



SAPIENZA  
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

ISSN 2385-2755  
DiSSE Working papers  
[online]

**WORKING PAPERS SERIES**  
**DIPARTIMENTO DI**  
**SCIENZE SOCIALI ED ECONOMICHE**

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**N. 15/2024**

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CF80209930587 – P.IVA 02133771002

## **Transnational Practices. The Women's Rights Caucus: a transnational feminist network in New York City**

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### **Abstract**

Women's and feminist movements have been studied by observing their formation through national and international processes. However, concerning some cases of feminist activism, a broader and more complex unit of inquiry has been necessary, as the scalar subdivisions of conventional academic research on social movements have required a change in perspective. Transnational feminism, as a specific form of activism, becomes a case study and a theoretical perspective that allows us to read the present and reread the past. At the same time, it is an opportunity to build a bridge to classical social movement studies, to which it provides new theoretical possibilities. Essential is the study of the embodied experiences of transnational feminism, which show us a conceptual and political shift away from the international or global, in the activists' proclaimed awareness that they do not want to reproduce power by placing the nation-state at the center, nor universalize women's experience (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997). One recognized manifestation of transnational feminism originated at the World Conferences on Women, organized by the United Nations, and continues to the present day through the mobilization and advocacy work of what Moghadam (2005) has called Transnational Feminist Networks. A scalar analysis in this context can highlight significant aspects of activism that have often been excluded from homogeneous representations of women's movements (Chowdhury, 2011), thus subverting the widespread tendency to represent social movements as a whole. In this context, the multiple identities and connections that decentralize hegemonic versions of Western feminism on various scales are revealed, showing "a set of circulating ideas" (Tambe, 2010) that complicate comfortable divisions between the global and the local, the center and the periphery, the self and the other. Moreover, the study of contemporary feminist activism in the international context provided by the United Nations allows us to analyze the circularity and reinterpretation of concepts such as intersectionality, postcoloniality, and decoloniality, used and acted upon in a political key.

### **1. Introduction to the Transnational Feminism**

When we talk about transnational feminism, we refer to two fields that may seem seemingly distinct but are actually closely intertwined: the field of women's activism and the academic field of feminist theory production (Desai 2007, Mohanty 2003, Moghadam 2000, Moghadam 2005).

While the feminist and women's movement <sup>1</sup> has often had a cross-border connotation over time, here we refer to the emergence of practices and theories developing between the 1980s and the 1990s. In this historical period, several transnational feminist networks emerged and consolidated (Moghadam, 2005), shaping an activism that challenges national and nationalist references and does not fail to challenge white and Western feminism and the concept of global sisterhood. Indeed, at the center is the recognition of differences among women and making alliances at the intersection of gender, race, class, nationality, and

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<sup>1</sup> Different feminisms move in time and space. Also, for this reason, especially in recent years, it is better to talk about feminisms in the plural, thus highlighting the existence of different paths of activism. In this text, when we talk about feminism in the singular, especially in its transnational form, we mean the variety of feminisms that compose it. This is also the context of the rejection of the definition of feminist by some activists who consider feminism a Western cultural product with which they do not entirely identify; for this reason, in this article and much of the literature cited, the definition "women's movement and feminist" is used.

religion. Transnational feminism is, in essence, a diverse and composite phenomenon and thus needs empirical referents to be explained; it 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. In many parts of the world, such as Latin America and South Asia, activism and academia are not as separate from one another as they are in the United States» (Tambe and Thayer, 2021: 15) The tangible and active manifestations of this kind of feminism are «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» (Baksh and Harcourt, 2015: 4).

One recognised form of transnational feminism arose during the Women's Conferences organised by the United Nations between the late 1970s and the 1990s. With the International Year of Women proclamation in 1975, followed by the International Decade, which ended in 1985, the focus on gender equality became global. These same years saw the organisation of the three World Conferences on Women, held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985), followed by the better-known 1995 Beijing Conference, still a political milestone for women's rights. Starting with the historical study of the conferences allows us to see what happened in the 1980s and 1990s, during a period commonly considered to be one of feminism's decline or "ebb" due to a Eurocentric gaze focused on Western feminism and due to a time scan, that did not allow us to catch the continuity of feminist movements. All this prevented us from observing the different scales that the women's movement was taking on through the building of transnational relations.

