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# Social Movements and Transnational Change: The Case of Feminism at the United Nations

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# *Social Movements and Transnational Change: The Case of Feminism at the United Nations*

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## Abstract

Social movement studies have devoted space to the women's and feminist movement since the 1970s, especially in its national declinations and regarding what was happening in Europe and the United States. Through the feminist sociologists that have defined a transnational perspective comprehended as an empirical and theoretical field, we have a reinterpretation of feminist movements, their past and new theoretical perspectives valuable to the entire field of inquiry. Focusing on a specific form of transnational feminism, which arose during the Conferences on Women organized by the United Nations, we can observe how certain classical theoretical assumptions applied to the phenomenon are questioned through its temporal and spatial dimensions, broadening the gaze and the possibilities of interpretation.
The temporal dimension, punctuated by the collective actions of protest, did not allow us to see the continuity over time of feminism through its "abeyance structures" and a composite "social movement community" that brought into actors not foreseen by traditional theories of reference. In this way, we can redefine the temporality and quality of feminist action, allowing for a reorientation of the protest cycle theory.
Instead, the transnational dimension, which becomes political practice and theoretical gaze, shows us feminisms in places other than those defined by the West. Indeed, spatiality shifts, showing the emergence of one of the first forms of intersectionality acted and theorized by women from the Global South. At the same time, crucial is the analysis of the role played by international institutions, such as the United Nations, which provided a political opportunity that enabled the emergence of transnational ideas and practices.

*JEL codes*: D70, D71, D85, L31,
*Keywords:* social movements, transnational feminism, intersectionality, United Nations

## 1. Introduction

Social movement studies are a multidisciplinary field in which sociology and political science have made fundamental contributions through diverse theories and methodological pluralism (Della Porta, 2022). Different approaches, categories of analysis and paradigms have made it possible to read the collective actions that characterize the contemporary world and to review those of the past in a new light, thus contributing to the understanding of society. The paper aims, first, to illustrate how the women's and feminist movement has been framed within social movement studies, according to the distinction between "old" (essentially the labour movement) and "new" social movements. The latter, which emerged in the late 1960s, is seen as vital actors of innovation: oriented toward the production of meanings and the creation of cultural models that influence collective and individual identity, they are devoted to cultural and symbolic, rather than material, claims (Della Porta, 2014). Focusing precisely on transnational feminism, we will investigate its interconnected dimensions of temporality and spatiality and, most importantly, how this form of activism needs to be further explored, as some classical paradigms and categories of reference are not enough to read it in its complexity. The study of

feminisms, in its transnational declination, also allows us to reread the recent past, noting how the definition of the movement through so-called waves has failed to grasp its continuity, the variety of mobilizations and the different realities that compose it. In addition, through the transnational dimension, the issue of spatiality will be introduced, understood as broadening from the national to the international and transnational field, showing an intersectional perspective theorized and embodied by women from the Global South. Indeed, we can observe in this context the transition to the centre of feminist theory and practice of other social categories besides gender, such as "race", nationality, class and their intersections. The intersectional approach acted out in the context under consideration reveals to us the capacity for political action that moves on a symbolic and material plane at the same time.
To sum up, this distinct form of activism allows us to enlarge our gaze and reconsider part of sociological theory, renewing some categories of analysis and providing the possibility of new approaches. As we shall see, transnational feminism is, at the same time, a perspective, a set of theories and practices of activism, networks of alliances and the production of discursive frames (Tambe and Thayer, 2021).

In particular, we will focus on feminist activism in the context of the Conferences on Women organized by the United Nations between 1975 and 1995, looking at the relationship with an international institution and the changes that occurred within feminism. That will allow us to show a social movement's complexity, continuity and transformation in its temporal and spatial dimensions, the role of the United Nations as a political opportunity and the creation of networks as constituent elements of transnational declination.

The paper proceeds as follows: the first part discusses how women's and feminist movements have been conceptualized and studied in the literature (i.e., as part of new social movements); the second part analyses the main characteristics of transnational feminism and its relationship with the United Nations, which provided the political opportunity that facilitated the emergence of transnational ideas and practices; and the last part observes the potential and active role of feminist networks as an active part of the movement community.

