

LUCY DELAP

Feminisms A Global History

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SPEW: Society for the Promotion of the Employment
of Women

WCTU: Women's Christian Temperance Union

WIDF: Women's International Democratic Federation

WIN: Women in Nigeria

WSPU: Women's Social and Political Union

WTUL: Women's Trade Union League

UN: United Nations

YWCA: Young Women's Christian Association

Introduction

In January 1886, a woman in the British-ruled Gold Coast (now Ghana) took up a pen to write an incendiary letter to the *Western Echo*, a local newspaper founded the previous year.

We Ladies of Africa in general are not only sadly misrepresented but are made the foot-ball of every white seal that comes to our Coast . . . We have been sadly abused by people of such description, and because we have said nothing they continue to abuse us with impunity . . . Although we have not white or angelic faces we are capable of as high a degree of culture as any white lady.¹

The letter speaks eloquently of her feelings of being kicked around by European colonists, of lack of respect for her culture, and the abuse and impunity of colonial governance as it impacted upon women. The writer was not just angry – she also offered some satirical wordplay, terming white male power 'Just Ass' rather than 'Justice'. Her name does not survive, yet her willingness to speak for 'we Ladies of Africa' draws our attention to her imagined community of African womanhood. Her forthrightness and breadth of vision were helped by local factors – the long-standing African-owned

press in the Gold Coast – as well as the global reach of the women’s movements of her day.

1886 was a moment of intense colonial expansion. Some of the major European powers were annexing African and Asian territory at speed, giving rise to a violent world order in which racial hierarchies and norms of sexuality became more strongly policed, and which radicals, nationalists and anti-colonialists would contest over the coming century. It was also a moment when women’s education was flourishing throughout the globe, their access to (or coercion into) paid employment was growing, and the spread of the bicycle was inaugurating new mobilities and anxieties that would be epitomized in the bloomer-wearing ‘new woman’ cyclist. It offers a way into a larger story of the profound transformations of how women thought about and inhabited their bodies and lives. Our story ranges both back and forward from 1886, to encompass 250 years of attempts to politicize the injustices of gender.

All who challenge the wrongs faced by women have approached it in ways deeply shaped by their own historical moment. Their ability to name themselves – as feminists, women, ladies or sisters – is always provisional. Their politics have been organized around divides of class, caste, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, nationality and age. No naming of an individual as feminist can be taken for granted. Nor can we impose ‘feminism’ as a label onto the activism of women and men who would not have recognized it, or who actively rejected it.

We can use ‘feminism’ as an entry point to understand better how campaigns over ‘women’s rights’, ‘new womanhood’, ‘the awakening of women’ or ‘women’s liberation’ might

have shared concerns and tactics. But I will also be telling the story of the limits of feminism, its blind spots and silencings, its specificities and complicities. Even the idea of ‘women’ (or, as nineteenth-century commentators often preferred, ‘woman’) has proved controversial. And ‘gender’, understood as the cultural and social organization of biological sex, has only become a commonly used term in the late twentieth century. This book traces out how feminists and activist women related to nationalism, religious doctrines, imperialism, utopianism and racial thinking. My aim is to offer feminist inspiration, showing how unexpected linkages and resonances emerge across different feminist generations and epochs. Inspiration must be set alongside a different story of conflicts and tensions. Feminist coalitions have long had their limits, and feminist concerns of the past don’t always mesh easily with urgent contemporary efforts to make visible and stamp out the injuries of gender.

Feminism seeks an alliance that spans more than half of humanity. There may have never been such an ambitious movement in human history. But what do feminists want? All share the insight that being a woman means disadvantage vis-à-vis men, and that this can be addressed through struggle. But the resulting political claims have varied dramatically over time and proceeded under many different names. Feminism is best understood as an overlapping, internally complex set of actions, questions and demands that has been in formulation since the eighteenth century or even earlier. Its concerns change over time. A century ago, British socialist-feminist Ethel Snowden described feminism as a project seeking the purity of men and women through harnessing ‘those instinctive feminine forces which make for the protection of

the race'. Twenty-first-century feminists are unlikely to identify with this rhetoric, and Snowden's race politics would have been contested by the anonymous Gold Coast letter-writer. There is nonetheless remarkable freshness and relevance to the feminist debates of the past when viewed through the lens of contemporary feminist concerns. Snowden's insistence, for example, that women have an equal right to fight in the military resonates with today's hard-fought campaigns to gain equality in battlefield operations.