In a short time, during the Women's Conferences, we see the consolidation of a feminist civil society capable of becoming one of the recognized actors in the process promoted by the United Nations. Indeed, a composite feminism capable of playing a role in shaping policies for women's rights challenged international and national politics. At the same time, activists, often organized into NGOs, have created parallel forums where, through bitter confrontations, they have redefined feminism and built a physical and symbolic place to act together. Women from the Global South played a crucial role in rejecting an alliance based solely on gender. They have contested white and Western feminism, bringing practices and discourses that we might now call postcolonial and intersectional, substantially before or simultaneously with their systematization as reference theories. The history of feminism related to women's conferences is a history of conflict and alliance building, the history of the emergence of embodied transnational feminism, and that of new theoretical insights. Transnational feminism takes shape through awareness of differences among women on the one hand, feminist political theories and imaginaries on the other, in a close relationship with broad and interconnected historical processes such as colonialism, capitalism,

and globalization (Roy, 2010, 72).

In this composite context, several transnational feminist networks emerged, developing a feminist advocacy strategy and practices that reach today. Since the Beijing conference, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has become the main body for gender equality, and the annual conference is an occasion to gather for global feminist politics. CSW is the political process examined in this research, and the Women's Rights Caucus (WRC) is the case study. The WRC is an informal feminist network of NGOs, activists, academics and grassroots associations that monitor the entire process, working online throughout the year and in person at the annual conference held in New York City.

The following paragraphs will attempt to deepen the theoretical framework through three key elements: temporality, spatiality, and scalarity. These have indeed proved necessary to understand feminism in its transnational declination, to read its present, and to reread its history. The methodology that enabled field research and ethnography will then be explained. Then, a section is devoted to the Women's Rights Caucus, whose intersectional and postcolonial/decolonial identity emerges through an initial analysis of the interviews. The last paragraph is dedicated to the conclusions.

## **2. The entangled dimensions of transnationality: temporality, spatiality, and scalarity**

Feminist sociology, through its connection with the theory produced in the classical literature on social movements, allows us to revise paradigms and approaches by bringing nourishment to the entire field of study. In this intersection of gazes, we have three key concepts that allow us to analyze transnational feminism and its concrete manifestations: temporality, spatiality, and scalarity. Investigating these aspects is necessary to study specific forms of activism to read the present and reread the recent past of feminist movements.

### ***Temporality***

Feminism is part of the so-called new social movements (Antonelli, 2009; Buechler, 1995; Della Porta, 2020; Melucci, 1980; Rebughini, 2015) and has long been studied by referring to its protest actions, essentially through the analysis of national women's movements in Europe and the United States in the 1970s. So-called second-wave feminism is still considered the highest expression of the feminist movement. The first issue to dwell on is precisely the scanning of feminism into "waves" due to a reading of mobilizations and protests as the primary expressions of a social movement. Addressing the question of temporality offers us possibilities for understanding and insights into new categories of analysis and theoretical approaches better suited to reading this phenomenon, supporting us, especially in abandoning

an exclusively national, often Eurocentric perspective. The definition of "waves," in addition to being problematic for analysing the movement itself since it does not see its continuity, refers only to Western history. Through this temporal framework, we cannot fully recognise what happened in the 1980s and 1990s, both in national and transnational movements, at the level of theory and political practices. Some scholars and activists define feminism as a karst movement characterized by recognizable phases of mobilization and other less obvious or seemingly less confrontational ones. In these periods of lower visibility, the actions carried out by women do not necessarily occupy the space of politics. The actions of feminists can be cultural events, opening bookstores, magazines, publishing houses, founding nongovernmental organizations, and creating gender studies courses in universities. These are all initiatives that keep the network of activism alive, nurture cognitive frames, and renegotiate identities through what sociologist Verta Taylor calls "abeyance structures" (1989); they are forms of feminist organizing often neglected in social movement studies (Thompson, 2002). These forms of activism are organizational and ideological bridges between different stages of activism. In essence, reorienting protest cycle theory (Bonu, 2022) allows us to see what practices a social movement deploys, whether and how it sustains itself, and the structures and dynamics of the networks that comprise it. Indeed, wave scanning has failed to see the different feminist and women's movements worldwide; many have been superficially seen as emanations of the Western one, ignoring cross-border connections and the circulation of people and ideas. Finally, in doing so, no space has been given to studying the construction of transnational feminist networks capable of playing a role in global political spaces. Instead, the investigated area shows us how, from the 1980s, an activism began to form that had precise and increasingly refined practices and a renewed political and theoretical perspective that would give nourishment, through continuous exchange, to academic transnational studies.