## 2. Feminist and women's movements as "new" social movements

The history of social movement studies shows alternations, overlaps and continuities of theories and paradigms that cannot be summarized in a few words. However, a fundamental change was the emergence of social movements in the second half of the 20th century, which also involved a clear shift in perspective. Collective actions of protest began to be read and analysed as intentional, organized and rational phenomena and no longer, as was previously the case, the result of unreason and out-of-control emotions. Resource mobilization theory (RMT), first proposed by John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (1977), emphasizes its rationality and instrumental character in planning to achieve structural change in society. According to Katia Pilati's definition (2018, 12), collective protest actions are those «svolte da uno o più gruppi organizzati che condividono un obiettivo e operano in vista di un cambiamento o della resistenza a un cambiamento». In the relevant literature, these actions are usually considered a basic unit and tangible expression of social movements. Of course, their definitions have also changed over time, depending on the theoretical references and movements analysed. It is necessary to emphasize that most of the events studied and related theories have come to life mainly in Europe and the United States. In summary, collective protest actions and social movements emerge at specific historical moments and cultural contexts that condition theoretical concepts and their diffusion (Buechler, 2011).

In this preliminary paper on transnational feminism, as a starting point, we investigate the resources and limitations of some of the theories in the classic literature on social movements. As mentioned, in its conflicting form, protest action has been and still is central to social movement studies. The so-called "contentious politics", which falls under the political process model (whose leading exponents are Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam), is a critical theoretical reference point, especially in the United States. The conflict that essentially plays out between a challenging group and the elites who hold power is: «episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants» (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001, 5). In such a context, we find social movements and other forms of conflict, such as riots and strikes, civil wars, and revolutions, which might intersect routine political processes such as elections and interest group politics. This approach has long focused on protest events, the means and the ends, leaving little room for analysis of the subjective dimension, the meanings attributed to collective action, and the relationships among the actors involved that go beyond the mobilizations. Although some representatives of the political process theory emphasize the relational dimension, this has seemed not to fully grasp some specificity, especially of the "new social movements".

Since the 1980s, there has been a turning point in this field of study; the "cultures" of social movements, frames of actions, collective identities, performances and emotions have become central. In this way, the analysis and definition of social movement went beyond conflict dynamics and expanded to include the participation of actors who had not previously been considered.
This time coming from Europe, we find an essential contribution in this direction in the so-called theory of new social movements that considers the American approach and those produced by Marxist orthodoxy insufficient to explain movements arising in the late 1960s. Furthermore, we must emphasize several authors and perspectives for which it would be better to speak, as Steven Buechler (1995) suggests, of theories of new social movements.
However, some basic and common themes can be identified, including the centrality given to the motivation of those participating in a movement, the symbolic dimension of collective action and claims, and the emphasis on processes that promote self-determination. Essentially, differences and a shift from the labour movement are highlighted. The unity of the worker's movement, an undisputed actor in a central conflict in the previous era, seems to crumble into diversified struggles that come to life after the symbolic date of 1968. In the so-called post-industrial age, we see the emergence of new social movements, defined as such over that of workers.

«I nuovi movimenti sociali si intrecciano insomma a nuovi approcci dell'idea di emancipazione che vanno al di là del materialismo storico come fattore convergente in grado di inglobare tutte le istanze rivendicative in un'unica idea di emancipazione, riferita prevalentemente al maschile, alla *whiteness* e all'egemonia culturale dell'occidente» (Rebughini, 2015, 42).