Feminists have been motivated by the terrible realities of women's lack of control over their bodies – the rapes, sexual abuses, unwilling pregnancies and the relentless pressures of the male gaze. They have drawn attention to women's poverty, their exclusion from safer and better-paid jobs, their vulnerabilities through marriage or motherhood, their illiteracy. They have shown the cost of women's lack of legal rights, that have taken the form of loss of custody of their children, forced labour, lack of medical resources and land rights, and women's vulnerability in conditions of occupation, war and famine. The costs and human misery of gender inequalities have been and remain incalculable. Yet feminist activism has also been creative and empowering, creating coalitions and inspiring commitment to change. Ideas and dreams have taken shape as campaigns and protests; individuals have found hope, resilience and justice.

Feminism has been repeatedly written off as a political movement that has achieved its aims – only to come back with renewed force as another generation of women angrily name their malaise. Today's campaigners have deep interest in what some ambivalently term 'the F word'. But many are

uncertain as to how their activism relates to feminist history: some embrace 'foremothers' such as Concepción Arenal, Mary Wollstonecraft or Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Others repudiate the past and stress the uniqueness of 'their' feminism.

The ambivalence about the term, and the content of the feminist past, is unsurprising. The historical organizing frame of 'feminist waves' has not proved up to the job of making sense of the complexities of feminist history. Talk of first, second, third and fourth waves of feminism, or variants such as 'new feminism' or riot grrrl, have not always mapped easily onto women's experiences. And for many women, their activism has been so bound up in other movements – socialist, nationalist, anti-colonialist – that the term 'feminism' has been rejected as too divisive, too Euro-American, too white, too middle-class.

There will be some familiar stories in what follows, of suffrage militancy and stone-throwing protests; of radical feminist celebration of women's power and solidarity. But there is no assumption that feminism looks the same in each place or time. A theme running through the book will be a central paradox of feminism: as a movement, feminism insists on women's inclusion in all areas of social and political life and demands the radical transformation of those exclusionary structures; but feminism has its own forms of marginalization and has struggled to extend its boundaries to all women on equal terms. Black, working-class, lesbian, trans and bisexual, disabled, non-Western and non-Christian women have often been shut out of what theorist Chela Sandoval has termed 'hegemonic feminism'.² Despite its cosmopolitan origins, charted in the chapters that follow, 'feminism' has

often been associated with a Western model of emancipated womanhood. The voices of those with different backgrounds or goals have not always been listened to, and feminist campaigning has not always met their needs. Archival materials, where they document feminism at all, tend to lean towards the story that more powerful and privileged feminists have wanted to tell. As Adele Murdolo comments, 'very few documents exist in the feminist archive that readily reveal a conflictual and racially or ethnically divided movement.'³

Feminist battles have sometimes been regarded as already won, victories realized at the moment of enfranchisement, or where pioneering women finally achieved rights to practise medicine, to have custody of their children or to drive. In the 1990s, there was much talk of a 'post-feminist world' in which political power, economic success and cultural riches were all for women's taking. But this confidence that feminism had done its work has diminished considerably in the last decade of economic austerity, brutal wars and authoritarian politics. In 2013, prominent Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a TED Talk which declared, 'We should all be feminists.' She published this clarion call in 2014, and her words were also sampled by pop icon Beyoncé, who had toured under a giant projection of the word 'feminist' in 2013. The published version of 'We Should All Be Feminists' was given to every sixteen-year-old in Sweden shortly after it came out. Yet anti-feminist and misogynist rhetoric has dominated recent political debates. In 2016, Hillary Clinton failed to win the American presidential election, having faced intense negative coverage over her appearance. She and other female politicians faced vitriol from their

opponent Donald Trump, who declared of Carly Fiorina in his own Republican Party: 'Look at that face!' and 'Would anyone vote for that?' His words prompted millions of women across the world to march in early 2017. They were incensed by Trump's boasts of having 'grabbed women by the pussy', and coined the slogan 'pussy grabs back'. Across the globe, the pink 'pussy hat' became ubiquitous at protests and marches, echoing the red 'liberty cap' or '*bonnet rouge*' of republican *citoyennes* during the French Revolution. 2017 was also the year that a major American dictionary, Merriam-Webster, declared 'feminism' to be its most looked-up word. A global poll showed that only in Japan did a majority of respondents disagree with the statement: 'I advocate and support equal opportunities for women - I do more than just think about these things, I actually speak up and out to change things for women in my country.'⁴ Talk of post-feminism seems unconvincing in the face of these social and political trends.

