hat pin. Chapter 5 extends material culture into the 'look' of feminist clothing and fashion, while Chapter 6 draws on new work on emotions to think about the feelings occasioned by feminisms. Chapter 7 reminds us of the strong activist dimension that has always threaded through the history of feminisms and looks at the ways protests have been executed across both bodies and space. And Chapter 8 explores aural dimensions of feminism, thinking about the chants, songs and musical innovations linked to activism.

These new perspectives root feminist history to some of the most innovative areas of historical research and shake up our sense of the uses of feminism. They take us across continents, and show why universal definitions of feminism, spanning time and place, aren't going to work. Instead, I invite us to examine 'feminisms' across a global canvas, spanning 250 years. The resulting stories are less about gender equality than about gender justice – demands for an environment in which all can thrive. This could mean paying a fair wage, kicking out colonial occupiers or embracing Goddess spirituality. It sometimes meant conflicts between different feminist goals and dreams. I argue that we can find inspiration in the feminist past, as well as a fuller understanding of why Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's invitation for 'us' to all 'be feminists' is never going to be a straightforward task.

CHAPTER 1

Dreams

When I was a graduate student in the 1990s, first embarking on study of the history of feminisms, a chance encounter in a seminar one evening challenged me to think hard about what kinds of dreams might motivate feminists. A senior colleague sat next to me, and we both listened to a debate about feminist philosophy. Or perhaps I listened, but I also have a powerful visual memory of her rainbow socks that, like gloves, had a space for all her toes. She was joyously unconventional in her self-presentation. We got talking about feminism, and I was genuinely shocked when she told me that her vision of feminism was that it would erase gender entirely. Her dream was of a world where male and female were simply irrelevant categories. Today, with gender-queer, trans and gender-neutral forms of identity being experimentally or vigorously taken up, this dream might be less transgressive, and my own views have become less conventional. But it was an important moment for me, because it made clear the diversity of utopian hopes attached to feminism, and my own investment in existing categories of male and female. Dreams are powerful ways of inviting ideas of change and otherness. The late-eighteenth-century writer Mary Wollstonecraft called them 'wild wishes', and these moments of

imagination are revealing of what brought women and men to feminist consciousness.

Dreams offer a very personal, intimate sense of what has motivated feminist activism. They are shaped by the circumstances of the dreamer – their family, experiences of labour and employment, their reading, their emotional states. But dreams are also linked to the historical moment – by what can be imagined in the context, say, of occupation, revolution, urbanization or famine. It might be imagined that feminist dreams started small, centred on equality with men or the attainment of specific rights such as child custody. But a glance at the diversity of dreams and dreamers in the decades of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would suggest otherwise. The dreams of Charles Fourier (1772–1837) and his followers are suggestive of the ambition and startling heterodoxy of earlier visions of a new gender order. Fourier argued that human happiness required meaningful labour and the free expression of desire. He reflected on the corrupted sexual mores of his time:

> Is not a young woman a piece of merchandise put up for sale to the highest bidder? Is she not tyrannized by prejudice from childhood and obliged to consent to any marriage that may be arranged for her? People try to persuade her that she is only bound by chains of flowers. But can she really doubt her degradation?[1]

Fourier proposed instead another feminist dream – an ideal society termed 'Harmony', characterized by creative, attractive work, organized cooperatively so that all workers – men, women and children – had a diversity of tasks, suited to their

inclinations. In sexual matters, all would be free to express their 'host of amorous innovations which we cannot yet imagine'. Women were to share in the governing of Harmony, which, Fourier forecast, would span the globe. But the means of achieving this goal were vague, which was why later thinkers termed this a utopia rather than a serious socialist prospect. His followers insisted on the abolition of marriage, property and conventional motherhood in favour of 'passional equilibrium' in their communities of the 1830s and 40s in France, Spain, Algeria, the United States and other nations. Their unruly experiments remind us that there has been no increase over time in the radicalism of feminist thinking.

In this chapter, I look at some diverse sources and sites of feminist dreaming, including those advocating separation from men, those prioritizing love and sexuality at the heart of their vision, and those 'advancing the race'. Well-developed literary or science-fiction fantasies are set alongside unconscious and chaotic fragments of dream life. Dreams are both a site of restless utopianism and, at times, an indicator of the uneasiness and conflict that frequently accompanied visions of a new life.

Ladyland and Herland

In 1905, a 25-year-old Bengali woman, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, published *Sultana's Dream*, a fictional account of a feminist utopia, a technologically advanced country she named 'Ladyland'. In her vision, men had been placed in the seclusion of the *zenana* or harem and women now ruled, without veils or purdah. Ladyland was a garden-like setting, where women's expertise and technologies had been harnessed for plenty. She imagined universities in Ladyland run by women,

whose research enabled ecologically sustainable agriculture. Crucially, she stressed women's access to plentiful water, perhaps influenced by Mughal cultural and garden traditions, as well as her experiences of the environmental depredations of the British colonial occupation of India. In the 'real world', Rokeya declared, men's use of science had been reserved for military purposes. Nonetheless, her female monarchs were strong and willing to enforce their rule; she imagined them using heat-ray weaponry to beat back armies of men from neighbouring lands.