### *Spatiality*

Basically, there are various women's and feminist movements that have acted throughout history, and we can locate them in different areas of the planet, giving rise to women's relations across borders. This is also taking into consideration how diverse contemporary social movements are that do not only address the state (or come into conflict with it); in fact, they are movements that often have a broader gaze directed at various structures of authority (Staggenborg, 2005) and mobilise through actions other than protest.

New spatialities take shape and «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» (Conway, 2008: 212). Transnational feminists refer to an idea of a global feminist movement with no shared

definition, much less a single empirical referent. Consequently, examining how this space is constructed by activist networks that move beyond the local is necessary. By local, we do not mean a subset or category as opposed to the global; they are connected to essential dynamics and mutually shape each other. We do not want to reiterate the truism that women's movements are the product of local and global forces simultaneously but to emphasize how transnational feminism activists think of these two categories as relational concepts continually generated through active relations. Arturo Escobar argues that space is not fixed or permanent but constantly constructed and is permeated by social structures and cultural practices that cannot be culturally neutral but are produced through particular processes and narratives (Escobar 2001:140). The space of the CSW is constructed by different actors who generate languages and policies: the United Nations, member states and a broad civil society composed of organizations and alliances. Therefore, the space in which we move is not just a scenography but also a space full of meaning. The chosen one is undoubtedly a global context in which the local dimension is constantly present through a continuous exchange flow between the international and national levels. Transnationalization is a socially constructed scale that sees feminist networks moving beyond the nation-state, creating new spatialities, as it is not just global institutions that produce scalar leaps.

### *Scalarity*

«Scale is not only related to the target of the protest. The configuration of power in a given space impacts the scale of the movement and the type of influence it can have on other scales of action (...) groups of women can transnationalize their discourses and claims, building multiscale alternatives to face social, economic, and political inequalities» (Díaz Alba 2021, 88). This wider scalarity makes it possible to see the interconnections between phenomena such as colonialism and capitalism, globalisation and neoliberalism while decentralising hegemonic versions of feminism on various scales. Both feminist scholars and activists see the transnational perspective as overcoming the binarism between global and local, showing the repercussions of the articulated phenomena mentioned above on material life and the possibilities for resistance. This "scaling effort" attempts to overcome ideas that see the international sphere as containing the national, including the local. In becoming a theoretical framework, transnational feminism shifts from international feminism, which still had the nation as its unit of measurement and women's experience in the West as a universal model for feminism. «Transnational feminism instead attends to differences rather than commonalities among women while situating those differences and inequalities in historical formations and globalizing flows that are cross-cultural and cross- or even postnational. Women are, in other words, different but inhabit an interconnected and interdependent world riddled with clear asymmetries of power and privilege» (Roy, 2010:72). Identifying the "scattered hegemonies" (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994) of the contemporary world, transnational feminism attempts to

contrast them by transcending the models of centre and periphery and the division into First, Second and Third Worlds through a postcolonial and intersectional perspective.

Postcolonial and intersectional perspectives are embodied and acted upon by activists before or simultaneously with systematization by scholars and researchers. Today, they are acquiring a fundamental role in language, identity construction, and feminist political claims. It is essential to understand what it means for the women's and feminist movement to define itself as decolonial and intersectional, to understand the semantic shift that gives birth to renewed politics and identities. This last issue is as yet little explored and is happening before our eyes, giving new definitions and identity politics to contemporary feminism.

Therefore, the research questions arise from the intersection of the case study, transnational feminist theory, and many theoretical perspectives that shift and change between academia and activism. Specifically, the questions guiding the paper are:

- How do activists define the WRC?
- How do they build and maintain a transnational space?
- What does intersectionality mean in the definition of WRC?
- What does decolonial mean in the definition of WRC?