Coined in the late nineteenth century, 'feminism' has always been a controversial term. An American comic newspaper called it the 'New Name for Masher' and pictured a man making unwelcome advances to a woman while declaring, 'Pay no attention to me, mademoiselle, I'm only a feminist.'⁵ It took some time to gain a more stable meaning as a person campaigning against injustice to women. Rebecca West, who began writing for a feminist journal, *The Free-woman*, at the age of twenty in 1911, defined being a feminist as what people called her 'whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a *doormat*'. But she nonetheless wrote under a pseudonym, for fear of embarrassing her family.

It has not only been women who have been inspired by

ideas of equality, 'gender justice' and living different lives. Throughout this book, we will meet men who have worked to advance women's rights, often through deep personal investment in feminist goals as also benefiting men. Indeed, the very term 'feminist' became used in the late nineteenth century to replace the idea of 'the women's movement' with a more open-ended identity that was open to both sexes. In 1906, at a meeting of the International Council of Women in Paris, a Monsieur Legendre interrupted the meeting, declaring himself to be the feminist candidate in a recent local election; participants were not impressed, and newspapers reported him as being 'ruthlessly expelled' from this women-only gathering.⁶ He was not the only man to stand on a feminist ticket in twentieth-century elections. George Lansbury, who went on to lead the British Labour Party, stood as a women's suffrage candidate in Middlesbrough in 1906, and in Bow and Bromley in 1913. Accused of seeking 'petticoat government', Lansbury lost both elections, but his commitment was undiminished. He was imprisoned for inciting violence in the women's suffrage cause later in 1913, where he joined the hunger strike which was widely used by women prisoners to protest their incarceration. In more recent years, campaigners have produced t-shirts for all, including in men's sizes, emblazoned with 'This is what a feminist looks like'. This slogan was taken up by United States former president Barack Obama in 2016, though for many men, being a feminist is still something they approach with ambivalence and anxiety.

For some women and men, feminism has proved a transformative, explosive, life changing way of seeing the world. For others, it has elicited responses of visceral repudiation,

laughter, ambivalence and irony. Impoverished women claiming welfare rights, Black women protesting police violence and housing conditions, working-class women in labour unions calling for equal pay and safe workplaces, or men meeting in men's groups have often opted for other labels, such as 'anti-sexist', 'womanist' and 'social justice campaigner'. Those who preferred other names for their activism should not be claimed as 'feminists'. But their motivations, and why they avoided this label, are important to historians of feminisms, who must cast their net widely in documenting activism against gender injustice.⁷

The 'When' of Feminism

Being a feminist has been projected back into past centuries with mixed success. There have been efforts to claim figures such as the late-medieval writer Christine de Pizan, or even the ancient Alexandrian philosopher Hypatia, as 'feminists'. Of course, these historical actors did not think in these terms, and it is misleading to approach them through our much later ideological concerns. Instead, we should ask what terms and concepts they used to think about men and women. A division of the world into two sexes cannot be taken for granted. In some parts of the world, it is not clear that there was a clearly recognizable concept of 'woman'. As historians of China have argued, the category of 'female persons' (*funü*) was a relatively late invention and related directly to family status. In many contexts, female persons were profoundly subdivided – into 'wives' and 'courtesans' in Qing China. The same might be said about the class divide of 'women' and 'ladies' in nineteenth-century Britain.