The student, feminist, pacifist and environmental movements are placed in this group. The scholars emphasize in different ways these issues and have relationships with varying reference traditions. We can identify several vital authors to bring an idea of the diversity of theories. Still, here we will focus, very briefly, on Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci, who have made valuable contributions to the study of the feminist movement.
In particular, with the advent of post-industrial society, Touraine identifies a significant change in the mobilizations that move from the economic sphere to the cultural one, with individualization of social problems; all this leads to the difficulty of carrying out collective actions that turn into a central conflict in society. The centrality of the individual in Touraine is fundamental because movement in this perspective is not only conflict, claim or protest but is also a form of struggle for individual emancipation, a path of subjectification (Antonelli, 2009). This perspective expands the notion of a social movement, including actors and actions that had yet to be considered, devoting new attention to the nexus between the individual and collective spheres. At the same time, there are limitations to this

rooted idea of individualized participation with no focus on material and class claims because it cannot capture the complexity of some mobilizations and the discourses they produce. The struggles of feminist movements, especially in their transnational dimension, have not excluded a material claim, much less ignored the class issue, as we will see more fully in the composition of the analysed form of activism and its intersectional perspective. The process of subjectification operated by feminism does not ignore the collective dimension nor a broad vision of improvement for the whole society. Through the process of individual subjectivation, it wants to arrive at a dimension of collective consciousness explicitly expressed by feminist theories and practises.

While Melucci agrees with Touraine that the political status of the new social movements does not resemble the past, he believes it can have structural effects. Melucci looks at these movements and their messages, emphasizing the importance of consolidating collective identities. Relevant is the insight that the social construction of collective identity is both a vital prerequisite and one of the main achievements of the new social movements. He turns the focus away from the formal organizations by indicating that various collective actions are nested in networks of submerged groups that occasionally coagulate (Melucci, 1980). He suggests speaking less about movements and more about networks of movements or movement areas to capture the reality of many contemporary mobilizations. Indeed, activists consider various entities part of a social movement, including collectives, cultural groups, bookstores, magazines, clubs and not only social movement organizations (SMOs). We will see how the relevance of networks and the consequent possibility of alliances are crucial in reading the phenomenon under consideration.

Feminism is historically part of the new social movements. It has long been studied by referring to its protest actions, like other movements, essentially, through the analysis of national movements in Europe and the United States in the 1970s. The so-called second-wave feminism is still regarded as the highest expression of the feminist movement. The first theoretical issue to dwell on is feminism's scanning in "waves", a reading of overt mobilizations as an expression of a social movement. Addressing the question of temporality offers us more vast possibilities for understanding and insights into theoretical approaches better suited for reading this phenomenon. The definition of "waves", besides being problematic for the analysis of the movement itself, refers only to Western history: when, in the United States and Europe, beginning in the second half of the 19th century, a series of events and mobilizations of women contribute to the definition of the first feminist wave. Through this time structure, there has yet to be full recognition of what happened in the 1980s and 1990s, both in national and transnational movements, from a theoretical standpoint and in terms of political practices.

Some scholars and activists define it as a karst movement, characterized by phases of recognizable mobilization and others that are less obvious or seemingly less confrontational. In these periods of less visibility, the actions performed by feminists do not fit the definition of collective protest action. These initiatives do not necessarily occupy the public space of politics. They can be cultural events, bookstore openings, magazines, publishing houses, founding nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and starting gender studies courses in universities. They are all initiatives that keep a network of activism alive, nurture cognitive frames and renegotiate identities through what sociologist Verta Taylor calls "abeyance structures" (1989): various realities, associations and collectives are born and survive, but they are forms of the feminist organization often overlooked in social movement studies (Thompson, 2002). Tylor's well-known essay devoted to women's rights activism in the United States challenges the widespread view that the American women's movement died after suffrage in 1920 and was reborn in the 1960s. The study conducted shows that this is not true, revealing a process that allows feminist challenge groups to continue to operate in unreceptive political moments through abeyance structures. These provide organizational and ideological bridges between different phases of activism. We can see how the wave metaphor hides the continuity of the feminist movement and obscures the range of political and cultural activities, especially those of "unexpected subjects" such as women from subaltern classes, racialized or who do not identify themselves with white feminism.

