, literate and illiterate women, they have sustained political parties. In the course of historical events and the narrative of collective history, the role played by women was denied and then totally erased.

Notwithstanding this gender division, women were and still are working hard to make their voices heard in the political arena. One of the first women's groups in the country, the Senegalese Women's Union (the UFS) was created in 1954 and continued to exist a decade after independence. Its primary purpose was to lend a helping hand to men who had been harassed by the colonial authority. The UFS was the first Senegalese women's organization to celebrate March 8, International Women's Rights Day. The idea of creating women's groups attached to political parties, such as the African Party for Independence (PAI), emerged from the UFS. Far from confining themselves to the roles traditionally assigned women's groups, these women's groups demonstrated a political awareness before their time, and understood that their political commitment could lead to better living conditions for future generations.

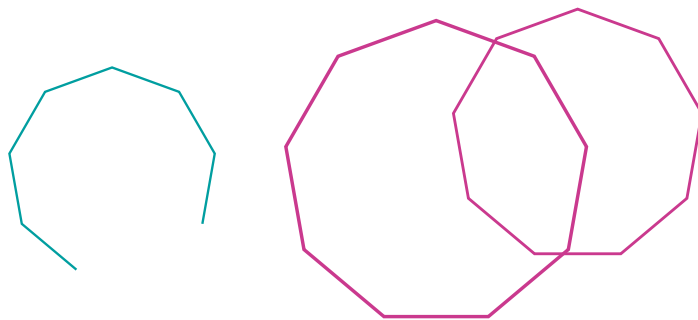
Once independence was achieved, women's groups persisted and new ones were created, but the political consciousness that was the strength of the pioneering movements lost its strength, giving way to groups that were only concerned with women's prerogatives, without questioning the surrounding patriarchy and without including gender issues in their demands.

In 1978, Awa Thiam, a Senegalese anthropologist and feminist activist, published *La parole aux négresses* (Speak out, Black sisters: feminism and oppression in Black Africa), the first book written by an African author. The book gave voice to Africans and allowed them to see the oppression suffered by women under the triptych of classism, sexism, and racism, through scourges such as female genital mutilation, the dowry system, forced marriage, and early pregnancy. But it was not until 1984 that the first feminist organization was created: Yeewu Yeewi. We had reached a point where it was time to change the paradigm, to strengthen our tone, and to position ourselves in relation to society, which only saw women as mothers, sisters, and wives. At the same time as the movement was created, a newspaper called *Fippu* was established, in which the contributors' articles focused on Senegalese women and their future in society: sexuality, degrading customs, households, financial autonomy, etc.. These articles were not only a pretext for a feminine speech, but also provided Senegalese feminists with a framework of expression where all women, even if they were not actively involved, could find themselves in their writings.

Finally, the exhaustion of Senegalese feminism could also be explained by two other factors: the intense presence of religion in the Senegalese psyche, as well as the social and

political advancement of some activists, and the fact that the personal and activist trajectories of early feminists are intimately intertwined, which personalized the struggle and made it difficult to pass the torch.

In the light of the reinterpretation of religious texts by male preachers, women's rights have regressed and now women only have duties. As the feminist boom coincided with the expansion of Marxist-Leninist ideology, for which class struggle is at the center of its concerns, the majority of women who claimed to be feminists aligned themselves



with this line of thought. But as liberalism gained ground as Senegalese socio-political changes took place, they shifted and shifted. Due to all these reasons, today it is difficult to speak on behalf of feminism. In a context where state feminism, under the supervision of the Ministry of Women and Gender and UN organizations, is being established, feminism is no longer what it used to be in Senegal.

A NEW FEMINIST RESURGENCE IN SENEGAL

This is the background against which I started my feminist activism in Senegal. The month of October 2017 saw the outburst of the so-called Weinstein affair: the #MeToo wave was born. A plethora of Hollywood actresses began to talk about the harassment they had suffered from Harvey Weinstein, a powerful producer and owner of Miramax Studios. The ensuing wave of denunciations has had repercussions far beyond the United States. In French-speaking areas such as France, a variant has been created: #BalanceTonPorc, which means “denounce your pig,” referring to abusers.

In Senegal, I observed all of this and wondered about the local context, in circumstances where there is a policy of silence in regards to the many cases of incest, femicide, and rape that take place in full view of all. In view of this situation, I initiated #BalanceTonSaiSai, where “sai sai” means perverse in Wolof, the most widely spoken language in the country. #BalanceTonSaiSai therefore allowed me to take a meta perspective and be able to bring the issue of sexual violence in Senegal to an international level, by allowing me to talk about it, through several international media, such as BBC, Le Point, and Le Monde. And, as **Radhika Menon** argues, international coverage is important (p.35).

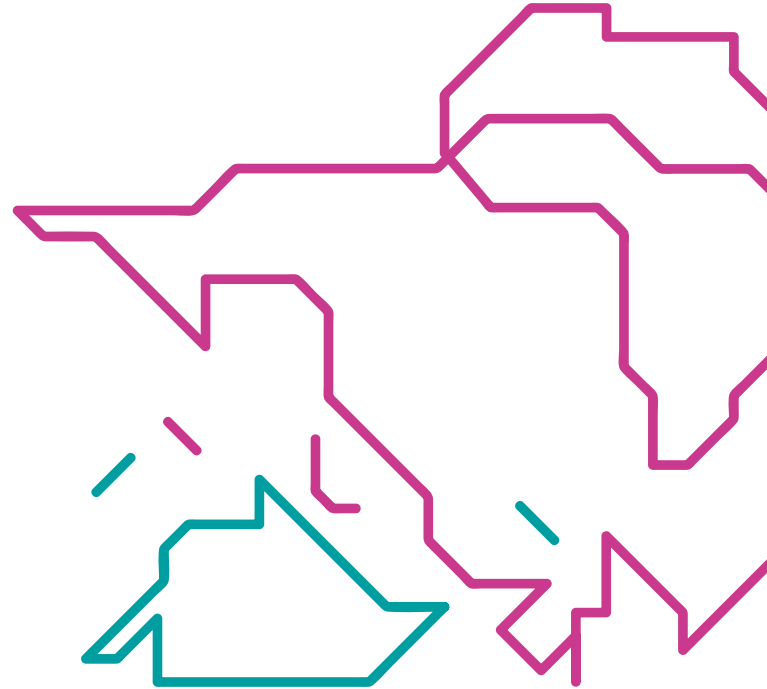
However, the hashtag did not have the impact I wanted it to have in Senegal, because it is all a matter of context. In a socio-cultural context where women's voices are still timid, a resurgence of feminist movements is required. Moreover, in a Senegalese society where the issue of gender is still taboo, talking about it from the point of view of violence is still problematic. I let the hashtag down, because our society is not ready to re-embrace feminist realities, but with the creation of the hashtag and the writing of the book *Did you say feminist?*, in which I returned more broadly to the reason for my engagement, I see things are changing. Thus, I see that, to a moderate degree, I have helped to re-establish feminism in Senegal. Since then there have been movements, in response to the cases of violence recorded in 2019, peaceful marches and sit-ins have been organized, and the criminalization of rape is well on its way. But all this is still sensitive, because of the structure of the society itself – which even suppresses it.