Local diversity has meant that the emergence of organized demands for change happened in very different ways all over the world. Where they existed, ‘feminists’ spoke for different groups and in diverse registers. ‘The women’s movement’ or ‘woman question’ was the terminology of nineteenth-century Europe and the Americas, while ‘women’s awakening’ was widely debated in Middle Eastern and North African countries in the early twentieth century. Others in this period preferred to talk of the ‘new woman’ as a symbol of new forms of economic and cultural opportunity for women. Chinese radicals variously made demands in the name of women’s rights (*funüjie*) and gender equality (*nannü pingdeng*). Feminism does not map in any straightforward way onto these terrains, and historians of feminism must take care not to erase the local specificity of struggles and activism. However, it would be a mistake to simply look at all these debates and movements in isolation; they often shared key ideas or drew inspiration from each other’s struggles. We can chart the rich interweaving of global debates on the relationship between gender and power, at the same time as recognizing feminism as a deeply historical and context-specific phenomenon.

Though it was often defined in highly various ways, ‘feminism’ as a term was adopted globally in the early twentieth century. It might refer to women’s ‘rights’ as well as to campaigns of women’s advancement, protection and equality. A single issue of a magazine titled *La Aurora Feminista* (*The Feminist Dawn*) was published in Chile in 1904, the same year that Rosika Schwimmer (1877–1948) founded the Feministák Egyesülete (Feminist Association) in Hungary; a Centro Feminista was founded the following year in Buenos Aires,

Argentina. An Asociación Feminista Filipina was founded in the Philippines in 1905; Filipina women saw feminism as carving out a civic role for women, attempting to improve the regulation of women’s work and preventing early marriage.⁸ In the same year, Argentina hosted the first International Feminine Congress, and saw the publication in La Plata of the journal *La Nueva Mujer* (*The New Woman*). The motto of the Congress had been ‘Let Us Work’, and the emphasis of Latin American feminism in these early years was on social service and the protection of women by the state. Its critics accused feminists of being *marimacho* – half man, half woman. But the term ‘feminism’ was flexible enough to be adopted by religious conservatives such as Laura Correa de Bustos, who published an account of ‘*feminismo Cristiano*’ (Christian feminism) in the Uruguayan capital Montevideo in 1907.⁹

In Britain, the suffrage movement is often assumed to speak for feminist concerns of the period. However, contributors to the first British magazine that called itself ‘feminist’, *The Freewoman*, used ‘feminism’ in 1911 to distinguish their beliefs from the suffrage campaign for votes for women. By ‘feminist’, its avant-garde editors indicated a term open to both sexes, and one which rejected conventional political institutions. They sought revolutionary change; one editor, Dora Marsden, declared controversially that ‘rebels armed with rifles’ would be most likely to gain respect. Other terms were also available – French radicals experimented with ‘*éclairceuse*’ (‘trailblazer’) to capture a sense of pioneering women, ‘liberated from all that still burdens the bulk of their companions’.¹⁰ German-speaking activists wavered between ‘*Feminismus*’ (feminism) and ‘*Frauenbewegung*’ (women’s

movement), fearing that the former term had implications of 'free love' or British suffrage militancy.¹¹ Feminism has often been a 'loanword', deployed in a wide variety of places to label different kinds of gender politics; there was talk of feminism as *'feminizumu'* in Japan in 1910. Russian activists however preferred the term *'ravnopravki'* or 'equal righters' when, in the heady revolutionary days of 1905, they founded the Union of Equal Rights for Women.¹² Across the world, there was fascination with this new concept, as well as suspicion of European or American influences.

Sometimes external labels stuck. The British media mocked early-twentieth-century militants by terming them 'suffragettes', but this name was embraced with enthusiasm by those throwing stones for the right to vote. 'Bra burners' was an insult of the 1970s, but activists came up with their own puns and subversive reappropriations: Harpies Bizarre, Hags, Lavender Menace, the Monstrous Regiment, the Society for Cutting Up Men.

The meaning of 'feminist' has continued to evolve, and to be controversial. Activists in the 1970s and 80s often preferred to talk of 'women's liberation', since they associated 'feminist' with reformist 'liberal' politics of parliamentary rights and suffrage. Feminists in France associated with the 'Psych et Po' (Psychoanalysis and Politics) grouping disliked 'feminist' as an American import connoting confrontation. They preferred to talk of *'femmes en lutte'* ('women in the struggle') as a means of capturing their distinctive stress on feminine difference and maternal qualities. Late-twentieth-century Japanese activists have preferred to talk about a 'gender-free' society. By the twenty-first century, many activists across the world

have felt the need to routinely preface their feminism with other flags, resulting in labels such as 'intersectional feminism' or 'trans-friendly feminism'.