«The analysis of continuous feminist mobilizations allowed reorienting of the theory of protest cycle (Tarrow, 1998). Whether conflict across the social system goes in cycle or waves, opposing challengers to authorities and possibly ending in reform, repression or revolution, it is also worthwhile assuming the persistence of movement structure (such as groups, free spaces, journals) that retain claims and organization from one stage of mobilizations to the other» (Bonu, 2022:76).

In this way, we can see what actions are put into play in addition to those of protest traditionally understood, whether they are more or less aggressive and to which authorities they are directed. As we shall also see, the space enlarges since it is not only the state that contemporary movements refer to (or with which they enter into contention) because they often have a broader gaze. Actions other than mobilization can be organized and recognized as the heritage of a movement, such as claims that can be directed against various authority structures (Staggenborg, 2005:39). Indeed, many of the causes and demands proclaimed by the new movements have international entities as their institutional reference. Reorienting the theory of the protest cycle allows us to see what happens to a social movement when it does not express itself through public mobilizations, if and how it keeps itself alive, and which are the structures and dynamics of the networks that compose it.

In sum, even with limitations and the need for readjustment, the theories of new social movements show us different actors in the field in phases of evident protest and those of less visibility in public space. They also contributed significantly to reading the identity of movements, their capacity for subjectification and their complex constitution that eludes rigid categories.
Several scholars have dealt with feminism and, starting with Melucci, have focused on properties and characteristics of the networks that make up a movement, particularly a feminist movement, and that influence processes such as mobilization, alliance formation and the ability to pressure authorities (Staggenborg, 2005). The expanded composition of social movements finds a proper representation in the definition of social movement community, which allows us to recover a complex whole capable of ensuring a continuum of activity. The actions of this community are as varied as their constituent realities, which, moreover, do not require formal political affiliation. Instead, we are invited to reassess the role of collective identity, of shared recognition, as a lever of political protest. Introduced by Buechler, the idea of "social movement community" has subsequently been used in contemporary research on feminisms, particularly by Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier on the lesbian feminist community and by Suzanne Staggenborg on the Bloomington feminist community. Defined as «informal networks of politicized individuals with fluid boundaries, flexible leadership structures, and malleable divisions of labour» (Buechler, 1990, 42), it goes beyond defining mobilization structures. Instead, it contributes to rethinking the cultural component of mobilizations by reflecting on collective identity (Bereni and Revillard, 2012). Taylor e Whittier described the social movement community as «a network of individuals and groups loosely linked through an institutional base, multiple goals and actions, and a collective identity that affirms members' common interests in opposition to dominant groups» (Taylor and Whittier 1992, 107 in Bereni and Revillard, 2012). Suzanne Staggenborg includes in it «all actors who share and advance the goals of a social movement: movement organizations; individual movement adherents who do not necessarily belong to SMOs; institutionalized movement supporters; alternative institutions; and cultural groups» (Staggenborg, 1998, 182).

## 3. Situating the transnational feminist movement: women's conferences, political practices and theoretical perspectives

Therefore, the movement community allows us to see the composition and variety of feminisms moving along time and space, giving rise to a composite but recognizable identity with which, above all, activists identify. That is also why, especially in recent years, we prefer to speak of feminisms in the plural, thus highlighting the existence of different paths of activism. Several types of research, especially since the 1990s (Chatillon and Tylor 2021), have shown how in the 1980s, transnational space was

becoming an arena, a perspective and a theory. Considered a period of decline for the feminist movement, these are instead the formative years for the movement in its transnational expression that challenges, dialogues and struggles in specific spaces, such as those of the Women's Conferences organized by the United Nations. In this context, there is also a redefinition of feminism through an intersectional perspective proposed and embodied by the women of the Global South.