AN INTERNATIONALIST AND INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM

Thinking about rebuilding feminism in Senegal, international debates also resonate with me. Starting with Simone De Beauvoir's quote: „One is not born a woman, one becomes one” and its double perspective of sex and gender, and continuing to the concept of intersectionality, originally proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an Afro-American lawyer and feminist. She defines intersectionality as a framework, a means of identifying differences in order to justify them, but also to negotiate the means by which these differences will be expressed. For what better concept than intersectionality to establish and discuss the different oppressions to which we are subjected as women and feminists from all over the world? Some of us will struggle with racism, classism, sexism, taken together or separately, depending on whether we are in Brazil, France or the United States. Others will experience oppression such as the caste system or discrimination based on education levels or class-based discrimination, as in Senegal.

For all these reasons, my vision of feminism can only be intersectional, imbued with solidarity, but also rooted in a local base, that of Senegal. In this sense, I do not pretend to speak for the whole of Africa. I can only say that the importance of the debate today around African feminisms (I stress the notion of plurality) is that we must be bound by our similarities, but we must also focus on the countless variations of the women's status in societies that are both comparable and different. Different, but supportive!

All of this leaves me convinced that the future of feminism in Senegal should consist in rebuilding the foundations of an intersectional feminism, without class divisions. This would take precedence over international solidarity.





*I am Senegalese. My history with feminism began three years ago, when I returned to Senegal after a decade in France and first became interested in Senegalese feminism from a critical perspective. From this standpoint, I wrote the book *Vous avez dit féministe? (Did you say feminist?, L'Harmattan Editions, March 2018)*, tracing the evolution of the feminist cause based on historical texts from France via Nigeria to Senegal today. In November 2018, I joined the Gender, Politics and Sexuality course at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales - EHESS Paris. My research is not only about Senegalese feminism and intersectionality, but also on the social construction of masculinities in Senegal.*

UNITED IN DIVERSITY – THE INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT

KERSTIN WOLTER | GERMANY

Practices of feminist resistance – from #MeToo to the feminist strike to the performance *Un violador en tu camino* (A Rapist in Your Path) – are now increasingly spreading at the transnational level. These actions are directed against the consequences of neoliberal policies for the reproductive sector, against gender-based violence and feminicides, and against right-wing or fascist rulers, or demanding the right of self-determination over one's own body. They are part of a global increase in class struggle. The reasons for their transnationalization lie, as **Cinzia Arruzza** also indicates (p.25), in the rapid spread of videos, images, and stories via social media and in the growing awareness of shared experiences, needs, and desires. This common ground gives the feeling of belonging to a worldwide movement, even if the structures in one's own country are still weak. Feminist resistance movements worldwide send impulses and inspiration. But the current mobilizing power of the protests is the result of a self-reinforcing interplay of contextual factors and an increasingly dense global network of feminist movements.

As similar as the motivations of national movements may be, however, they are shaped by local historical and economic specificities. The internationalization of feminist movements raises questions that must be answered locally. Movements cannot simply be copied, as the

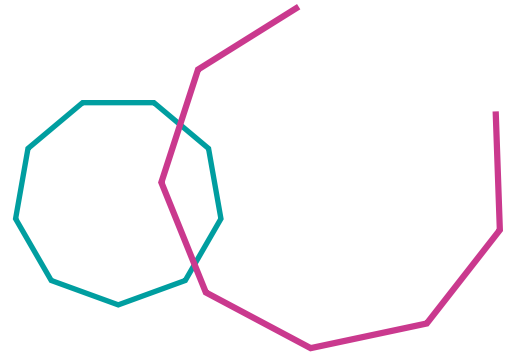
experience shared by **Ndèye Fatou Kane** (p.15) shows, when she tried to initiate the #MeToo debate in Senegal. Local answers, in turn, are the prerequisite for the growth of protests in a country and thus for the possible international coordination of feminist movements as a whole.

A NEW AWAKENING OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

For Germany, for example, one could say that the extent of the new feminist movement would not have been possible without the international movement – as **Cinzia Arruzza** indicates in more general terms (p.25). But the feminist movement in Germany has its own fractured history and takes place in a local context, which needs to be better included in the movement's analyses if it wants to become stronger and more permanently effective.

While the feminist strike movement was already bursting forth in Latin America and the US, planning for a feminist strike in Germany began with a delay of several years. The first planning meeting took place in Berlin in May 2018, nearly two years after the first strikes in Poland and Argentina in October 2016. Initial discussions had already taken place in various feminist contexts in previous years, but the idea was met with considerable skepticism, as **Radhika Menon** is currently witnessing in India (p.36). In Germany, many feminist activists didn't believe that a feminist strike would be possible due to the strength of the movement and there was no agreement about what such a strike should look like.

Then, on March 8, 2018, the pictures and stories from Spain arrived. If it was possible for five million women and queer people to take part in a feminist strike there, why wouldn't it be possible in Germany? Many feminists were filled with the wish to be part of this powerful and radical movement, spreading desire and courage. Even more so since women and queers in Germany had more than enough reasons to strike. Only a few months earlier, the latest national survey of femicides was published: in 2017, 141 women died at the hands of their partner or former partner, the gender pay gap is over 20 percent, women are significantly more likely to spend their old age in poverty, and two thirds of unpaid care work is



done by women. Still, there is greater public outcry when it comes to sexism than to women's bad working conditions or gender-based violence, which differs from the countries of Latin America, where violence and femicides appear to be the dominant reasons for protest.