This was not a secular vision, but the religion the Muslim-born Rokeya supported was unorthodox. She described it as based on love and truth, with a redefinition of 'sacred' relations. In Bengali society, 'sacred relationships' were those with immediate family, where intermarriage was forbidden. Rokeya playfully insisted that, in Ladyland, the 'sacred' was enlarged as if *all* were 'family', so that men and women could freely interact without any sexual connotations. Rokeya's critique of purdah and veiling did not cast Islam as a site of constraint. Like many others, she based her politics on ideas of the restoration of women's rights that Islamic religion had offered: 'What we want is neither alms, nor a gift of favour. Our claim is nothing more than what Islam gave us 1300 years ago.'[2]

In her lifetime, Rokeya (1880–1932) was frustrated by Bengali Muslim women's seeming compliance with purdah: 'Why do you allow yourselves to be shut up? You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves and you have lost your natural rights . . .' She passionately supported women's education as the route to freedom for her female contemporaries, and went on herself to have a career in social work and

women's education.[3] For her, women's seclusion through purdah and veiling was 'a silent killer like carbon monoxide gas'. In this rejection of purdah, Rokeya's views were compatible with the majority of colonial commentators, who saw the seclusion of Muslim women, as well as Hindu child marriage and 'widow burning' as primitive or savage practices. Rokeya chose to write *Sultana's Dream* in English, and her utopia was first published in the *Indian Ladies Magazine*. This Christian, English-language journal may indicate her imagined audience of educated colonial elites. She positioned herself as part of elite indigenous circles, whose interventions aimed to 'modernize' the domestic practices of British-ruled India. Nonetheless, Rokeya also published extensively in Bengali journals, and founded a branch of a welfare association for Muslim women, the Anjuman-e-Khawateen-e-Islam (Muslim Women's Association). She also translated and cited progressive feminist tales and texts from Afghanistan and Britain, and campaigned for women's education in the interwar years.[4]

Rokeya's vision of a community of women governed by autonomous self-rule shared much with the dreams of another major feminist figure, but one who came from a very different cultural background. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) was one of the most important and visible feminists of the early twentieth century, who campaigned on a bewildering variety of issues, spanning dress reform, suffrage, sex reform, birth control and prostitution. Like Rokeya, Gilman presented feminism as a dream of a different future. She had been born into a family linked through her father to well-known activists for social causes and women's suffrage, such as her abolitionist great-aunt Harriet Beecher Stowe. But her father

abandoned his wife and children, and Gilman's early years were spent in poverty and marginalization. Her brother was sent to college, but Gilman was not. She was forced to become resourceful and independent even after marriage in 1884. Her material challenges were intensified after she took the relatively unusual step of separating from her husband in 1888. These qualities served her well, in a career of extraordinarily prolific writing. She published single-handed a monthly periodical, *The Forerunner*, from 1909 to 1916, in which she wrote every editorial, article, book review, poem and story. She even wrote her own advertisements, such as a glowing endorsement for the Wisconsin 'Holeproof Hosiery Company' in 1909, which informed her readers: 'I wore them and wore them and wore them, till I was so tired of those deathless, impervious, unnaturally whole stockings that I gave them away!'

Gilman promoted feminism with a light touch, aiming to reach out to 'ordinary' women readers. She termed feminism a form of humanism, promoting 'the development of human qualities and functions among women'. Fiction helped her imagine alternatives to women's economic dependency, and her most elaborate utopia, *Herland*, was published in 1915, a decade after Rokeya's Ladyland. *Herland* was written during the heightened tension of the suffrage campaign, and the growing devastation of global warfare in the First World War. It envisaged a women-only community where the racial advancement of humanity (or 'race work') was undertaken without the constraints of male domination. Gilman was highly influenced by theories of matriarchal or 'gynaecocentric' culture as the early form in which human society had evolved. Sociologists and ethnographers had argued that

kinship and property-owning motives had led to an overthrow by men of women's social dominance in the earliest human societies. This overthrow gave rise to what Gilman termed an 'androcentric' society in which 'parasitic', non-working women were subjugated by men.

This phase of human evolution, Gilman believed, was now over – both women and 'the race' would benefit from a more egalitarian society in which sex selection based on love would lead to a 'higher race'. *Herland* was a means of imagining how this might come about and its consequences. Gilman depicted a science-fiction utopia of a South American society of women who had slaughtered their menfolk in the distant past. After two thousand years of reproduction by parthenogenesis (single-sex reproduction), in which only daughters were born, Herland society had evolved humanist values. Its women were enabled to be intelligent, physically active and completely autonomous of men. Motherhood was valued above all else, and was placed at the heart of society – whether expressed through personal motherhood or the 'social motherhood' of care towards society:

> the longed-for motherhood was not only a personal joy, but a nation's hope . . . Each girl holds it close and dear, an exquisite joy, a crowning honor, the most intimate, most personal, most precious thing.