We cannot dwell here on transnationalism to give an exhaustive definition of it (if at all possible). Still, undoubtedly transnational political actions belong to different historical periods. Global activism, which sees a spread of movements and mobilizations across borders, is well-known and evident even in periods of greater nation-state strength (Tarrow, 2005). What, then, is new about contemporary transnationalism? As Sidney Tarrow suggests, it is more widespread than in other eras, involves a more substantial set of ordinary people and elites, and extends to a broader range of issues. Globalization has often been considered one of the drivers of transnationalism and has undoubtedly helped shape more recent contemporary social movements. However, a historical perspective allows us to rescale its role without diminishing the relationship between globalization and transnationalization. «Although globalization is a powerful source of new actors, new relationships, and new inequalities, as an orienting concept for understanding transnational activism, it leaves much to be desired» (Tarrow, 2005, 5).

In essence, the suggestion is not to see transnationalism as merely a reaction to globalization, for the connections are not always so direct and demonstrable; the phenomena we see as an effect of globalization, for example, some forms of inequality, do not necessarily give rise to social movements. Instead, they are «a set of identifiable processes and mechanisms that intersect with domestic politics to produce new and differentiated paths of political change» (Tarrow, 2005:9). The relationship, emphasized by Tarrow, between the global and the local is fundamental and characterizes contemporary collective actions defined as transnational. The activists are aware of these links and explicitly affirm that the Nation is no longer a point of reference but providing for its overcoming through concrete forms of alliance, claims and modes of action. In this sense «la distinzione semantica fra gli attributi ultra-nazionale, inter-nazionale, sopra-nazionale e trans-nazionale ha implicazioni concettuali e analitiche importanti, non solo da un punto di vista giuridico-formale, ma anche per quanto riguarda l'angolazione dell'analisi sociale» (D'Albergo, 2010, 2). Processes defined as transnational differ from international ones because they cross the state boundaries that have long defined the modern world, its spatialization and its "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1996); the actors involved in such processes are also changed, they are no longer only governmental, and civil society represents a fundamental and recognized actor. Boundaries blur, change in meaning, and relocate, redefining spaces and perspectives with «l'effetto di ridisegnare la geografia e la gerarchia scalare di strutture e processi economici, culturali e sociali» (D'Albergo, 2010, 5). In summary, transnationalism is a process that defines the dynamics of roles, structures and institutions in which actors other than governments and intergovernmental agencies also play, capable of moving in the international space independently of governmental political power centres. Identifying and tracing the processes that connect the national to the international level of activism is the methodological strategy pursued by Tarrow and other scholars, in which the international sphere is a political opportunity for the formation of the transnational in its spatial, theoretical and concrete composition. The idea of the international sphere somehow producing the transnational can help to investigate the distinctiveness of transnational feminism about one of the longest-lived cases, the one that is still active and related to the UN.

A crucial historical moment is the Conferences on Women, organized by the United Nations, which saw the emergence of transnational feminist networks and practices that reach the present day. Tracing the history and analysing concrete forms of activism enables us to understand what concepts and categories of analysis are helpful and what challenges and innovations can contribute to contemporary sociological research.
In the 1970s, when the United Nations declared 1975 as the International Year of Women, which was

followed by the International Decade and the four World Conferences (in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995), transnational feminism took off, defining a strategy for action. During the Conferences, international and national politics were challenged by a global feminist civil society that soon became protagonists in relevant political processes. At the same time, activists created parallel forums, caucuses and networks, new spaces that, through dialogue and conflict, built alliances and languages.

Identifying the "scattered hegemonies" (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994) of the contemporary world, transnational feminism attempts to contrast them by overcoming the models of centre and periphery and the division into First, Second and Third Worlds through a postcolonial and intersectional perspective. Universal sisterhood is the first thing that is challenged. Indeed, the women of the Global South denounce how gender is insufficient to define a commonality, point out how patriarchy does not always manifest itself in the same way, and bring diversity among women to the centre of discussion through a fierce critique of Western and white feminism. The social categories of class, "race", nationality, religion and sexual orientation accompany that gender to give an accurate picture of women's lives and the various forms of oppression they experience in different countries and within the same territory or state. Also evident is a renewed historical dimension, invoked in many of the analyses proposed, which sees colonialism as a watershed of contemporaneity. In doing so, they denounce its permanence in the West's economic, political and cultural actions, from which the feminist movement is not exempt. «Transnational feminism emerged as a critique of imperial modes of practising feminism, and its intellectual foundation included a focus on the relationship among colonialism, racial formations, and gender/sexual regimes» (Tambe and Thayer, 2021, 17).