Within a short time, more than 40 local and regional feminist strike groups were founded, which met twice in national strike meetings with several hundred participants each. Even if wage labor strikes on a large-scale on March 8, 2019 still failed to materialize, the numbers of demonstrations on International Women's Day far exceeded the numbers of earlier years. In total, 80,000 people took to the streets nationwide. For each of the participating cities, about two to three times as many people took part in the demonstrations than in previous years. In some cities, demonstrations were held on March 8 for the first time in decades. But not only that, the variety of actions, which went beyond the classical demonstration, had taken on a new quality: creative strike actions, feminist bicycle demonstrations, renaming streets, dressing up statues of nobilities with aprons and brooms, district picket lines that served as supply and information points all day long. Even if the protests had not reached the same dimensions as in Spain or Latin America, the call to strike had obviously struck a nerve.

A FRAGMENTED HERSTORY

At the same time, some people in left wing organizations voiced the criticism that the strike in Germany had not been as large because the organizers had tried to directly transfer the format from Spain to Germany without sufficiently taking into account the national context. This criticism applies only so far as some of the activists and viewers had expected a similar success to that of other countries. It is precisely the consideration of the German context that is relevant for the national direction of the strike. In Germany, the feminist movement, as well as the workers' movement as a whole, has its own history.

There had not been many feminist protests worth mentioning in Germany since the early 1990s. For many years, the movement was small and had not grown organically and continuously. In 1994, the first major women's strike in the history of Germany was called. Although an estimated one million women took part, this experience disappeared from collective memory and only came to light again with the new call in 2018/19. One of the main demands of the protest at that time – the decriminalization of abortion – was not met. The movement subsequently shattered due to differing ideas of its protagonists. Academic and institutional disputes took its place. A new phase of visible feminist protests began only a few years ago, triggered by public debate on sexism and gender-based violence, new

struggles for the legalization of abortion, networking for the valorization of care activities, and growing demonstrations for the repoliticization of March 8. These networks were what eventually nourished many of the strike groups.

However, it is not only in relation to feminism in which the German history of strikes and protests has stagnated. Wage labor struggles were also severely curtailed by the social partnership between unions and businesses in the second half of the 20th century. In addition, German law criminalizes political strikes, that is, strikes whose demands do not solely relate to working conditions. Workplace strikes take place within the tight and controlled corset of collective bargaining laws and have been decreasing continuously for decades. Only recently has this trend changed, interestingly, it is increasingly in women-dominated industries where these strikes are taking place.

Even if this raises hopes that the strike in Germany will again become a powerful means of class struggle, for the reasons mentioned above we are at a different point in the development of feminist strike in comparison to Argentina, for example. For more than 30 years, feminist meetings of women and queers have been taking place in Argentina, in which major campaigns have found resonance. In Argentina, there is a long tradition of *asambleas* (assemblies), which were particularly important for connecting different perspectives. For the further development of the feminist as well as, protests in general in Germany it would therefore be interesting to ask what (comparable) traditions are – or could be – taken up here.

RADICALISM DOES NOT WORK AS A BLUE-PRINT

It is not only in regard to the movement's history, but also to the specific political and economic situation, that the impulses from an international movement must be discussed locally in each case. In her piece, **Victoria Furtado** describes the combination of radicalism with massiveness in Uruguay (p.5). Talking about Germany, perhaps the radical demands for expropriation that we are witnessing right now are only as popular as they are because an ever greater proportion of the former middle class is threatened with displacement due to rising rents. The question is what a similarly radical demand, shared by the majority of women and queers, could be for the feminist movement. What would be the equivalent of a rent-cap, which was recently implemented in the city of Berlin, for feminism in Germany? One thing is clear: radicalism does not simply function as a blueprint, but requires a specific form in each case. Therefore, I fully agree with **Victoria Furtado's** claim in reference to Rosa Luxemburg that radicalization is not something you create because you are trying to connect different forms of exploitation and violence in theory, but of material reasons and as a consequence of a spillover effect (p.8).

At the same time, the respective realities of life and pressing problems of women and queers can differ, not only in an international comparison, but also within each location. Through the debate on intersectionality – that **Ndèye Fatou Kane** also highlights (p.16) –, there is greater awareness of this today, which makes it possible to build an anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-colonial feminism. We know that

the intersection of different power relations due to place of origin, gender, race, social class and geographic location generates specific concerns and exclusions, but also possibilities for action. While one person might be particularly exposed to the danger of right-wing attacks or prevented from obtaining legal residence status by national isolationist policies, another is fighting against her precarious position as a nurse as a result of neoliberal rationalization in the health care system.

This is precisely where the feminist strike comes in. Its uniqueness lies in providing the opportunity to express these different struggles and to share different experiences through a common practice. It could even be said that it was this feature that made the transnationalization of the feminist movement possible in the first place. Only the variety of issues and forms of the collective strike seems to be able to address women and queers in their different contradictions and practices at present, while at the same time rendering visible the full size and complexity of the problem. Openness and diversity are precisely the particular strengths of this movement.

In the medium term, however, the question will arise as to whether and how these qualities can be used to develop sufficient power for fundamentally transforming this world. In view of recent global political developments, there is also an urgent need to consider whether there can and should be institutionalized forms of exchange and decision-making at the European and international levels. This is especially urgent given the background of the international network of right-wing organizations and parties, which are the feminist movement's most dangerous enemy, as **Radhika Menon** points out very clearly for the case of India (p.30).

So, the question arises of whether or not we need something like a Feminist International – and if so, how it should be built?

To address this question, it is worth looking back, because the idea of a Feminist International is not new. At the beginning of the 20th century, the proletarian workers' movement came together several times for an international socialist women's conference and founded the Socialist Women's International at its first congress in Stuttgart in 1907 – initiated and coordinated by Clara Zetkin, who was a key figure of German social democracy at the time. Participation was regulated by a system of delegates and decisions were binding for social democratic parties in every country.

This form of organization does not seem to be a suitable model for today's international feminist strike movement. In contrast to the Socialist Women's International 100 years ago, the movement today is not organized in parties in the respective countries that could issue delegates and mandates. While agreeing with **Victoria Furtado** that this is not a suitable form for a Feminist International of today (p.8), we must also recognize that movements that do not create binding structures run the risk of becoming undemocratic sooner or later, or of disintegrating after success or failure. A practical answer to these contradictions is not yet in sight, but there are increasingly more forums for discussing what an international network of feminist movements could look like. In Latin America and the Caribbean, transnational meetings of feminists have been

taking place since 1981. After the women's strike in Switzerland in June 2019, an invitation was extended to the first meeting of European feminist activists in Geneva. At the *Encuentro Plurinacional de las que Luchan* (plurinational meeting of women and queers) in Chile in January 2020, there were discussions of hosting an international meeting. The international network that is emerging is becoming increasingly consolidated.