In Gilman's Herland, sex relations were banished. Dress was unencumbering and aesthetically pleasing: 'short hair, hatless, loose, and shining; a suit of some light firm stuff, the closest of tunics and kneebreeches, met by trim gaiters'. Ever practical, Gilman also stressed the inclusion of roomy pockets in this

idealized dress. Herland residents lived semi-communally, each with their own bedroom, reception room and bathroom. For Gilman, who had been forced to give up custody of her daughter when her marriage had broken down and who lived a semi-peripatetic life of lecturing and campaigning in bedsits and lodgings, this vision must have helped sustain her own hopes for change.

Gilman's novel was not just a paean to a female-centred lifestyle. It was given shape by the plot device of the discovery of Herland by three American men, and their efforts to capture its women into couple relationships. Their early efforts to entice women using cheap jewellery failed, and their assumptions were quickly unseated, as the central (male) narrator reported:

> Jeff, with his gentle romantic old-fashioned notions of women as clinging vines. Terry, with his clear decided practical theories that there were two kinds of women – those he wanted and those he didn't.

The residents of Herland surrounded each interloper

> in great numbers, evidently indifferent to what he might think, evidently determined on some purpose of their own regarding him, and apparently well able to enforce their purpose.

The narrator marvelled at their physique:

> Fishwives and market women might show similar strength, but it was coarse and heavy. These were merely athletic – light and powerful.

Despite their attempts to use guns to enforce their demands for marital partners, the male visitors were captured and forced to a reluctant respect for Herland society and its forms of 'higher comradeship'. They eventually were married into the Herland society, and Gilman depicted their slow realization that the 'hyper femininity' of the old world might be a damaging condition for both women and men.

Consistently through her publications and lectures, Gilman stressed the shared interests both sexes had in feminist reform based on mutual love and respect. But she remained aware of how fragile this could be and used *Herland* to raise the issue of marital rape, at a time when husbands could disregard the sexual consent of their wives with the full support of the courts (a situation only reformed across all jurisdictions of the United States in 1993). Gilman depicted one of the American male visitors, Terry, attempting to enforce his 'conjugal rights' against the wishes of Herland inhabitants, with his rationale: 'There never was a woman yet that did not enjoy being MASTERED.' But Terry's attempt to enforce sex with his wife led to the expulsion of all three from Herland at the conclusion of Gilman's utopian text.

Gilman's conclusions were seemingly pessimistic; yet historians have noted her strong desire to involve men as agents of feminist change, and her optimism that male violence and coercion would ultimately fail when set against the demands of the human race.[5] Her advocacy of male sexual restraint came to seem naïve and 'Victorian' when set against the new sexual precepts of psychoanalysis, as well as the sexual informality and experiment that pervaded the mid-twentieth-century United States. Nonetheless, her utopia of short-haired,

physically liberated and mentally alert women, living lives of emotional and sexual liberty from men, remains a compelling dream of a feminist future.

A Great Love

Both Rokeya and Gilman envisaged women's liberation through the abandonment of sexual links to men. Gilman's life as a divorced travelling lecturer reflected the new possibilities for some women to live without men and become emotionally centred on other women. Increasing numbers of women across Europe and the United States experienced lives of singleness, and while some mourned this, others found women-centred lives to be loving and fulfilling. But the exclusion of men was probably not a majority goal, and most who dreamt of a feminist future still included men in various forms and roles. Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952) was one such dreamer. She was passionately committed to the transformative power of love and sex between men and women, but nonetheless imagined a very different world in which love might flourish.

Kollontai was born to a wealthy Russian father and a peasant-born Finnish mother. The social distance between her parents created huge obstacles to their marriage. Kollontai was always aware of the tensions for those trying to realize a 'love match' in late-nineteenth-century Russia, and became fascinated by the power of love. She rejected her parents' attempts to impose a conventional bourgeois feminine role on their daughter, and embarked on a rebellious marriage herself – but one that was to prove deeply unhappy. Despite the birth of a son, Kollontai became increasingly politically

Figure 1.1
On the left, Alexandra Kollontai, Marxist revolutionary, writer and, after the Bolshevik Revolution, People's Commissar for Social Welfare (1917–18)

active in Marxist circles in St Petersburg. She was hugely impressed by the strikes amongst women textile workers in 1896, and became convinced of the need to engage women in socialist struggle. She left her husband in 1898, after five years of marriage, and embarked on a life of political organizing.

Feminist attempts to gain access to suffrage and the professions in Russia seemed marginal to Kollontai.[6] Instead, she founded a women factory workers' club and became heavily involved in revolutionary agitation. This work threatened her safety in Tsarist Russia, and leaving her son with her parents, she went into exile in Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia. It was perhaps during her extensive travels in Europe and the United States that she gained further exposure to ideas of individual self-fulfilment in love relationships. She viewed women's status as key to Communism, and confidently expected a transformed world after an anticipated Communist revolution.