As Desai reminds us «The four world conferences and accompanying NGO Forums were contentious events with women, not all of whom identified as feminists, from the South challenging Northern women's conceptions of women's issues based solely on gender and sexuality and insisting on bringing in issues of development, nationalism, and neocolonialism» (Desai, 2007, 2). During the Women's Conferences, feminism without borders (Mohanty, 2003) began to take shape thanks to women from the Global South who denounced the epistemic violence rooted in their condition of subalternity (Spivak, 1998). The image of the average Third World Woman (Mohanty, 2003), constantly oppressed, uneducated, poor and incapable of self-determination, is dismantled. Diversity among women finds space in the inner conflict, nurturing the analysis of global issues with a new historical narrative, an embodied intersectionality, and an anti-capitalist dimension that characterizes the claims. That is also the context of the rejection of the definition of feminist by some women activists who consider feminism a Western cultural product with which they are not entirely identified; for this reason, in this article and much of the referenced literature, the definition "women's movement and feminist" is used to understand the diversity that characterizes this complex transnational arena. The internal debate, particularly harsh at the 1980 Copenhagen conference, did not lead to a paralysis of activism but later created the possibility of alliances on selected issues. The 1985 Nairobi Conference saw the emergence of the first networks of "Third World feminists", with manifestos and documents explicitly referring to an intersectional and postcolonial perspective, although not yet codified in these terms. The conference in Kenya marked the shift from contention to solidarity that resulted in the Fourth Beijing Conference, during which women, despite their differences or because of awareness of them, will find a shared language in the area of human rights. The engagements of transnational feminism have been wide-ranging, and activists have brought their intersectional perspective even to United Nations conferences that were not dedicated to gender issues. Indeed, one of the first Women's Caucuses took shape at the Earth Summit or Conference on the Environment, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This informal entity coordinates advocacy, mobilization and bargaining activities during the work of the UN. The materiality of the claims ranges from class issues to sexual freedom, from rejecting an idea of development that perpetuates exploitative dynamics to the politics of fertility. These instances show us how the feminist movement, read through a Western lens, was not in decline but in a real transformative moment and how the claims are not merely symbolic or cultural but also substantially material.

UN meetings undoubtedly represent a political opportunity, as they play a substantial role in mobilizing challenging groups. However, these groups were ready to embrace diverse chances and contribute to creating and defining political opportunities. Several elements, such as a renewed historical perspective on feminisms, the concept of social movement community, and "abeyance structures", can be valuable tools for understanding the extent to which the structure of political opportunities facilitated the rise of the transnational feminist movement. Janet Conway argues:

«As social movements transnationalize, they enact new spatialities which necessarily demand re-imagining and renegotiating political relations among new ensembles of places, sites, and scales of practice. It is not just capital and states but social movements that actively produce space, place, and scale through their practices and discourses» (2008, 212).

In this regard, several scholars suggest the necessity of a broader understanding of the structure of opportunity than that rooted solely in formal political opportunity, beginning to explore the structure of gender opportunity. The change in gender relations, thanks to the struggles of the 1970s and the continuity of feminism in different shapes and places, contributed to the strength of a movement that was able to grasp and contributed substantially to the creation of political opportunities offered by the United Nations. Recognizing women's rights, nationally and internationally, represented a fundamental change that altered the general view of women's political capacity; policymakers began to view gender relations differently.

«Thus, rather than using the narrower 'political opportunity structure' to refer to the contextual factors that influence movement success, researchers would use the broader and simpler term, 'opportunity structure'. Then, to determine the precise nature of the opportunities-be they gendered, racial, ethnic, class or combinations of these researchers must carefully examine the evidence in the particular context for their movement(s) and scrutinize the dynamics shaping the willingness of key political decision-makers to support policy change» (Campbell, 2001, 66).