Beyond international meetings, individual actions could also be better coordinated, as **Cinzia Arruzza** stresses in her piece (p.26). It is especially important that the feminist strike movement began in countries of the Global South and the periphery of Europe. This is an opportunity, but above all a task for the women and queers in the Global North and the center of Europe. Due to the globalization of the economy and financial markets and mass access to knowledge and information through the internet, the connections between global processes are better understood today than ever before by the majority of people. The international climate movement has played a major role in ensuring that nobody can deny that how we produce and consume in the Global North has direct impacts on pollution and exploitation in the Global South. When Germany supplies weapons to Turkey, which is waging a war against the Kurds in Northern Syria, or when European companies in Latin America engage in extractivism, local resistance alone is not enough. However, international resistance requires functioning local structures. One does not work without the other. It is in this dialectic where the feminist movement must build its own, new, Feminist International. It is still at the very beginning.



I am a co-organizer of the feminist strike on March 8 in Germany. I am active in the strike committee in Berlin, building a network of various local committees. Women and queer people with different backgrounds (social status, age, migration background, gender) are present in our local and nationwide meetings, and we have also had exchanges with activists organizing feminist strikes in many other countries, primarily in Europe. Prior to that, I was involved in the alliance for organizing the demonstrations on March 8, which took place annually starting in 2014. I'm also an active member of the left-wing political party DIE LINKE.

ACROSS BORDERS, AGAINST BORDERS: WHY WE NEED A TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT

CINZIA ARRUZZA | USA

Originating in Poland and Argentina in October 2016, the feminist strike movement has continued to mobilize millions of people around the globe for the past three and a half years, organizing three consecutive feminist strikes on International Women's Day, as well as transnational days of mobilization against gender-based violence and international festivals and gatherings. This transnational dimension has been a constitutive feature of the movement and is key to understanding the conditions that made its growth and mass appeal possible.

STARTING FROM INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND INSPIRATION

The examples are many. The mass feminist strikes in Poland and Argentina in October 2016 gave impulse to the organization of a 150,000 strong demonstration against gender-based violence in Rome in November 2016, which sanctioned the beginning of a feminist mass movement in Italy. These mobilizations prepared the ground for calling the first coordinated transnational feminist strike on March 8, 2017. This call is what gave impulse to the creation of a national network for organizing the strike in the United States, the International Women's Strike (IWS). As several countries involved in the mobilization were countries from the Global South

(e.g. Argentina and Uruguay, as described by **Victoria Furtado**, p.4) that have been targets, militarily, politically, or economically, of the United States' imperial politics, the first motivation for organizing the strike in 2017 was the desire to express solidarity towards the feminists going on strike in those countries and to take advantage of our location at the heart of the empire to give global visibility to their movements.

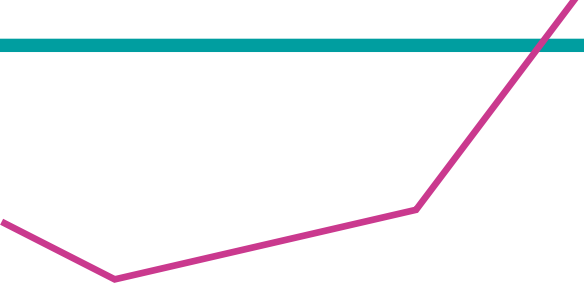
There were also specific local reasons to call for a women's strike. The enormous participation in the Women's March in Washington, on 21 January 2017, had opened a possibility for the rebirth of a mass feminist mobilization. Moreover, Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election marked an impasse of the political and cultural hegemony of liberal feminism. The call for a women's strike was meant to take advantage of this impasse in order to put forward an alternative to liberal feminism: a class-based, anti-racist feminism, inclusive of trans women, and queer and non-binary people. Finally, the adoption of the term "strike" was meant to contribute to the political re-legitimization of the term "strike" in the United States, in a situation characterized by the constant decline both in the rate of unionization and of strikes and by repressive labor legislation, which makes it impossible to call for legal general strikes – as **Kerstin Wolter** also describes in the German context (p.21).

The women's strike in the United States caused non-conventional work stoppage in three school districts, and gave visibility to labor organizations where the majority of workers are women. However, this kind of intervention would have not been possible without the strength of the international feminist movement.

The following year the call resonated further to other countries where feminists started organizing after being inspired by the movement happening abroad. When feminist activists in Spain decided to organize a productive and reproductive strike on March 8, 2018, it was because they had been inspired by the mass dimension of feminist strikes in other countries: the global visibility of the strikes and mass demonstrations of the previous year contributed greatly not only to the motivations for organizing the strike, but also to its mass appeal and success (five million people on strike in 2018, six million in

2019). A similar dynamic occurred in countries such as Chile, Belgium, Germany – as described by **Kerstin Wolter** (p.19) – and Switzerland, which organized their first strikes in 2019. It could be seen at work in late 2019 in the immediate global appeal of the powerful performance *Un violador en tu camino* (A Rapist in Your Path) created by the Chilean collective Las Tesis to protest State violence against women. When the images of hundreds of women collectively performing A Rapist in Your Path in Chile – in the midst of a phenomenal mass rebellion against Piñera's governments, in which the feminist movement played an important role – started circulating on social and mass media, the performance was immediately translated and adapted into several other languages, including native languages under threat of extinction, and staged in dozens of countries by different feminist movements and collectives. In all these instances, and in several others that could be mentioned, the transnational character of the movement helps explain its mass appeal on a national or local level. This resonance was also made possible by the fact that, although often responding to events, social conditions, and policies occurring in their respective countries, from the beginning, the various movements articulated the transnational and national levels together: for example, by opposing xenophobic migration policies and national borders, protesting against transnational debt policies, organizing around climate change, and denouncing various forms of neo-colonialism. In the United States, for example, some strike actions included flash mobs or other kinds of protest in front of immigrant detention centers.