In *Working Woman and Mother* (1914), Kollontai compared the life chances of four women who shared the same name – Mashenka. They comprised a factory owner's wife, a laundress, a maid and a dye worker. She was enraged by the material inequalities of their lives, and imagined an end to the class hierarchies that created 'parasites' and workers. Instead, Kollontai asked her readers to 'Imagine a society, a people, a community, where there are no longer Mashenka ladies and Mashenka laundresses', where human needs 'will be taken care of by society, which is like one large, friendly family'.[7]

Kollontai saw enormous possibility for women in the changes promised by the Bolshevik Revolution. Indeed, her earlier writing saw these changes as inevitable, rooted in Marxist interpretations of economic systems:

> But such a society, surely, is only to be found in fairy tales? Could such a society ever exist? The science of economics and the history of society and the state show that such a society must and will come into being. However hard the rich capitalists, factory-owners, landowners and men of property fight, the fairy-tale will come true.[8]

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, in which she was on the Petrograd Soviet executive committee, she became a high-profile agitator. Kollontai's forecasts of collective housekeeping, the new morality and new womanhood were widely publicized within the Soviet Union, and her writing was also translated by revolutionaries of the May Fourth movement in China in the 1920s. Yet her dream of inevitable change downplayed the obstacles of male power and seemed to leave little space for women's agency. A dream might be inspirational, but if it offered no opportunities for women to do anything to bring about its realization, then it remained a chimera.

Kollontai recognized some of the limitations of her earlier dreams of women's transformed lives when she was writing a few years after the Bolshevik Revolution. She had been able to experiment with some of her dreams when, in 1917, she became the first People's Commissar for Social Welfare in Vladimir Lenin's government. She founded the Zhenotdel (Women's Department) in 1919, and insisted on women's literacy and reproductive rights in the early Soviet Union. Abortion was legalized in 1920, though Stalin was to criminalize it again in 1936. In the chaotic years after the revolution, Kollontai had not found it easy to realize her dreams, and she eventually fell out with the Bolshevik leadership. Her novels

and short stories, written in the 1920s after she had gone into semi-exile, revealed her growing awareness of how complex change in the gender order would be. Unlike many of her revolutionary peers, Kollontai's dream evolved beyond a vision of higher living standards for her Mashenkas. Her later utopian writing centred on a society where all could experience 'great love' – the transformative potential of which she believed would change the entire social order. She sought sexual liberation, and saw (heterosexual) desire as a transcendent force:

> only when words were no longer adequate would they discover the ultimate expression of their feelings in sexual passion, that bright burning force which was so very beautiful, which encompassed the colour of her dreams.[9]

Nonetheless, Kollontai recognized that love and desire were difficult emotions to control, which could carry significant costs for women. Her personal life also reflected her emphasis on love; she lived out a transgressive and unconventional love affair with Aleksandr Shliapnikov, a metalworker, and then Pavel Dybenko, a much younger working-class revolutionary whom she married in 1917. She was forced to face the limits of both her dreams and their realization in the difficult climate of the 1920s, when the sexual and emotional transformation Kollontai sought was eclipsed by the realities of economic and political crisis. Kollontai was sidelined by Lenin over her support for worker control and was required to leave the Soviet Union and take up diplomatic posts in Scandinavia and Mexico. It was during the 1920s that she wrote her fictional explorations of women's lives under Communism and gained global notoriety as an identifiable

face of 'free love'. Just as the reputation of the British writer Mary Wollstonecraft was dominated by accusations of sexual immorality when her love affairs and pregnancy outside of marriage become widely known, so Kollontai became known as a subversive promoter of sexual excess. She was notorious for her analogy between sex and drinking water; Lenin's reported response was scathing and stigmatizing: 'thirst must be satisfied. But will the normal person in normal circumstances lie down in the gutter and drink out of a puddle, or out of a glass with a rim greasy from many lips?' Whatever Kollontai's intentions, both dreaming of and living an alternative life risked being subject to exclusion and silencing.

Unlike many utopian writers, Kollontai projected her fiction into the past, before the Bolshevik Revolution, or into the contemporary moment of the revolution itself. Her stories centred on female characters who loved men, and were committed to new kinds of living. Kollontai's utopia was not futuristic, but remained utopian in imagining a transformed human psyche, able to love, to enjoy sexual passion, and to balance passionate self-realization with a commitment to the collective good. In 'A Great Love', a short story written in 1923, Vasilisa Malygina was presented as a working-class Communist activist attempting to set up communal houses. Vasilisa was the lover and then wife of an anarchist-turned-Bolshevik, Vladimir, and their relationship was a complex one of desire, friendship and frustration. Vasilisa, like many of the other heroines Kollontai created, struggled to combine stormy individual love relationships with working for revolution. She rejected the patriarchal premium on virginity, and had sexual relationships with several men; yet she was tortured by the

survival of older ideas of sexual respectability, which her lovers sometimes hypocritically maintained. Eventually, the worker-heroine left her unfaithful husband and returned to her Party work; Kollontai's heroines were unfailingly happier when relieved of their demanding lovers. Vasilisa had related to men in an almost maternal fashion, and Kollontai's men seemed childlike in their emotional dependence on women.