Despite the many varieties of feminisms, one of the overarching feminist dreams has been of a movement that could span all women: 'Helping each other, all of one mind', as the Chinese banner declared at the 1913 conference of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. This fantasy has carried with it the paradox of an abstract political agenda that, in its very inclusivity, ignores concrete exclusions. Talk of 'black feminism' or 'Chicana feminism' has sometimes attempted to solve this problem, but critics have argued that this simply foregrounds the exclusion of black or Chicana women from the ethnically unmarked feminist 'mainstream'. African American writer Alice Walker coined the term 'womanism' in 1984, and this has been taken up by some black women. 'Womanist' (or 'womynist' for those who preferred to entirely excise the 'man' lurking in 'woman') runs the same risks as 'feminist' of universalizing its claims. But it does provide a useful reminder of the limits and exclusions of feminism as an affiliation. As the African American activist Frances Watkins Harper (1825–1911) put it succinctly as far back as 1866: 'You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs.' Harper wanted the women's movement to challenge the racial segregation of streetcars, but her white peers were reluctant to take on issues of racial exclusion. As an African American woman and a former domestic servant, she continued: 'I, as a colored woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if I were in the situation of Ishmael, my hand against every man, and every man's hand against me.'¹³

She and her fellow African American activists formed the National Association of Colored Women in 1897, preferring, in an environment of growing racial exclusion, to organize separately from white women and without embracing 'feminism' as a platform.

These debates over naming and belonging suggest the need to look closely at the historically variable labelling of gender activism, and to think hard about the work different names do. We need not engage in a competitive struggle to identify the first, or the truest, feminists. Instead, we can trace out experiences of exclusion and difference amongst gender and social justice activists, and chart their passionate, painful or strategic coalitions.

Despite the renewed interest in what feminism 'means' in the present day, it is important to recognize that its meaning has been mobile. Feminist symbols and slogans have been malleable, reshaped in formats that were useable for different audiences. *Feminisms: A Global History* will explore traditions that include Islamic, black, indigenous and lesbian feminisms. More controversially, it will also explore men's identification with feminism, in order to probe long-standing tensions over who is being addressed by feminism, and who can be part of the movement.

Why Global?

Why should we approach feminism from a global perspective? Histories of feminisms have often been organized around a 'civilizational' and Eurocentric model. In these stories, feminism can be dated back to the European writers of the seventeenth century, such as Aphra Behn, François

Poullain de la Barre and Sarah Fyge, who began to think about women as an 'enslaved class'. Such writers were inspired by ideas of women's spiritual equality within mostly Protestant religious traditions. When they talked of 'enslavement', they rarely considered women who were literally enslaved on the plantations and estates of the Americas and Caribbean. They began to find ways to name and renounce experiences of rape and forced marriage – though again, without reference to the prevalence of such experiences for the enslaved. These intellectuals have often been viewed as significant 'foremothers' for the history of feminisms.

In older histories, the baton was usually then passed to women who experienced the American and French revolutions in the late eighteenth century, such as Abigail Adams and Olympe de Gouges. De Gouges, who proclaimed the rights of women in her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791), is often named with the British writer Mary Wollstonecraft as the initiators of ideas and polemics that are recognizably feminist. Their influence is then traced onwards, through the more activist nineteenth century, during which campaigns flourished on women's education, property rights and suffrage, and into the twentieth century. Only recently have figures such as former slave and poet Phyllis Wheatley (c. 1753–84) been added to this story. Feminist history has often been structured around a limited cast of mostly white and educated foremothers. This has led to lineages of inheritance that not only risk misreading earlier versions of feminist thought and action, but have also been organized around the desire to show 'who was first'. Simply put, the earliest texts that can be read as 'feminist'

have been used to establish a national priority, where white citizens of imperial powers such as France, Britain or the United States came to be taken as originating points.

The writing of global or world history has for decades now challenged this kind of account. Historians have proposed ways of understanding the global that take alternative starting points and new thinkers. We might take as an originating feminist moment the 1799 Rasheed (Rosetta) Women's Conference, where a group of Egyptian women, radicalized by protesting the 1798 French invasion at Alexandria, met to discuss the conditions of women's employment and family status. Alternatively, a starting point might be the rights given to indigenous female householders to vote in Sierra Leone in 1792 – a right lost when their country became a British Crown Colony in 1808. Indigenous and settler women gained voting rights in New Zealand from 1893, well ahead of their European and American counterparts. These perspectives help challenge the assumed priority of European feminisms.