In this respect, the new feminist wave places itself in the wake of a number of mass mobilizations from the past



two decades, which took on an international dimension from the very beginning: the Global Justice and the anti-war movements from the early 2000s as well as the new season of mass mobilizations that followed the 2008 financial crisis (Occupy, Indignados, Taksim Square, the Arab revolutions). Of course, international solidarity and resonance are not a new characteristic of social struggles: it suffices to think of 1968 and the anti-Vietnam War movement. However, the past two decades of international mobilizations have represented a break with the emphasis on political localism, which had become predominant among left circles in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, the annihilation of space by time accomplished by capitalism (with its impressive development of the means of communication and transportation) makes virtual political coordination among movements much easier than in the past and allows news, images, slogans, analyses, and programs to circulate at an unprecedented speed.

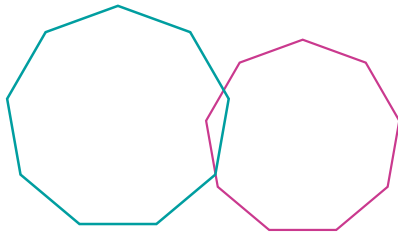
FROM INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY TO TRANSNATIONAL COORDINATION

While international solidarity obviously should be pursued, it is not sufficient. What is needed, as argued by **Kerstin Wolter** (p.22), is a capacity for transnational self-organiz-

ation and coordination (which means having regular meetings online, organizing transnational meetings in person where movement activists can make collective decisions together, thinking about creating accountable and more stable transnational coordinating bodies, drafting common documents, and so on) and this for at least three reasons. The first is that capitalism increasingly operates on a transnational level and has developed powerful transnational institutions and forms of cooperation and coordination. These processes of global organization occurred at a moment when the left landscape was becoming increasingly fragmented and dispersed, following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Today value chains connect capitalist production across the globe and workforces employed under hugely different conditions. Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the executive institutions of the Eurozone set increasingly rigid constraints to what can be achieved through national politics. Political possibilities on a national level are severely limited by transnational trade agreements destroying labor rights, the pressure of international debt destroying welfare, and the omnipresent threat of financial terrorism through an increasingly pervasive and internationally integrated financial market. Furthermore, transnationalization of capitalism also means an increase in the circulation of people across borders, often in response to conflict, debt, and ecological crisis, which, in its turn, has led to an increasingly transnational management of immigration: it suffices to think of the role of Frontex for the European Union's management of immigration, of the infamous EU-Turkey migration deal, and of the various bilateral agreements for opening and managing hotspots and detention centers outside the geographical borders of the European Union and the United States. Obviously, it would be mistaken to think

that capitalist globalization entails a homogenization of living and working conditions on a global level. On the contrary, the global capitalist market is predicated on the multiplication of diverse forms and sites of oppression, and on the creation of further social hierarchies and unequal social positions. However, analyzing the complex dynamics of capitalist accumulation on a global scale means pointing out the internal connections between these different forms of oppression and uneven conditions, and it enables us to identify a common ground for struggle, without, for this reason, making abstraction from differences.

The second reason is rather obvious: climate change, a consequence of capitalism's drive toward enlarged accumulation, is a global phenomenon which cannot be addressed at the level of the nation state alone. A renewable energy transition would require a complete re-organization



of transnational supply chains. One of the dangers is that this re-organization will be accomplished – if it ever will – in such a way as to reproduce and perpetuate the social injustice and inequalities of the past and of the present. For example, an increase in lithium extraction, which a renewable energy transition would require, would put immediate pressure on Indigenous people in Chile, contributing to their ongoing dispossession. Increased extractivism in the

Democratic Republic of Congo, the world's largest supplier of cobalt, would raise the issue of both labor conditions and environmental destruction in those areas. The youth strikes organized by the Fridays for Future movement in 2019 showed an awareness not only of the necessity of acting together across borders, but also of denouncing postcolonial and neocolonial extractivism, the global inequalities in the distribution of the burden of climate change's catastrophic effects, and the destruction of Indigenous communities and lives (consider, for example, Jair Bolsonaro's politics of dispossession and deforestation in the Amazon forest).

The third reason has to do with the current political landscape and the political processes detailed, for example, in **Radhika Menon's** piece (p.30). In the past few years we have witnessed the rise of a dangerous, racist, and reactionary new right, which has managed to gain power in a number of key countries: Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Narendra Modi in India, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines to name a few. These new right-wing political forces as well as right-wing authoritarians such as Vladimir Putin have been extremely active across borders in recent years, forging international alliances and coordinating their assault on women, LGBTQ+, and racialized people. One prominent example is the World Congress of Families, which took place in Verona at the end of March 2019. Indeed, the crusade against so-called gender ideology and the attack on women's and queer people's basic rights characterize all of these right-wing formations without exception. In the face of a coordinated transnational backlash against women and queer people's self-determination and freedom, we need transnationally coordinated responses.

None of the above means that nation states have disappeared or entirely lost their role, or that the movement should abandon the local and national terrain for an abstract internationalism. It rather indicates that – as suggested by **Victoria Furtado** (p.7) –the complex imbrication of national and transnational dimensions should be always taken into account in our organizing. Social and political movements with the aspiration of changing society root and branch need to be able to operate at both levels. This requires a capacity not only for international solidarity, but also for transnational coordination and action. March 8 strikes have pointed in this direction, but have not yet produced an adequate level of discussion about the transnational dimension of the movement and how to strengthen it.

THE MEANING OF A FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL

What **Ndèye Fatou Kane** writes about her experience with trying to launch the equivalent of the #MeToo movement in Senegal (p.15) should alert us to the difficulties inherent in transnational organizing. The fact that we live in an increasingly interconnected world does not mean that political and social processes can be mechanically exported from one context to another. For example, in the United States the feminist strike movement has not managed to gain momentum and the experience of the Women's Marches has failed to turn into a sustained grassroots mass movement due to both its NGO-like undemocratic organizational form and significant pressures and even direct attacks coming from the Democratic Party's establishment, and this in spite of the relentless attack on basic women's rights, especially abortion, by the Trump administration

and by Republican administrations at a State level. Local conditions and political dynamics, the local sedimentation of a history of past struggles and their defeats or victories are factors that play a determining role: the movement cannot spread at the same time and to the same extent to all countries, for local conditions of possibility must be in place as well. There will never be a moment in which there will be perfect synchrony: there is no global clock that says "revolution time" marking the beginning of a simultaneous global uprising. By the same token, there is no blueprint for a feminist international that can be mechanically applied. Rather, we should understand the global expansion of the movement and its transnational coordination as an ongoing process of politicization, radicalization, and self-organization. This process will be studded with failures and mistakes, roads taken and later abandoned, that is, with all the incertitude of practical experimentation and the lessons we can draw from it. When the slogan of a feminist international started spreading starting from Argentina, what was meant by it was not a plan for a well-defined international political organization, with its rules and statuses, but rather the expression of the awareness of the constitutive transnational dimension of the movement, of the process of self-organization at a transnational level from below, through the struggle.