## 4. Transnational feminism: the building of networks as part of the movement community

In sum, the elements of space and time we have alluded to are interlinked and prompt us to analyse transnational feminism as a field of action and theory. Scanning in waves not only fails to read the continuity of the movement and its specific composition but is a partial view that is placed on national levels (with explicit reference to European and North American feminisms), not allowing us to see what is happening or has happened in other times and places; nor did it enable us to observe the formation of transnationality that was going to redefine contexts and identities of transforming feminisms. There may be different expressions of transnational feminism that need to be studied empirically in their concrete manifestations because they are, as defined by Rawwida Baksh e Wendy Harcourt

«fluid coalescence of organizations, networks, coalitions, campaigns, analysis, advocacy and actions that politicize women's rights and gender equality issues beyond the nation-state, particularly from the 1990s, when deepening globalization and new communications and information technologies (ICTs) enabled feminists to connect readily with and interrogate their localities and cross-border relations» (2015, 4).

As we have seen, the main actors in the proposed analysis context are organizations, single feminists, researchers, and gender experts, often brought together in transnational feminist networks (TFNs), as defined by Moghadam. A form of collective organization and action that brings together activists from multiple countries on a range of claims and goals, particularly on gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, and gender justice.
Between the Nairobi Conference in 1985 and the Fourth Beijing Conference in 1995, up to the present

day, numerous women's organizations have come into contact with each other, and various formal and informal TFNs have been formed. These networks have been able to create and manage transnational feminism through practices, shared language, and reference theoretical perspectives. They have common agendas across national borders, connect local issues to global structural crises, and engage in information exchange, mutual support, and a combination of advocacy, demonstrations, and campaigns to achieve their goals of equality and empowerment, social justice, and democratization of society. Today, the work of these networks is evident at various international United Nations meetings and in the annual Commission on the Status of Women, the main body in charge of women's rights and gender equality. On this occasion, most of these networks interface with relevant UN agencies and government delegations, permanent national missions, and attempt to influence the policy process, which involves final Agreed Conclusions.
The people who make up these networks tend to be middle-class, call themselves feminists and act, through their work, to protect and promote gender and women's rights. It is not the case here to dwell on the so-called "NGO-ization" of feminism or its professionalization. It is an issue to be considered in a broader analysis, considering how the boundaries are porous and open to different possibilities and identities within the movement community. "Although there will continue to be a diversity of feminisms, framed by local issues, problems, needs, opportunities and constraints, this need not refute the proposition that there seems to exist a worldwide women's movement with common goals and strategies" (Moghadam, 2000, 79). Studying transnational networks allows us to observe the identities at play, the construction of common ground and the possibility or otherwise of concrete alliances.

The study of TFNs has several implications for social theory and theories of social movements. Moghadam enumerated five issues that, recalibrated to the present, can still provide a path forward and represent proposals for further reflection and research (2000).
The first is that TFNs have emerged in a multifaceted context of opportunities and constraints, including a growing population of educated and politically aware women worldwide; the opportunities afforded by UN conferences; gender inequality; neoliberalism and economic inequality (Moghadam, 2000). Today we can add to the list the anti-gender movement and the presence of ultra-conservative UN member states, the defensive policy of the United Nations concerning women's rights, and the pandemic that has reduced civil society spaces. On the feminist side, there are several issues in the field: the relationship between feminists in the Global North and Global South, constantly being defined, and the rise of LGBT people and instances that again challenge the concept of gender. These internal issues have several implications yet to be investigated.

The second is that "new social movements", such as women's and feminist movements, are not only identity-based and disconnected from material and economic aspects. Especially in the transnational sphere, claims are closely linked to the concrete analysis of inequalities and their impact on women's lives from an intersectional perspective that never forgets the class issue.

The third is that the transnational status of feminist networks challenges theorizing that begins and ends with individual societies or states, so the appropriate unit of analysis must combine global, national and local.

The fourth is that transnational feminism challenges sociological research that has often remained focused on the West; in this particular case, we have seen how a broader view is needed to give a proper historical perspective and a present that cannot be Eurocentric.