### **3. Methodology and methods**

Social movement studies and feminist theory are both plural and multidisciplinary fields of study; through the present research, we attempted to create a link between them, both theoretical and methodological. In general, research on social movements has straddled between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, using very different methods, resulting in a methodological pluralism that essentially defines the field of inquiry (della Porta, 2014). The research I am conducting uses a qualitative methodology, and in this essay, we will focus on the ethnographic method that guided the field research. The latter is one year and took place online and in-person throughout 2023 (see Table 1). Various data collection techniques were used, such as participant observation, daily field notes, and collection of 30 semi-structured interviews. Between January and April 2023, I traveled to New York to observe the entire process in person and see the work of the WRC before, during, and after CSW67. I attended all WRC meetings online and in NY as a member of the organizing committee, which consisted of a small group of organizations and individual activists. I also collected the documents produced by the WRC: position papers, press releases, recordings of press conferences and policy statements, and public letters of complaint and protest addressed to the United Nations. I also collected all final CSW documents (Agreed



Conclusions) from 1947 to 2023 to develop a content analysis. Through field research, the primary theoretical references, social movement literature, and feminist theory have been better delineated (a still ongoing process). Transnational feminism, from a theoretical perspective, is the bridge between the two primary theoretical references.

Content	Time period	Frequency of calls
Planning upcoming CSW: political mapping and analysis related to the upcoming CSW including SG's report; advocacy around regional negotiations; WRC strategy meeting, launching and undertaking work of Working Groups; drafting and finalizing WRC position paper; following and responding to negotiations of Agreed Conclusions	December - early March	Monthly at least
During CSW itself: morning coordination meetings, daily tracking, activity of Working Groups, responding to final negotiations and launch of Agreed Conclusions	March	Daily
Follow-up from most recent CSW: issues arising from debrief calls/ guided discussions; evaluation and analysis of agreed conclusions; implementation of agreed conclusions; updates and next steps including for national level advocacy	March/April - June	Bimonthly
Early planning for upcoming CSW and other maintenance tasks: capacity strengthening and network expansion per thematic focus; task team work (see below);	June-December	Bimonthly

Table 1. WRC annual cycle (2023).

### ***Positionality***

The first thing to clarify is the role of the researcher, an issue widely discussed in the social sciences, to which feminist theory has made a noteworthy contribution by reinforcing awareness of how an investigation and those who carry it out are always situated (Gobo, 2016). Indeed, who conducts the research is a constitutive element of the research itself. I have been part of feminist activism in the context described for several years and I have been following the work of CSW for years. Therefore, I participated in the WRC, and this position allowed me to quickly enter the context, as I had trusting relationships that allowed me to find an alliance with the women coordinating the WRC, present myself as a feminist who knew the process, and take on the role of researcher without being perceived as an external and intrusive figure. I was welcomed as someone who could lend a hand to the organization and, at the same time, conduct research that could be useful to the WRC. Moreover, while I already knew many women by sight, I knew none in depth. This condition allowed for recognition, trust, and the distance needed for people to open up during interviews. Nevertheless, it does not detract from the fact that it is complex and challenging to step into the researcher's role when one has to share spaces and ideals or when research confronts us with the need for a critical gaze in contexts of potential belonging. The contribution of feminism and feminist theories to this reflection has been a constant support, such reflection beginning



in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when several scholars began to emphasize the need to develop more closely the relationship between theory and subjective experience, between supposed neutrality of knowledge and an evident positionality. Among the best-known contributions that can serve as a starting point are Adrienne Rich (1984) and Donna Haraway (1988), who make room for imagining and claiming embodied and partial research. This perspective, which will be joined over time by the contributions of many others, highlights not only the role of the researcher as she carries out the inquiry but also how her positioning is essential in her choice of topic, the questions she asks herself, and the way she stands in the field (Bonu, 2022). The beginning is already positionality. Awareness of where we come from, our profession, our education, and thus the choices we make are an integral part of the work and merge with the feminist practice of starting with the self. This approach can show us how and why we choose those methods and theories of reference and how we place ourselves ethically in the entire research work (Bonu, 2022). My positioning allowed me to conduct field research, enter a field not accessible to everyone, and establish relationships with the people I interviewed with comfort but, at the same time, with the considerable challenges that researcher involvement brings. The created relationships are complex and must be investigated as a crucial social research element.