It is impossible to predict at this stage the precise organizational form that a Feminist International should or could take. Given the challenges we face due to the transnationalization of capitalism, while **Victoria Furtado** is right that we should not be afraid of "the multiplication and diversification of many international networks, of different types and scales," (p.8) it is also possible to imagine the organization, for example, of macro-region meetings representative of

the feminist strike movement, where collective decisions can be made and strategies can be developed. This would probably strengthen the movement and give new energies and ideas to activists operating on the ground in the various countries. It would be a step forward in the direction of moving from a position of resistance to one of offensive. Moreover, organizing macro-region meetings would be a first step in the direction of the consolidation of transnational networks of activists and organizations. It is a matter of starting a process and then seeing where it leads us, with the awareness that we will probably need to go through trials and errors, but also that it is worth taking this path because the stakes are high. The racists and misogynists of the world are meeting and strategizing across borders and strengthening their international of reaction: it is time we also meet in person and discuss across borders, share experiences, slogans, texts, envisage common strategies, and make decisions together without, for this reason, jeopardizing the autonomy of the various movements.

I was one of the organizers of the Women's Strike in the US in 2017 and 2018. Together with Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser, I wrote Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto, which is in circulation in more than twenty languages. Both my activity as an organizer and as an author have given me the opportunity to travel to several countries with strong feminist movements, to engage in interviews and meetings with activists, and to participate in assemblies and events of the movement. What follows is informed by these experiences and by the ideas and analyses of the comrades with whom I had the privilege to discuss at length.

SHRINKING DEMOCRATIC SPACES IN INDIA AND THE NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST SOLIDARITY —

RADHIKA MENON | INDIA

It is difficult to situate the women's movement and the struggle for rights in India, without understanding its deep connection with the condition of democracy in the country. Democracy is in a state of ill health and facing an unprecedented challenge today, following the electoral foisting to power of a government, whose commitment to democracy is far less than its commitment to the establishment of a political-religious Hindutava state. Right wing populism and authoritarianism were the chosen horses for riding to power, but following achievement of power, political hegemony has been established through fascist mob justice as well as electoral maneuvering. The result has been a steady erosion of democratic structures and processes within the country. It must, however, be emphasized that India has reached this stage after nearly three decades of neoliberalism. Since 2011, following the global crisis of capital the descent has been steady. Policies of globalization, liberalization, and privatization washed away the social safety net elements of the Indian state, leaving people and mostly women extremely vulnerable to shocks. Growing unemployment, agrarian crisis, and low growth rates have limited the opportunities for large masses of people and the malaise has taken the form of farmer suicides and the targeting of vulnerable communities in resource fights. Politically, the centrist and regional ruling class parties have been discredited as they have not been able to offer any credible alternatives



to the distress. On the other hand, the uncertainties and anxieties have been mobilized by right wing organizations to widen the historical inequalities based on caste, prejudice, and religious communal divides. In 2014, the capture of national political space was complete with the formation of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

MUSCULAR HYPER NATIONALISM AND SABOTAGE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Right wing authoritarianism has thrived on muscular hyper nationalism that has found strong support from

corporate mainstream media, which has often acted as a propaganda machine for the regime. The push for a majoritarian communal nationalism has been led by the parent organization of BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which emphasizes Hindu supremacy. This religious 'national' mobilization has been focused around a communal culture that promotes the control of women, prioritizing duties over rights, and vilifying minorities, particularly Muslims. Mythical strengths have been attributed to Mr. Modi's leadership, who is often presented as a strong-man patriarch who is setting things in order. The outcome of the decisions is rarely what matters, with emphasis mainly on the muscularity of the actions, whether regarding monetary policy, the economy, foreign policy, defense policy, or law making. There has also been a demonization of socially liberal values, undermining of the democratic structures of the state, and intolerance towards diversity, disdain for intellectual discourses including feminist discourses, and crackdowns on democratic dissent. Women are tolerated only as long as they fit into a narrative of honor and considered worthy of being "rescued" according to the patriarchal Hindutava politics. Support by the regime for socially conservative attacks on dissent has also increased vicious slandering of women, who transgress and stand up and assert themselves.

Patriarchal mobilization around communal and caste formations have led to attack on women's choices in companionship and mobility and killings based on misplaced ideas of "honor". Women's democratic choices thus have been curtailed both by hypernational authoritarianism of the state machinery as well as fascist mob mobilizations. The latter have even enjoyed impunity

when found engaged in mass violence, when their policies are aligned with the regime.

It must be remembered that the last decade in India has also seen energetic articulation and mobilizations around women's freedom, choices and consent, mass awareness of rape culture and sexual violence, and holding the state accountable for institutional violations of women and children. There have been mobilizations over women's rights to the city, work and mobility, and massive mobilization of women rural workers. The wide variety of concerns voiced by feminists also have expanded the spaces available to women. Public discourses that reeked of sexism have been called out and social media has been deployed to make this criticism reach further. However, the Hindutava nationalist regime has tried to push the achievements of women's movement back by decades.



Women in physical and virtual spaces are threatened by conservative forces through relentless promotion of misogyny, normalization of sexism, and objectification of women. The rise of Hindutava politics at the same time has institutionalized state's concern for women within the framework of majoritarian hypernationalism. Women are hence treated as pawns, without any agency of their own and needing to be rescued from the "other". For instance, the regime's favored girl child program with its slogan of "save the daughters, educate them", confines girls to the actions of patriarchs in society. Hindu women have been restrained by both state and non-state actors from entering into inter-community relationships and marriages, with accusations of "love-jihad". Communal attacks have been repeatedly staged in the name of honor. Groups of men calling themselves Romeo Squads have physically attacked couples and acted as moral police, with state support. In fact, long standing feminist demands for laws for gender justice have also been subverted, as in the case of Muslim women's struggle against arbitrary dissolution of marriage (triple talaq). Instead of gender justice, the law was taken up by the government to vilify and criminalize Muslim men. Similarly, demands for justice and convictions in cases of sexual violence have been reduced to demands for the death penalty and staging of police encounters, contrary to the stance of feminists against the death penalty. There have also been serious cases of women and children being raped and abused by people in positions of state and institutional power. In two cases from Uttar Pradesh, denial of justice to the rape survivors went to the extent of hounding, harassing, attacking the survivors and their relatives with state support, since the perpetrators held power or enjoyed close links with the regime. The communal planks around which sexual violence is seen, was also shockingly

demonstrated in flag waving street mobilizations in support of the rapists of a child in the state of Jammu. Social media, which enabled women to reach out, has become malevolent with trolls. Women in public life are particularly abused and trolled for dissenting with the ruling regime.