Finally, the fifth, on which there is still much to be done, is to recognize that transnational feminist networks are the organizational form of a broad movement and are an essential component of the family of global social movements and organizations.

As we can observe, there is a fracture, a symbolic loosening of nation-state boundaries to make room

for the intersection and multiplicity of identifications and claims. Transnational feminist networks are formed internationally and nurture national and local struggles through feminist identities, a canonical body of knowledge, methodologies, and strategies such as building alliances and particular actions. While identity construction and framing are fundamental to the women's and the feminist movement, a crucial paradigm shift exists in the transnational sphere. Shared feminist identity is an articulated vision that does not refer to any "wave" or universal concept of feminism but has as its premise the diversity of feminisms.
Therefore, it becomes necessary to analyse the relationship between transnational feminism and parallel perspectives-particularly intersectional and postcolonial perspectives attempting to reveal overlaps and disjunctions over time. Transnational feminism is a movement situated in material places of encounter and discussion, but it is also a perspective and theory in the making. Transnationalism, intersectionality and postcolonialism have been performed by women on different occasions, partly conceptualized and claimed before their theoretical systematization.

## Conclusions

«Transnational feminism is at once a perspective, a set of theories, and a set of activist practices, networks, and discourses. Transnational feminist movements and transnational feminist theory are certainly different arenas of action, but they have developed in explicit and implicit dialogue with each other» (Tambe and Thayer, 2021, 15).

It is primarily feminist sociologists who have nourished investigations of the transnational feminist movement. They have produced new theoretical approaches and problematized existing ones in social movement studies, raising epistemological and methodological questions.
In investigating what a social movement is in the present, as we have seen, some studies prefer to use networks as the unit of analysis because they have become the organizational expression of transnational social movements. Others question the concept of conflict by revealing how it is not only conflictual actions that characterize a social movement. More generally, the research invites a reassessment of the criteria on which the dichotomy between reformist and radical actions is based. Indeed, while protest actions involving the occupation of public space are commonly perceived as more provocative than "less visible" forms of mobilization such as awareness campaigns and advocacy activities, the transnational feminist movement demonstrates that this type of action can have a substantial impact in terms of change and that the challenges can be political, cultural and social at the same time.

«Whether it analyses the process of politicization from a historical perspective, focuses on the integration of non-(exclusively) activist dynamics into the field of social movements using the concept of social movement community, or studies the intersection between movement and institutions, research on the women's movement raises theoretical issues that are central to the current renewal of the sociology of social movements» (Bereni and Revillard, 2012, 18).

The women's and feminist movement has revealed a continuity over time, developing a community that acts in different spheres, building tactical repertoires that have challenged numerous cultural and political authorities and codes, permeating other social movements and public consciousness, and creating gendered opportunity structures. Although there has long been international feminism that has influenced the national sphere, in recent decades, networks of feminist organizations have expanded to create transnational networks. What has happened and still happens at various United Nations appointments dedicated to gender equality is an excellent example of this process. Despite numerous internal conflicts and generational changes, the women's movement has generated a significant and vibrant number of organizations. As we have seen, the movement community and activist networks have robust and adaptive identities to sustain engagement within and between cycles of protest. An approach to feminism based on the capacity for aggregation, relationality, and the theoretical and discursive frames helps us understand how feminisms create and maintain a collective identity that

contributes to their vitality. Thinking about the role that social movements play as producers and distributors of new ideologies, cultural codes, and practices suggest investigating movement organizations and a comprehensive and composite variety of organizations.

In sum, placing the feminist and women's movement community at the centre of social movement theory can broaden general theoretical understanding and allow us to see their effects in institutional arenas more clearly.
It is not a matter of abandoning existing theoretical references but questioning them to make room for different perspectives in light of new research. In the meantime, what is needed is a fluid view of collective mobilization and social movements that goes beyond the moment of protest and looks at the political relations among women and the practices of action that networks develop in specific times, spaces and situations.

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