In 'A Great Love', Vasilisa's passionate love for Vladimir eventually turned into friendship, and she was even able to feel sisterhood with his new lover, if shot through with pity at the mistress's bourgeois reliance on loving a single man. But Kollontai acknowledged women's reproductive vulnerabilities by concluding 'A Great Love' with Vasilisa discovering that she was pregnant. She was perhaps naïvely optimistic about the prospects of raising a child by relying on collective Soviet provision. Kollontai's *Working Woman and Mother* had made confident forecasts:

> When Mashenka, who is now neither a lady nor a servant but simply a citizen, becomes pregnant, she does not have to worry about what will happen to her or her child. Society, that big happy family, will look after everything. A special home with a garden and flowers will be ready to welcome her . . . Children will grow up in the kindergarten, the children's colony, the crèche and the school under the care of experienced nurses. When the mother wants to be with her children, she only has to say the word; and when she has no time, she knows they are in good hands.[10]

The reality of life in the post-revolution Soviet Union was less rosy, but Kollontai maintained her sense of optimism in

the imagined pregnancy and motherhood of Vasilisa. Perhaps her own relative privilege, and the limited impact of her own motherhood on her political activism, had left her with little imagination for the actual experiences of women raising children outside of conventional familial structures.

Though all written within a space of twenty years, Rokeya's, Gilman's and Kollontai's feminist utopias differed dramatically in how they imagined the relationships between women and men, reflective of their different cultural, religious and political contexts. In the intellectual work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, her spirituality and vision was woven together with Darwinian and eugenic concerns into a formation Gilman termed 'the larger feminism'. The dreams of Rokeya Hossain had developed a transcendently visionary and unorthodoxly Islamic version of a feminist dream. Alexandra Kollontai was also interested in spiritual transcendence through the power of love, though she preferred a secular, Marxist framework for this. Though these figures were also rooted in specific local campaigning around causes such as women's suffrage, reproductive rights and education, all were keen to explore imagined and sometimes fantastical worlds of changed gender relations. They shared an emphasis on women's meaningful, universal labour as key to a feminist future. This feature was common in the utopian socialist tradition, and in Kollontai's work it was most closely linked to a Marxist vision of the rule of workers. Employment brought economic independence, and most feminists acknowledged this as an important goal. But women's labour – projects of creative, socially useful activity – was a key underlying goal shared across these different feminist dreams.

Actualizing Utopia

These dreams of feminist utopias reflect a rich period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when both sexes were able to imagine different kinds of social organization. There have also been attempts to live out such dreams in more concrete terms. Nineteenth-century radicals experimented widely with 'model' and utopian communities and insisted on their ability to turn dreams into reality. Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) was one such dreamer, who was convinced of the need for her Indian female peers to live autonomously, in supportive communities of women. She was a high-profile social reformer, whose life had been shaped by the unusual decision of her father, a high-caste Brahmin Sanskrit teacher, to extend his scriptural knowledge to his wife and daughter. Ramabai undertook a precarious, unorthodox life of pilgrimage with her parents and siblings. Her father resisted offers of an arranged marriage; Ramabai eventually chose her own husband at the relatively late age of twenty-two, after her parents had died of starvation during the Madras famine of 1877, and her brother had also died unexpectedly. She had been a celebrated example of traditions of Hindu scholarship in Calcutta before her marriage, though her choice to marry outside of her caste and in a civil ceremony caused controversy. She went on to take a profound interest in issues affecting Indian women. As historian Padma Anagol has argued, Ramabai's establishment of Arya Mahila Samaj (Arya Women's Society) in 1882 in the Indian state of Maharashtra gave her a platform to testify to colonial authorities on issues of women's subordination and the need for reform.[11]

Early marriage and widowhood had become prominent issues of gender justice and equity for Ramabai, who was herself widowed after only two years of marriage and left to support a daughter. It was this experience that led her to promote widows' homes, particularly aimed at those widowed in their childhood or youth. First opened in 1889, Ramabai's home was termed Sharada Sadan (Home of the Goddess of Learning), and aimed at economic self-sufficiency for women, through craft and agricultural activities.

Like many other women's movement activists, Ramabai was intensely committed to the power of literacy and print culture for realizing feminist dreams. Sharada Sadan, she declared, was to have libraries of the best books on science and literature. In addition, 'Lectureships should also be established in the libraries . . . to open the eyes and ears of those who long have dwelt in the prison-house of ignorance.'[12] Ramabai helped set up a women-run printing press, and encouraged the publication of women's journals. She promoted opportunities for the employment of Indian women in teaching and nursing, and remarriage for widows. And while she had initially presented her work as securing the futures of high-caste women, she remained alert to the needs of the less educated and privileged. Given her own tragic experiences of famine, she was particularly proactive in offering rescue to women made vulnerable by the repeated famines of colonial India. Her feminist commitment was organized around the idea of women's self-reliance, underpinned by a strong sense of the transformative power of women's education.