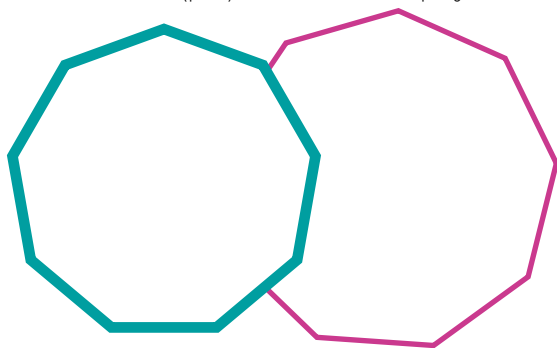
NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

As dissent and speech itself is being silenced and mainstream media is reduced to a propaganda machine, the amplification of local struggles and voices stand to gain from international solidarity. Feminist alliances play an important role here, in international coordination, cooperation and campaigns. However, the specificities of struggle, demands of the local movements and the speed with which the descent is happening under the regime, makes organizational structures for a Feminist International challenging.

In India, the growing corporate control of the public sphere and the rise of the nationalist right wing through electoral and other maneuverings interestingly takes place with the support of global networks of patriarchy and hate. There are networks and think-tanks that fuel hate propaganda within the country and they operate across borders. Muscular nationalism, xenophobia, right wing populism, and jingoism are aligning their interests across countries and there is a unity in their sexism. From the United States' Trump, to Brazil's Bolsonaro and Russia's Putin, they all meet with Modi and share authoritarian warmth based on interests of capital and trade. This does raise the question of, when such patriarchs are uniting, why can't feminists from across the world come together for organizing a more caring world? Hence, it is important to have inter-

national solidarities and feminist alliances to counter hate networks across the world, exposing patriarchal alliances and resisting the roll back of feminist and progressive left achievements – as **Kerstin Wolter** (p.22) and **Cinzia Arruzza** (p.27) have also indicated. This is needed against the politics of xenophobia and hate being leveraged by fascist politicians and right wing populists across the world.

When speech itself is being silenced under right wing regimes, international campaigns – as **Ndèye Fatou Kane** shows for #MeToo (p.15) – solidarities amplify voices that



are being drowned out. There is much to share between movements across the world and the issues that they generate. In recent times it is notable that women have led and nurtured significant mass movements. These include mass struggles against displacement, workers' rights, university issues, and struggles for freedom to live life as any other citizen. The movement against policies and laws that could disenfranchise, have been sustained by Muslim women across India. This has disrupted the

narrative of the ruling regime which looked at Muslim women as having no agency and who had to be rescued by criminalizing men from the community through changes in personal laws. Interestingly, the mass assertion of women and exercise of their agency has not only been for themselves but for more inclusive nationalism and citizenship rights. These mass protest sites have resisted coercion and developed as creative platforms for learning and struggle for more than two and half months.

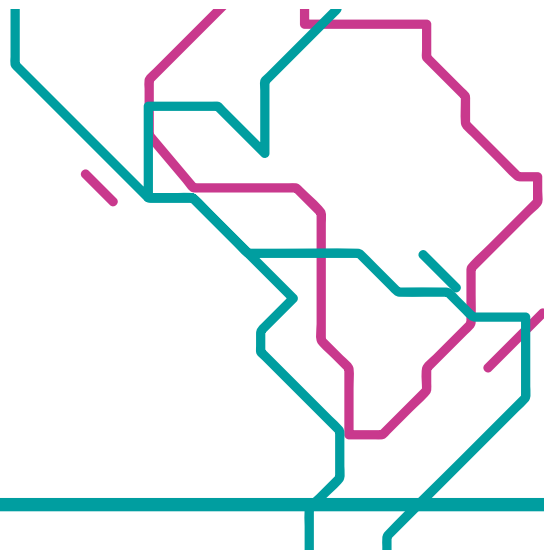
There are significant movements taking place in India around issues of equal pay for equal work. They are rooted in the specific conditions, but they also take up wider concerns related to women's productive roles. In India neoliberal policies of privatization have led to withdrawal of state's role in social security and massive cost cutting. This has impacted work arrangements for women as they are invoked to extend domestic roles of care and voluntarism to fulfill the state's social security responsibilities. This denies the recognition of women's productive roles even when they enter the workforce. It keeps them unorganized and denies them both a wage and status as workers. There have been mass movements in India led mainly by left unions for recognition of women's productive and reproductive labor in health care, education, scheme work, and agriculture. Take the case of the workers in the area of health (ASHAs) who have been working for a small honorarium rather than a salary. The state policy and machinery looks at them as if they are volunteers and only pays them nominal amounts even though they are the pillars of the national health system. In recent years, their work responsibilities have expanded without changes in their service conditions or wages, thereby increasing their exploitation. Scheme women workers are unionizing and waging struggle for recog-

nition as full workers with more defined work conditions as well as recognition of their productive role. In some places they have been at the forefront of important mobilizations of workers, participating in extended strikes, work lock-downs lasting for over a week, taking over towns and cities in rallies, as in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They have also managed to win some of their demands in some states because of sheer strength of the struggles. The struggle of these women, who are fighting very local battles, are, in fact, struggles against the state's exploitation of women's labor through neoliberal arrangements of work, and their resistance and massive mobilization connect with international struggles for equal pay for equal work, even though they have their own rhythms of organizing.