Global histories of feminism have focused on the large-scale structures that underpinned ideas about the 'woman question', women's rights and women's emancipation. There has been deep attention to the role of empires, for example, in shaping the nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's movements and producing a world in which liberty and citizenship were denied to colonized populations. Colonized peoples underwent mass migrations within systems of indentured and forced labour. Women in many settings found their access to land and trading rights curtailed. Women of imperial powers used the rhetoric of racial and civilizational advancement to become authorities on colonized women. They used

the roles of missionary, settler and wife to travel, describe the lives of non-Western women, and intervene in how they were treated, sometimes in the name of equality or feminism. For later decades, when empires began to be dismantled, it was the geopolitical contests of the Cold War that helped to authorize and shape women's and feminist activism.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were also dominated by the development of nationalism, and this meant that women's status and freedoms were often tied to debates about national progress. Within such debates, the problematic idea of 'backwardness' as a means to capture local discontent with women's circumstances features prominently. In Brazil, for example, the imagined European or North American emancipated, educated woman was used to make claims for the advancement of the nation or region. The editor of the Brazilian women's rights newspaper, *O Jornal das Senhoras* (*The Ladies' Journal*), noted in the journal's first editorial in 1852:

in France, England, Italy, Spain, the United States, and in Portugal itself, cases abound of women dedicated to literature who contribute to various newspapers. Perchance shall South America alone stay stationary in its ideas when the entire world marches toward progress and moves toward the moral and material improvement of society?

O Jornal das Senhoras had been founded in Rio de Janeiro and was edited by the Argentinian-born Juana Paula Manso de Noronha (1819–75). Manso saw *O Jornal das Senhoras* as a platform to work for the 'social betterment and the moral emancipation of women'. While it was rhetorically useful for Manso to draw a contrast between 'advanced' and 'backward'

regions, in reality the kinds of reforms actually (or imagined to be) taking place in nations such as Britain, France and the United States were also evident in Brazil. The first university college for women in Britain, Girton College in Cambridge, opened in 1869. Women were given the right to enter higher education only a decade later in 1879 in Brazil – in the same year that the French state resolved to provide *lycées* (secondary education) for French girls. Women's suffrage was seriously debated in the Brazilian Constitutional Congress of 1891, paralleling similar debates in Britain and the United States. And despite her rhetoric of backwardness, Manso was convinced that Europe need not take the lead, since 'the banner of enlightenment waves gracefully in the perfumed breeze of the tropics'.¹⁴

Manso's mobility across national borders reminds us that histories of feminism cannot be located only within single nation states, regions or empires. Global influences have been based on the migration of individuals, as refugees, students, exiles and workers. An early women's suffrage petition in Britain, for example, was organized by Anne Knight of the Sheffield Female Political Association in 1851 after she had spent time with French activist Jeanne Deroin in Paris during the revolutionary days of 1848; in turn, Deroin published Harriet Taylor Mill's 1851 essay 'The Enfranchisement of Women' in her journal *L'Almanach des Femmes* in 1852. With the rise of technologies of travel and communications in the nineteenth century, some women were peripatetic across multiple nations – historian Bonnie Anderson, for example, tracks the Jewish abolitionist and suffragist Ernestine Rose (1810–92) across Poland, Berlin, Paris, London and New

York as she fled an arranged marriage and immersed herself in socialist and feminist activism.¹⁵

Historians have become newly attentive to the deliberate cultivation of transnational spaces, in the pages of globally circulating periodicals, in conventions, conferences, alliances and federations. Sometimes transnationalism was a deliberate tactic, witnessed in the global mobilization undertaken by bodies such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union in the nineteenth century. International organizations such as the International Council of Women helped foster important elements of global governance, such as the League of Nations Commission on the Legal Status of Women (1937). The 'left-feminist' Women's International Democratic Federation built up similar networks of campaigning and mobility in the second half of the twentieth century, which later helped inform the influential United Nations (UN) World Conferences on Women in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).¹⁶

A global history approach also allows us to see the interactions between globally famous texts and local intellectual or activist traditions.¹⁷ John Stuart Mill's important book, *The Subjection of Women*, for example, was published in Britain in 1869, in the context of Mill's recent attempts to get a women's suffrage bill through the Houses of Parliament, where he sat as the Member for the City and Westminster. It was quickly translated into many languages, including into Spanish by a Chilean woman, Martina Barros Borgeño, in 1872, and published in the Chilean journal *Revista de Santiago* as *La Esclavitud de la Mujer*. The Chilean women's movement drew on European texts but retained its own distinctive emphases.