Ramabai had travelled extensively in Britain and North

America in an attempt to study medicine, and to fundraise for her widows' homes. Her lectures were supported by publications, including *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, which she published in English in 1887. Ramabai was successful in raising money, partly through the establishment of the Ramabai Association of America.[13] Engaging with suffragists, temperance activists and abolitionists, Ramabai was able to construct a coalition of supporters that gave her opportunities to support socially marginalized Indian women.

However, such support came at a cost; Ramabai's work was introduced in terms that exoticized Indian women and presented them as victims. One of her sponsors, Rachel L. Bodley, was Dean of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. Bodley had helped train Anandibai Joshee (1865–87), the first Hindu woman to gain a medical degree, despite having been married at the age of nine. Joshee's pregnancy at thirteen and loss of her son at birth had inspired her to seek medical training. Bodley supported Joshee, but found it impossible not to see Indian women as powerless victims. Commissioned to write the introduction to Ramabai's *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, Bodley offered a melodramatic presentation:

> The silence of a thousand years has been broken, and the reader of this unpretending little volume catches the first utterances of the unfamiliar voice. Throbbing with woe, they are revealed in the following pages to intelligent, educated, happy English and American women.

Ramabai herself seemed to follow Bodley's lead, and described Hindu women in highly pejorative terms:

> They have been so cruelly cropped in their early days that self-reliance and energy are dead within them; helpless victims of indolence and false timidity, they are easily frightened out of their wits, and have little or no strength to withstand the trials and difficulties which must be encountered by a person on her way towards progress . . . Is it not the duty of our Western sisters to teach them how they may become self-reliant?[14]

Despite her talk of Indian women's timidity, Ramabai herself developed a reputation as a disputatious, unorthodox character who would not play the part of victimized Indian womanhood. Controversially, she had converted to Christianity during a visit to Britain, and offered Sharada Sadan residents instruction in both Hinduism and Christianity. However, she rejected key elements of Anglican ritual and theology, refusing to wear a crucifix or endorse the divinity and resurrection of Christ; instead, she preferred to indigenize Christianity by composing Marathi and Hindi psalms, and translating the Bible into Marathi. She was also convinced of the very low impact that Western interventions through missionaries and charity might have on Indian women's situation. In her view, the 'zenana missionaries' from abroad could never overcome the scale of India. In order to effect change, Ramabai insisted, 'women teachers of our own nationality' must be prioritized.

When it came to the administration of the Sharada Sadan, it proved difficult for Ramabai to exercise authority in the complex environment of colonial India. Her activities were in competition with British and American missionaries, as

well as Anglican Church authorities and colonial government. Ramabai sought authority within the homes she founded, only to find herself sidelined by committees of wealthy American funders. She also challenged the ritual authority of Brahmins, and as a Christian woman was an unwelcome presence. Her widows' home became boycotted by influential Maharashtra Hindus, for fear of the threat of Christian conversion by inmates. Her tolerance of a multifaith environment and championing of women's spiritual freedoms were always suspected of being a form of subversive Christian mission, particularly when Ramabai extended the home's membership from upper-class widows to the less educated rural women who had faced starvation during famine years. The managing committee eventually restricted Ramabai from spaces in the home such as kitchens, dining rooms and the living accommodation of Hindu residents.

The dream of a space of personal and religious freedom for women was extremely hard to implement in the tense environment of interfaith interactions. Ramabai's attempts to create women-run spaces of sanctuary and opportunity were undercut by patriarchal opposition, but also by religious sectarianism and the interests of colonial powers. Nonetheless, her agency and determination were inspirational to later activists. In Indonesia, a schoolgirl called Kartini read about Ramabai, and recorded that she

> trembled with excitement; not alone for white woman is it possible to attain an independent position, the brown Indian too can make herself free. For days I thought of her, and I have never been able to forget her.'[15]

Kartini (1879–1904) went on to become the first woman to openly contest polygamy and campaign for women's education in the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia) via her correspondence with Dutch women. Abandoning plans to train as a teacher in Tokyo, she became the third wife of an Indonesian chief in 1903 and died the following year, aged twenty-five, after the birth of her son. Despite a life cut short, her outspoken support for expanded opportunities for Indonesian women has made her an important figure for later Indonesian activists.

The Limits of Dreams

So far, the feminist dreams examined here have been utopias, expressed in fiction and fantasy, and occasionally in everyday lives. But dreams are not always straightforwardly utopian or aspirational. The dreams of nighttime hours can be ambivalent, and full of unconscious tensions that remind us of the difficulty of living with feminist principles. Recalibrating the relationships between men and women meant rethinking the most intimate realms. Unsurprisingly, this provoked some ambivalence and distress that emerged in the dream lives of women and men imagining a different world.

Very few dreams are recorded in historical archives, and we have to treat those that are written down as only a very approximate record of what might actually pass through our dreaming minds. And, of course, those written down are those the dreamer chooses to share. We gain an extraordinary glimpse of the unconscious wishes of a key feminist thinker in a letter written by the nineteenth-century British philosopher, politician and champion of women's rights, John Stuart Mill (1806–73), describing one of his dreams.