Then there are specific struggles for dignity as in the movement of Dalit women sanitary workers, who are battling caste oppression and demanding their rights as workers. The struggle of Kashmiri women has been primarily concerned with the effects of living in highly militarized zones. The transgender community is facing challenges of recognition as policies have ignored their demands for equal rights. Hence there are different kinds of concerns driving feminist mobilizations. These movements are emerging as exciting sites of mass learning in India, and attaining larger participation, evolving in their articulation of resistance against fascism and capitalist exploitation, and also trying to build communities of care and solidarities. Yet most of these are specific movements with their own peculiarities, and building organizational networks is quite challenging. As I see it, at this stage, a Feminist International would function more in terms of invoking the spirit of internationalism to build solidarity through dialogue and sharing information. These are important

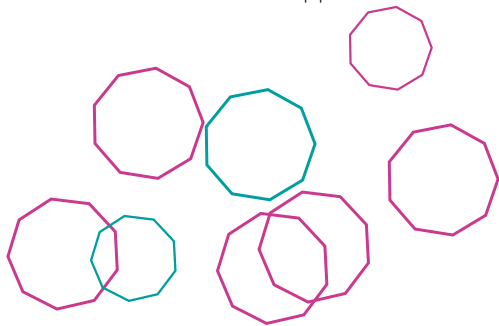
as there are fascist attacks on women's self-assertion and aggressive attempts to remove women as actors of change and resistance, to the extent that recently riots have been endorsed by the state, dissent attacked, women punished by separating them from their families, and peaceful democratic protests being declared as anti-national and even false cases slapped against assertive women.

I do feel that marxist feminist engagement, education and study would enable critical analysis of the networks of capital and patriarchy that are being consolidated through global fascist networks that are leading to social-political subjugation, economic extractivism, xenophobia, and increasing inequalities of class, caste and discrimination faced by minorities in recent times. The Feminist International could enable us to connect the dots between various struggles across the world, which



might take the form of formal or informal networks for exchange, as **Victoria Furtado** (p.8) points out. However, its feasibility in terms of an organization with a structure is far more difficult because of the specific nature of local struggles, identity concerns, and the immediacy of social movements. Therefore, it may function more in extending solidarity and sharing information.

The flow of information is certainly important. In India, women's struggles are often not televised or given any media coverage, particularly when they involve issues of work conditions, wages, and attempts to organize. Corporate control of the media is near complete and the mainstream media stands in support of neoliberal policies



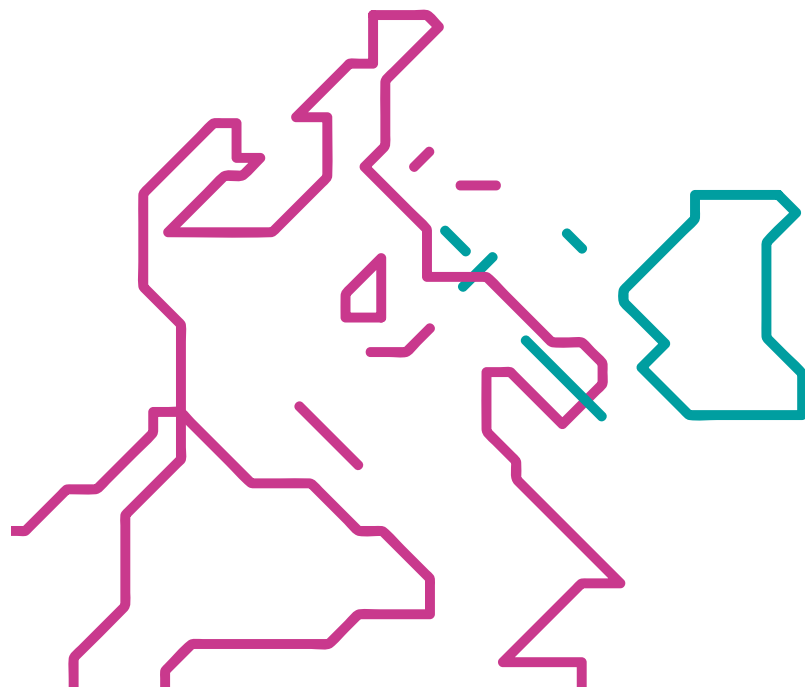
of cost cutting and state withdrawal from social security measures. Hence, even when there are massive mobilizations of women workers, their strikes are not reported and information does not spread within the country, let alone to other parts of the world. For instance, in 2016, around 50,000 women garment workers went on strike in Bangalore, an outstanding assertion by unorganized, poor


working women who had not only organized as workers, but were also asserting themselves politically against exploitative economic policies. Yet, not many know about this strike. India being a large country, the diffusion of information is essential to build bridges and to put forward a new articulation of political protests. It is important that these struggles find a voice within and outside the country.

Women in India are increasingly being affected by policies that have transnational origins. Tribal women resisting displacement because of land grabs by global capital located half way across the world would stand to gain if those offices across the world were held accountable. Market crashes, unemployment, and recession have forced women to take up low paid work with exploitative working conditions, even as the burden of care work increases at home. This has been scripted along with fascist offensive and feudal control of women and their bodies and widening wealth inequalities. Local struggles with all their specificities hence require linking with processes occurring across the world. International solidarities need to happen both on the streets and at conferences.

Pursuit of international cooperation, campaigns and solidarity are much needed. In doing so, loose coordinating bodies may also emerge, however it is difficult to imagine sustaining a transnational organization at this point. The nature of the women's movements as it exists in India is such that working through the peculiarities of each struggle is a challenge in itself. The feminist strike – which the contributions from **Victoria Furtado** (p.4), **Kerstin Wolter** (p.18), and **Cinzia Arruzza** (p.24) have helped me to conceptualize – is still an idea that has to mature in India, even though women are taking on roles for themselves

in strikes, rallies, protests and also finding these spaces empowering. Women unionists and activists have also indicated in discussions that responses to a general call for a feminist strike are still uncertain. It is possible that as solidarities develop and dialogue grows, the feminist strike may bring together women across the world. However, I do see women in different parts of the world voicing their immediate concerns in these strikes, rather than coming together on common calls at the present juncture. Sharing information and solidarities are more likely to build bridges and dialogue, which could then proceed to form political education around feminist strikes.





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IMPRESSUM

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In the midst of a global pandemic, which is surprisingly countered by national or even nationalistic answers, it might seem out of date to talk about new forms of internationalism. But feminist struggles have never taken place in a friendly environment. Yet, against all odds, strong local, as well as transnational movements, have developed. The contributions collected in this volume – from Uruguay, Senegal, Germany, the U.S. and India – share insights on the state of those movements and possible futures that are as relevant as ever.



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