### ***Participant Observation***

Participant observation was the gateway to enter this space of activism. Although it is not a standard method in social movement studies (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014), in my case, it was crucial to observe the construction of a transnational feminist network and its identity in the making. Of course, it is also a way to observe forms of collective behaviour, to understand what the roles within the group are, the relationships between activists and between organizations, to shed light on the meanings produced and that, in turn, define the identity and political culture of the group. Only in this way did I begin to understand what was going on, learning to move and disentangle the simplest and the most complex issues: the names and roles of people, those of organizations, relationships, conflicts, and underlying tensions. Participant observation certainly builds the background to prepare for interviews, but it is not limited to that; it is an inexhaustible source of information and possible ways forward. The period of participant observation is demanding, when not exhausting, in terms of time, practical organization, and emotional burden.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews play a crucial role in data collection. I prepared the interview themes and question outlines before leaving, but the final version took shape only after the first observation period and the beginning

of collecting field notes. I then began to sort out the information and ideas. In this way, the interview was a fundamental tool for understanding «the meaning individuals attribute to the external world and their own participation in it, the construction of identity, and the development of emotions. Qualitative interviews are, in fact, particularly useful for understanding the sense that actors give their actions» (della Porta 2014:230). The interview outline was based on three main themes: transnational feminism and the WRC (identity, feminism, roles, personal and organizations' motivations); the relationship between people and organizations from the Global North and the Global South (historical and founding issue of transnational feminist networks, starting with the Women's Conferences); and gender as a category that has expanded over time and thus the presence of LGBTI people and instances. With these trajectories in mind, I began a dialogue with the interviewees, returning them to the central nodes when we strayed too far from the identified themes. I also left myself free to observe that issues I had not considered were emerging. This way, the questions were restructured to investigate new themes or delve into others. People were very willing, even enthusiastic to speak, and devote their time to the interview because in their words, in the fast pace of CSW's work, they thus had the opportunity to reflect on their history and the meaning of their political engagement; reasoning together about the role, resources, and challenges of the WRC; the role of the United Nations; and what it means to inhabit that political context. During the interviews, awareness of my positioning was crucial in the ongoing attempt to balance the role of researcher, expert in the context, and feminist activist who was also solicited for opinions and asked questions.

### ***Subjects and artifacts***

The field research, the collection, and the future content analysis of the documents require further reflection because of the reality I have chosen to investigate. I have wondered whether a network like the WRC was the possible subject/object of field research, the ideal one to produce an ethnography. Studying a context closely related to institutional practices and in the global context is still challenging for the social sciences. Riles (2000) denounces existential and methodological insecurity in the face of the global (of anthropology), a daunting challenge in deconstructing key conceptual tools such as culture and society. Moreover, the specific case, similar to the one studied by Riles, sees transnational networks (which are precisely neither a society nor a culture) engaged primarily in the production of documents, reflections, and analyses (or artifacts) that resemble those being conducted in academia. We are not faced with an irreducible "other." To address this problem, Riles (who is skeptical about the need for "discovery" in research, especially in a political and institutional context) takes the opposite direction, that of flexing the social science discipline to learn how to make ethnographically accessible what appears familiar. The social relations and networks examined are, as she points out, "seen twice," on the one hand, functioning as 'external' analytical tools for the social scientist, while on the other hand, being used 'internally' by the

objects of study in the construction of themselves. In a sense, there is no actual ground, so through ethnography and analysis of the documents produced by the network (I mean the broader one that includes the WRC, national delegations, permanent missions, and the United Nations), what remains to be done is to turn it upside down, to turn it inside out in order to observe its complex nature. Geographical location also eludes definition, as WRC activities take place online first, and then in NY with daily meetings in dedicated places, in “non-places” that are the offices of national missions, and finally in the UN glass building that has the symbolic ambition of representing the aspiration for so-called global governance.