In Chile, where few men voted, the most pressing question was not suffrage but the economic exploitation of women drawn into industry, and this perspective reshaped the meaning of Mill's ideas about the 'slavery' of women.

Feminism is better understood as a conversation rather than an import; but a conversation with many registers. It has taken place under unequal conditions, where some voices are amplified and some are routinely ignored.¹⁸ The idea of 'entangled histories' has been used by global historians to capture the ways in which ideas, people and texts crossed and re-crossed borders to create multiple 'intersections'; historian Kathryn Gleadle invites us to think of feminist history as a non-linear rhizome root structure, full of unexpected growth points, dead ends and patterns of influence.¹⁹ Some of this patterning stretched over time; feminists and others sustained critical dialogue with earlier texts and reworked their ideas. The assumed priority of white, educated Euro-American women has turned out to be a myth.²⁰ In the following chapters, I highlight specific local constellations of ideas that allowed for feminist dreams, ideas and actions to be developed and contested. There may sometimes be faint lines of influence, but there is just as likely to be repudiation and innovation. Rather than trying to find origins in Europe, I work with a more diffuse idea of 'mosaic feminism', built up from inherited fragments but offering distinctive patterns and pictures. Like mosaics, the view from afar and the close reading of feminisms may give a very different picture. And like mosaics, feminist coalitions were built up from the bits and pieces available – other movements, committed individuals, actions and ideas. Some mosaics have been long-lived;

others have crumbled, and their tiles have been reused, or have disappeared from view.

The familiar centring of Europe is displaced and 'provincialized' by telling the histories of other networks and sites, such as the importance of Japan in hosting Chinese exiles in the early twentieth century, creating a site of powerful exchange. International campaigners and writers on suffrage, temperance, anti-colonialism and peace questions are also brought into view, displacing those located firmly within the nation state. Throughout the book, I alternate between wide-angle summaries of different feminist beliefs or campaigns, and close scrutiny of the lives of individual women who fought against gender inequities. In doing so, I hope to draw out some important new ways of reading feminist practices and ideas across historical time. Influenced by Kimberly Springer's concept of 'politics in the cracks', I suggest that we look not only at the shards and fragments that make up a mosaic, but also at the gaps between the pieces. Springer's work on black feminist organizations such as the Third World Women's Alliance describes a politics created in 'the cracks' – snatched moments between the demands of everyday work and care. Black women's organizing also fell between the civil rights and the women's movements, awkwardly or creatively showing up the intersections of class, gender and race.²¹ Springer's 'interstitial' politics draws our attention to concerns that did not fit easily into existing feminist politics, and the opportunities and dislocations that resulted. In a similar spirit, we might ask what makes the mosaic stable, or what erodes its patterns. Or investigate how dreams, campaigns, spaces and places, emotions and songs could provide a kind of feminist

'cement', embedding a politics into its historical shape, and giving way over time so that mosaic pieces might drop out and new patterns can emerge.

Metaphors of mosaics and conversations give a sense of the richness of feminist debates. But it is important also to maintain in view the discord, violence and trouble that have also characterized feminism. As the feminist philosopher bell hooks has observed, 'women can and do participate in politics of domination, as perpetrators as well as victims.'²² Some of the global systems that emerged around the same historical moment as the 'woman question' and feminism – systems such as imperialism, missionary and settler colonialism, indentured labour, nationalism – were projects that relied on violence and subordination. The world is not, historically, a freely traversed space for all. While we as twenty-first-century observers might take a global perspective on the feminist past, this privilege was not available to the historical actors themselves. A global history of feminism, as historian Mrinalini Sinha has insisted, will not simply pluralize our picture so that we think in terms of 'feminisms'.²³ Instead, our account of feminisms must acknowledge what Sinha terms the 'discrepant histories of different women's movements', marked by contests, conflicts and power-play.