Mill had published a philosophical and ethical case for women's equality in 1869, *The Subjection of Woman*. He attempted to push for women's suffrage by sponsoring a women's suffrage amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill that was about to enfranchise a new swathe of working-class British men. His contributions to women's suffrage remind us of an important thread running through this book – that men have been active and influential as feminists. The idea that only women can be feminists is a claim that must be historicized – at certain points in time, and in certain places, this was a deeply held belief. But it is far from being true of all periods, and Mill joins other figures, such as American former slave and suffragist Frederick Douglass and China's Jin Tianhe, as high-profile supporters of wider opportunities for women. Mill, like many male feminists, drew inspiration from a female collaborator – in this case, his wife Harriet Taylor Mill. He idealized her as having 'all but unrivalled wisdom', and the two wrote collaboratively on domestic violence and other campaigning issues.[16]

John Stuart Mill had a very specific vision of the ideal woman citizen. He celebrated the lives of married, domesticated women as the highest form of womanhood, despite the rising numbers of women in many European countries in the later nineteenth century who were unable to marry. The emigration of European men to countries such as the United States, Argentina, Australia and Canada had created gender imbalances in their countries of origin. This caused enormous public concern that unmarried women were socially and sexually 'surplus'. Mill's support for women's suffrage was based on his perception of the particular qualities of married women as citizens, and he was less supportive of

single women, whom he considered to have failed to reach their highest fulfilment. Yet while the married woman was Mill's ideal, his account of feminine virtue depended on an 'asexual femininity as a moralizing force', Sandra Zerilli has argued.[17] Prudence, restraint and the suppression of lower appetites were core to this vision of citizenship, and Mill himself sustained a twenty-year passionate but celibate relationship with the already married Harriet. It was only after the death of her first husband that John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor were able to marry, and Mill maintained his critical position towards 'base passions' as social evils throughout his life.

His own dream life suggests something of the dissonance that sexual desire held for Mill. In 1857, he wrote to his wife Harriet about his dream of an imagined conversation at a dinner party, 'with a woman at my left hand and a young man opposite'. In Mill's dream, the young man declared:

> 'There are two excellent and rare things to find in a woman, a sincere friend and a sincere Magdalen.' I answered 'the best thing would be to find both in one' – on which the woman said 'no that would be *too* vain' – whereupon I broke out 'do you suppose when one speaks of what is good in itself, one must be thinking of one's own paltry self interest? No, I spoke of what is abstractly good and admirable.'[18]

A 'magdalen' was a euphemism for a promiscuous woman or one who sold sex. Mill's dream suggested that he was seeking a figure who could combine sensuality and desire with the intellectual equality and companionship he prized as citizen virtues – though he feared judgement of this as 'vain'.

Ambiguously, the reference to this combination as 'vain' could mean impossible ('in vain'), or an accusation of personal vanity. Dreams rarely offer clarity, though they can suggest tensions and unresolved feelings. In Mill's account of his dream, he went on to correct his dream character: 'he had quoted it wrong and [that] the *right* words were "*an innocent magdalen*" . . .'

The paradox of this concept – female sexual knowingness combined with innocence – again points to Mill's unconscious frustration and ambivalence over his gender politics. The impossible 'innocent magdalen' was a menacing, destabilizing figure. His letter to his wife continued, 'How queer to dream stupid mock mots, and of a kind totally unlike one's own ways or character.' He distanced himself from the dream by terming it 'droll' and 'ridiculous'. Nonetheless, it offers a tantalizing glimpse into the difficulties of sustaining a feminist position that for Mill, like Gilman and Rokeya, centred on sexual restraint and the promotion of reason over passion.

The dream of American feminist Doris Stevens gives us another vivid example of the tensions involved in living the feminist life. Stevens had joined the suffrage struggle in the United States through the National Women's Party, and she later featured prominently in the interwar efforts to raise women's influence on international policy, as head of the Inter-American Commission of Women (1928–39). She had married the well-known lawyer Dudley Field Malone in 1921 and declared her support for new kinds of marital relationships. Women should keep their names on marriage, she proposed, and should remain in paid employment. She hoped her marriage would be an example of how love and companionship

might be possible – a lived example of the hopes Kollontai had expressed only a decade or so earlier, and which had seemed both utopian and realizable in the ferment of the Bolshevik Revolution.

But the relationship between Doris Stevens and her new husband did not take the form she had hoped for. He was emotionally abusive, belittling and isolating her. Malone had little understanding of women's needs for autonomy and fulfilling labour. He was also sexually unfaithful, and the couple eventually divorced in 1927. Doris had recorded in her diary a dream that she had had while living in Paris with Dudley; she had dreamt that on approaching a group of friends, Dudley had commented on her as a 'little wife – nice bitch she is'. Mortified by his behaviour, she had dreamt of impersonating a train, making 'chuff chuff' noises to mask his treatment and defuse the situation.[19] The dream reveals the psychic cost of trying to live outside the confines of conventionality. Doris was pilloried in the press after her divorce, as a woman whose aspirations to work and 'modern' love had destroyed her marriage.