#### **4. The WRC: acting from a postcolonial and intersectional perspective**

The Women's Rights Caucus is an informal feminist network composed of NGOs, networks of organisations, activists, academics, and grassroots associations that monitor the entire CSW process and work, as already illustrated, both online and in person. The Transnational Feminist Networks (TFNs), which arise in the context of the political opportunity given by the United Nations, have been defined in their main characteristics by Valentine Moghadam, who has made a relevant contribution to bridging feminist sociology and the analysis of world systems and social movements. Moghadam argues that feminists have become important non-state political actors in the contemporary world system, with the power to mobilise resources against the hegemonic aspects of globalisation (Moghadam, 2005). This mobilisation is enabled and empowered by political ties that transcend national boundaries, which Moghadam calls "transnational feminist networks." A substantial part of her study focuses on the collective consciousness and identity of TFNs, highlighting their differences and unique characteristics, as we have tried to do in the case of the WRC in this research. First, a common agenda unites the people who are part of the WRC: the main goal is to influence the agreed conclusions of the CSW, protecting the rights of women and those of LGBTI people. So, there is work that consists of advocacy actions at the United Nations and government delegations in a continuous shift from global to national. The Caucus is not a secret collective, but it is not open to everyone, and much information cannot be disclosed. It has no dedicated funds, and the NGOs and people who coordinate and are part of it do this work voluntarily, which means activism. To make this mobilisation of resources and people possible, we need to understand how the WRC is defined, what it stands for, and what feminism and women's rights globally are to the people who are part of the network.

Now, the two research questions set forth above include the challenges posed by local-global dynamics, the interplay between scales, and the difficulties involved: What is the identity of the WRC? How is a transnational space constructed and maintained?

The interviews suggest the overlap between a definition of global feminism and the WRC, where the former is the ideal and the latter the possibility of its implementation.

Some quotes show the definition of feminism that activists give in the interviews through an explicit question: What is feminism for you today?

*“Feminism is about asking that question: Who holds the power? How is the power distributed? Who has access to it? Because I'm interested in structural questions whereas, you know, for other people, it's about identity, it's about, you know, reclaiming a female identity and so on”.* (I. 2. H.D.F.)

*“... I think today's feminism sees a much more intersectional feminism, where there is a recognition that there are multiple identities and that being a woman is one of them”.* (5.2 K.V.)

*“Very slow feminist struggle for our basic rights and equality and everything that touches on sexuality and negotiating power dynamics around healthcare. And that's going to take us Millennium still, you know, and you can see it here. And then there's the other, I think, the evolution of feminism, which is where the joy is. And the joy is thinking around intersectionality and class and race in ways that really come to complexify”.* (3.4. J.H)

The WRC in the description of activists is described in similar words but mostly in terms that refer to a broader feminist ideal that serves as a model.

*“a space for strategy, a very secure space for people who were engaged in the text and negotiation to come together to share updates and to... To make the feminist demands (...) I think it's an intersectional space”.* (3.4. J.H)

*“So it is not a formal organization. It is not an ongoing organization. Yeah, you could say it's seasonal. It is an expression of a desire to create change and a clear understanding that change will only happen if we work together. So it's a mobilization... Here our common purpose is literally feminism”* (I. 2. H.D.F.)

In the descriptions of what feminism is today and how they would describe the WRC, two terms/questions emerge with regularity, intersectionality and the need to decolonise both the space of activism and to have a decolonial perspective in the documents produced. It should be noted that the

verb decolonise is the most frequently used (to decolonise a proposed theme, the perspective of analysis, the shared space).

That is why closely related to the previous two questions about feminism and WRC identity follow two questions that highlight issues related to the network under consideration but are now defined as fundamental issues of contemporary feminisms and which often go to define an identity. Indeed, it is not uncommon today to call ourselves, in different countries, intersectional and decolonial feminists. It, therefore, becomes essential to ask: What does intersectionality mean in the definition of WRC? And what does decolonial mean in the definition of WRC?

We immediately understand that the first challenge is internal to the WRC itself. It relates to its identity, the network's constitution defined as "intersectional and decolonial" or desired to be so. The group's identity is delineated in the construction of the discourse, in the representativeness of differences (i.e., the concrete bodies of the people who are part of it), and in the relationships between women and organizations. Only through this constant and ongoing work is it possible to have a relationship with the outside world, with the United Nations and member states. An intersectional and decolonizing capable practice and perspective must be lived and theorized within the group before it can be claimed in the official CSW context.