Theory, Activism and Useability

What have feminisms been used for? What uses might they have today? The idea of 'useable history' offers a means of thinking about history in dialogue with the present – a history which can help clarify questions of feminist strategy, priority and focus in the contemporary moment by showing

how dilemmas and campaigns were shaped in the past. Feminist ideas and campaigns have been used to redistribute domestic labour, to transform how children are raised and educated, how art and music are created, how 'work' is categorized and rewarded, how legal systems operate. Without wanting to claim that history offers direct repeats or recapitulations, we can look back to feminisms past and find precursors to problems today. We might ask, historically who could reside in the category 'feminist'? Who gets left out? What kinds of differences did feminism make to individuals, to societies or to nations?

Thinking about useability does not mean that we should explore the feminist past only for contemporary inspiration. Instead, we can also grasp the specificity and distinctiveness of how, say, religion informed feminism in the late eighteenth century, or how nation-building provided a specific context to the development of women's movements in early-twentieth-century China or the Middle East. A useable history is not one that judges the past by today's standards. Instead, useability reminds us of the variable ways in which feminisms have been put to use, rhetorically, intellectually and materially, in the lives of historical actors.²⁴ And inevitably, each reader will bring their own questions and determine what is useable for them. Useable feminisms must be non-doctrinaire and open-ended, shaped but not determined by the encounter between past and present.

There may be aspects of the feminist past that make us uncomfortable today. But the idea of useability acknowledges the need for a historical underpinning to today's activism.²⁵ Feminists have long been caught in an awkward

position in relation to their history; moments of rejection of what mothers or grandmothers believed in are motivated by a need to rebel, to declare a new era and to shake off inheritances. Novelties such as social media platforms can make contemporary feminists feel that the #Cuéntalo (Tell It) or #MeToo moments are very different from preceding feminist upsurges. But at the same time, there has always been a strongly historical aspect to feminist movements, sometimes imbued with nostalgia for the past. And only a brief look back reveals strong shared themes, around sexual harassment at work and in the street, and challenges to male violence, impunity and disrespect for women.

For many, a book about feminist history will be at least partly an intellectual journey. Feminism has always been, amongst other things, an invitation to think hard about how and why society is organized, and why (some) men have louder voices, more resources and more authority than women. Feminist thinkers have been engaged with the big ideas of modern times – they have challenged the liberal self, the social contract, accounts of democratic citizenship, state and nation, as well as socialist ideas of revolution. Feminism has intersected with and contributed to anarchist critiques, as well as ecological, theological and critical race scholarship. Indeed, as higher education has expanded in the late twentieth century, feminism has become an established part of the academic landscape across much of the world. Yet theory was also produced at the cutting edge of protest, consciousness-raising and campaigning. It has often been intended to be useable in activism, as well as in personal life transformation.

The ways in which history is written have changed and

pluralized over the past twenty years. There has been a flourishing of work in cultural history, as well as the development of new approaches to the study of material culture, space, capitalism and the emotions, to name but a few recent growth areas. This book is informed by these new approaches and expands feminist history beyond its typical location within intellectual and social movement analyses. I won't attempt to tell a continuous story that spans the feminist movements of the last two centuries – such an undertaking would be impossibly large. Instead, I offer some new jumping-off points, rooted in recent innovative histories. Chapter 1, on feminist dreams, is informed by the turn towards literary and psychoanalytic thinking, which takes seriously our dreams and the creative and unconscious work they might do. Chapter 2 recognizes the theoretical resources that feminists have created, by discussing how patriarchy and other terms have captured the persistent gender patterns within human social organization. It also examines the influence of long-standing intellectual traditions such as republicanism, and the more recent development of ideas of intersectionality and sexism. Inspired by the increasing scholarly interest in how location and space shape social movements, Chapter 3 explores the idea of a feminist place. It locates feminism in spaces of work and worship, and charts attempts to craft spaces of refuge and safety. Chapter 4 looks at some feminist objects. Where previous histories have understood feminism as an ideology, or best captured through biographies of people, this chapter foregrounds the material and visual culture of feminism, in the political statements of badges and posters, as well as everyday objects such as the mundane yet powerful book and

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.

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