Dreaming of Difference

The feminist dreams we've looked at spanned a relatively short time period – the 1880s to the 1920s – and show how the environments of British-ruled India, Soviet Russia and the United States could produce very different visions. Each feminist 'mosaic' has its unique pattern, though sometimes the same tile or colour is visible across time and space.

The impulse to find commonalities between feminisms became particularly pressing and troubling when framed by the concepts of sisterhood that pervaded ideas of women's

liberation in the years after 1968. American feminist Adrienne Rich (1929–2012) published her poetry collection *Dream of a Common Language* in 1978. She was already a well-recognized poet, and a leading figure in the strand of the American women's liberation movement termed 'radical' for its celebration of women's autonomy, and their shared knowledge and interests rooted in motherhood and autonomous sexual desire. Rich's poems offered no simple call to unity, and her emphasis was on the disempowerment of women in the structures of language imposed on them by men. She was also well aware of the challenges that divides of race, ethnicity, sexuality and class posed to concepts of 'sisterhood'. But in one poem dedicated to black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde, Rich seems to be reaching out in female or maternal solidarity across the contentious racial divides between women:

> I stand convicted by all my convictions –
> You, too. We shrink from touching
> Our power, we shrink away, we starve ourselves
> And each other, we're scared shitless
> Of what it could be to take and use our love,
> Hose it on a city, on a world,
> To wield and guide its spray, destroying
> Poisons, parasites, rats, viruses –
> Like the terrible mothers we long and dread to be.[20]

Audre Lorde (1934–92) published a long conversation with Rich, taped in 1979 and published in 1981, about the power of writing to convey women's experiences and traumas. Their exchanges suggest the very deep racial tensions between American feminists, but also the possibility of creative

energy through acknowledgement of difference. Rich had ended her poem dedicated to Lorde, 'Until we find each other, we are alone.'

But commonality proved hard to achieve. Lorde lost patience with having to constantly address, but seemingly never resolve, the racism of white American women. In 1979, she refused to engage further, in protest at the sapping of her activist energy by racism. In an open letter to another white radical feminist, Mary Daly, Lorde declared:

> I had decided never again to speak to white women about racism. I felt it was wasted energy because of destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because whatever I had to say might better be said by white women to one another at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing.[21]

It was a similar sense of futility that led Pratibha Parmar, a British Asian film maker and activist, to contribute a reflective piece titled 'Other Kinds of Dreams' to the magazine *Feminist Review* in 1989. Parmar had stressed on other occasions the strength that she drew from black feminist commitments to diversity, though she noted the defensiveness that this provoked amongst white feminists. To celebrate difference, based on specific experiences of oppression, could be productive; but could also easily end in the unproductive accumulation of 'oppressed identities' and a retreat into 'lifestyle "politics"'. Parmar proposed that, instead of organizing around shared oppressions, or 'partnership in misery', the concept of diaspora was the most productive way of capturing diversity, avoiding the essentialism of identities such as

'blackness' and 'whiteness'. Parmar cited the American poet June Jordan on the power of 'other kinds of dreams that have nothing to do with whether we are white or not white'.[22]

In 1871, the American suffragist Susan B. Anthony was lecturing to an audience in Salt Lake City, Utah. A bothersome male audience member tried to convey his views, and Anthony famously declared: 'Away with your man-visions. Women propose to reject them all and begin to dream dreams themselves.' The idea that women's dreams might differ from men's was deeply subversive. Yet the extent to which all women might share the *same* dreams has proved a defining concern of feminists, and an area of deep divisions. Dreams do not only envision innovations but can also suggest the limits and tensions embedded in hopes for change, as Ramabai discovered in her awkward attempts to create a women's shelter. Feminist visions of an imagined future have been radically plural. My colleague's vision of the erasure of gender, for example, was taken up in Ursula Le Guin's extraordinary 1969 novel of androgyny, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. But the erasure of gender can be another person's nightmare. There is no evidence that feminist dreamers of the early twentieth century such as Rokeya, Gilman and Kollontai read each other. They would likely not have recognized themselves as participating in any common 'feminist' movement or sharing any kind of identity. Placing their dreams alongside each other does not try to reconcile them. It shows instead the different registers of feminist utopian imagination in different places, as well as some resemblances and echoes that were shared across their dreams.

Sidestepping the impossible conundrum of feminist unity

and substituting looser, more provisional coalitions and mosaic patterns has been a productive move within recent feminist thinking. As feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young argued in 1997: 'we need to wake up to the challenge of understanding across difference rather than keep on dreaming about common dreams.'[23] Where Adrienne Rich had named her dream one of a 'common language', Lorde talked of 'the very house of difference'. Her own dream in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, was of a sensual world in which women 'work together as friends and lovers', bridging the divisions between labour and love that so troubled the writings of Mill, Gilman and Kollontai. I shall give Lorde the last word here:

> Being women together was not enough. We were different.
> Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different.
> Being Black together was not enough. We were different.
> Being Black women together was not enough. We were different.
> Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different.[24]