*"I think we are at least competent at an intersectional lens. But imposing intersectionality onto something which has been designed to not be intersectional is always problematic". (I. 2. H.D.F.)*

These two elements, intersectionality and decoloniality, are fundamental to the construction of scalarity because they allow transnational feminism to be joined to its history and the present, constructing a heterogeneous field that is based on differences among women (and now also with and between LGBTI people); as well as allowing connection to global issues (such as patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism) through relationship to national and international institutions. Interscalar work is thus, first and foremost, internal and generates tensions and conflicts, some long-standing and unresolved, mainly due to power inequalities between organizations and regions of the world.

*"European organizations are in the majority and can stay for two weeks of work because they have more money". (I.18.C.D.)*

*"We are trying to be intersectional, but I still can see too much whiteness". (I.24.C.T.)*

As we can see, the activists' use of intersectionality and the decolonial perspective overlap with what we mean at the theoretical level in academia, and there is a considerable gap at the same time. Intersectionality here represents the awareness of the multiple intersecting oppressions in women's lives and the construction of an intersectional place imagined as a safe space for all, capable of welcoming diversity and understanding how to enhance it. It is a political intersectionality that aspires to guarantee equity and the building of alliances across social divides (Ciccio and Roggeband, 2021).

In the words of those interviewed, the WRC must be a safe space, for giving the floor to everyone regardless of origin, class, religion, sexual orientation and gender. But the issue considered most relevant is still, as in the days of women's conferences, the inequality of representation and power between women from the North and South of the world.

*“I think we have to take everyone's experiences into account, into the design of policy (...) Intersectionality is ... It's about power sharing”.*

(I.4.K.V.)

Even more complex is the use of the verb decolonize, which does not clearly and explicitly refer to the practices and issues debated within decolonial feminism, but instead to what at the moment could be called a postcolonial perspective, which focuses on the colonial phenomenon and the never-overcoming of it. This perspective is expressed more in the documents and less in the speeches I have heard. The majority of respondents consider the WRC to be an intersectional space but not yet decolonized.

*“I think... It has an awareness of the need to decolonise. I don't think we prioritize that, particularly in the work we do and I don't think that's from a lack of intention. I think it is because decolonizing is a process that needs to start at the individual and it's... It's very difficult long process”.*

(I. 2. H.D.F.)

In recent years, the terms 'decolonial', 'decoloniality' and 'decolonize' have been used extensively and have gained space in different fields, both theoretical and political. Therefore, they require a precise and accurate investigation that returns us to the meaning with which they are used. Within the WRC, these words describe the effort to build a space where whiteness is contained, balanced and representativeness no longer delegated, in essence, a space where there is no racism and where there is preservation and equal dignity of different forms of knowledge and practice. When discussing decolonising practices and knowledge, basically through the production of documents and the revision of official UN documents, I could observe an attempt to decentralise the gaze and action from white and European knowledge and presence. However, I did not hear explicit references to decolonial feminism as such. Undoubtedly, in a

transnational space composed of educated and tendentially middle-class people, with a decided presence of Latin American women, it is likely that on a personal level, many would call themselves decolonial feminists, while others would likely call themselves postcolonial. These two concepts do not overlap, and there is no doubt that decolonial feminism is now also widespread in Western contexts. Therefore, a critical evaluation of decolonial vocabulary is appropriate and necessary (Colpani, 2022) in a broader analysis. Moreover, the 'non-pacific' relationship between the decolonial and postcolonial approaches, though not explicitly referred to by the interviewees, has undoubtedly influenced the various forms of contemporary feminism. The presumed incommensurability and friction points between the two perspectives must be explored rather than avoided. Moreover, the debate undoubtedly also influences and defines the approach of the writer, the scholars of reference and thus, the research perspective adopted.

This article has traced the identity of an intersectional and yet-to-be-decolonized feminist space that reached out of a political dimension of conflict, beginning with the Women's Conferences. Because of the postcolonial and decolonial overtones we find in the WRC, we prefer to borrow the term "subaltern feminisms" «as a concept to capture this dimension of (geo)political conflict and to highlight the democratic antagonism provoked by the construction of subaltern feminist identities» (Ballestrin, 2022, p.112), but also capable of understanding the genesis of the construction of the alliances that result. The emergence of transnational feminism is located in the 1980s, when opposition emerged that Ballestrin calls binary, that between hegemonic and subaltern feminisms that sees the incorporation of multiple intersections, including the categories of gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation. A provisional and strategically essentialist opposition that generates feminist identities that finally leave room for differences among women, giving rise to a dimension of political conflict concerning the diversity and representational scope of feminism (2022). Conflict that not only is not denied but becomes the basis on which transnational feminism develops and strengthens. The attempt to synthesize tensions is constant, and the goal is the creation of a concrete alliance based on different factors and not on the "only" basis of gender of belonging, in short, the realization that feminism is composed of feminisms.

In the context of the WRC, the deconstruction of "Third World difference" is ensured by the presence and demands embodied by activists from the Global South. Because of this delicate balance, the WRC is described by all as an opportunity to build bridges between women despite and because of differences. Activists say that the WRC has allowed them to demonstrate that the same struggles can be shared in an international context, and some can then be transferred to other parts of the world and vice versa. In essence, challenges, tensions and resources constantly evolve and contribute to a space of transnational subjectification, which seems to relate to a renewed idea of feminism defined as intersectional and postcolonial. In addition, but this is an issue that will not be addressed here, all of the respondents believe



that the WRC is a form of resistance to the increasingly determined advance of anti-gender and anti-rights groups supported by a growing number of conservative and right-wing governments.

## Conclusions

Social movements and their manifestations are ever-evolving phenomena that escape relentlessly constructed academic definitions. In this case, we are dealing with a network that calls itself feminist and constantly refers to a broad concept of a global feminist movement. This form of activism undoubtedly has characteristics that must be noticed, such as the predominant presence of NGOs. There has been talk since the 1980s of the professionalization of feminism or the "NGO-ization" of the movement. This critical aspect needs to be examined in the broader analysis while remaining anchored in the case study to avoid chasing an ultimate definition of social movement.

Moreover, it is generally difficult to say there is an evident transition from social movements to NGOs. From a historical and transnational perspective, investigating places and ongoing identities challenges the idea of original and autonomous feminism without relationships and connections with institutions. Furthermore, the need to dialogue with them changes considerably depending on the historical period and the background of the activists. There are many women and feminists of the WRC, coming from the Global South, who consider it essential to make their voices heard at United Nations events since international institutions are a resource for the protection of fundamental rights in countries in which they live.

Feminism opens us to the dimension of a "social movement community" (Buechler, 1995), a composite whole that moves through time and multiple places. Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier have defined it 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» (1992: 107 in Bereni and Revillard, 2012) Suzanne Staggenborg also includes «all actors who share and advance the goals of a social movement: movement organisations; individual movement adherents who do not necessarily belong to SMOs; institutionalised movement supporters; alternative institutions; and cultural groups» (1998:182). In the case of transnational feminism, scalar analysis helps us highlight significant aspects of feminist activism that are often neglected by homogeneous representations of women's movements (Chowdhury, 2011), thus subverting the tendency to represent social movements as a whole. Díaz Alba, quoting Masson, invites us to reflect on «what happens to the movement's relations and processes as they spread across the transnational space, what happens to discourses when scales change, what contradictions and tensions emerge, and what negotiations are necessary» (Díaz Alba, 2021:89). In this way, we can see the multiple identities and connections that have

decentralized hegemonic versions of Western feminism at various scales in the first place. Through the transnational perspective, several scholars have rewritten the history of feminism by showing "a set of circulating ideas" that complicate the comfortable divisions between the global and the local, the centre and the periphery, the self and the other (Tambe, 2010:2). The study of the embodied experiences of this type of activism shows us a conceptual and political change, through the awareness of not wanting to reproduce power through the centrality of the nation-state, nor of wanting to universalize women's experience (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997).

In studying these forms of activism, an analysis of solidarity is also required, understood as a continuous political process that creates bonds and construction of coalitions beyond social differences, negotiating asymmetries of power. In particular, it would be helpful to focus on two dimensions as suggested by the authors: how differences within and between organisations influence the framing of various issues and the extent to which organisations actively seek to address power disparities in resources and representation. (Ciccia and Roggeband, 2021). Transnational feminism is thus, as illustrated, a political strategy and practice, as well as a theoretical research perspective that overlaps and discards with other perspectives, such as intersectionality and postcoloniality, and that feeds on concepts and practices that can account for the dislocation of viewpoints and different positions of power.

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