Editorial

Africa's 21st Century Feminist Struggles: Terrains, Formations and Politics

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Introduction

This issue of *FA* reflects on Africa's 21st century feminist struggles and movements, paying particular attention to the continuities and changes in terrains, organisational formations, politics, and strategies. The issue is inspired by the visibility of young feminist leadership in recent and ongoing struggles for decolonisation, democratisation, economic justice, and emancipation such as the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, otherwise referred to as the Arab Spring; the RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall campaigns in South Africa; the Black Lives Matter movement; the uprisings against dictatorship and misrule in Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria; as well as more localised struggles against land and natural resource dispossession and immiseration across Africa. The unforgettable and emblematic media images of Aisha Yesufu of Nigeria and Alaa Salah of Sudan addressing massive demonstrations, and of young women leading campaigns in Tahrir Square, on university campuses and in the streets in Egypt, South Africa, and Namibia respectively, drew attention to women's leadership and unsettled notions that they are second-tier players in national, Pan-African, and global struggles. While for superficial observers the sight of women on frontlines was unexpected and new, feminist scholars, drawing on their research on the long traditions of women's activism, have seen these developments as a specific conjuncture in the movement building, thought leadership, and struggle credentials of African women.

The feature articles in the issue are the outcome of empirical research that builds on a respectable corpus by Africa's feminists; one that has chronicled rural and urban women's struggles for national liberation and for emancipation

and gender equality since independence, to which *Feminist Africa* (*FA*) has made significant contributions. This literature has shown that struggles during the colonial period in which women played pivotal roles such as the Aba Women's War in Nigeria, the cocoa holdups in Ghana, the Nyabinghi movements of East and Central Africa, the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, the liberation movements against Portuguese colonial rule in Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique, and the anti-apartheid movements in Namibia and South Africa, have laid firm foundations for the more recent struggles against imperialism, neoliberalism, and dispossession.

This issue continues with *FA*'s tradition of bearing witness to feminist politics by publishing the reflections of a new generation of feminist scholars and scholar activists. This is the first of two issues of *FA* devoted to examining how the current conjuncture of multiple and compounding crises of neo-liberal globalisation, demographic stresses, the regression of democratic impulses and intensification of State repression, corruption and ineptitude, has framed the demands of feminist movements. Contributions to the Issue suggest that these demands are often framed in ways that require a reassessment of- a) what is feminist; b) how changes in the terrains, methods, organisational forms, technologies and inter-sectional dynamics of struggles should be characterised; and c) their implications for the transformation of societies and the emancipation of all oppressed and subordinated social groups.

The seven feature articles are the outcome of a call for proposals for a three-year project on 21st century feminist struggles and movements to establish an inter-generational collective to research and produce informed accounts of particular experiences in Africa as a basis for theorising and supporting praxis. The overarching question of the project, "How are 21st century feminist struggles and movements in Africa constituted, and what are their contours, antecedents and futures?", has resulted in nuanced and thoughtful studies that also raise pertinent questions for future research.

African Feminist Movements in Historical Perspective

Women's modes of resistance have been theorised within African feminist scholarship that sheds light on a long "herstory" of African-descended women's engagement in multiple forms of collective and individual resistance to patriarchy and other forms of injustice (Kuumba 2006), by deploying, opposing, and transforming cultural systems (Collins [1990] 2000; Steady 1987, 1993; Terborg-Penn 1986). According to Steady (1993), distinctive female modes of resistance are often institutionalised in traditional African cultural systems. For instance, while there was wide variation across the continent, women historically played important political, religious, and economic roles as the primary agricultural providers, renowned spiritual leaders and organisers of women's societies (Sheldon 2020). The multiple and varied expressions of African women's resistance include the political and transformational uses of cultural practices, even those with patriarchal overtones. In her work examining African women's cultures of resistance and political uses of culture, Kuumba (2006) has argued that the patterns observed in various African contexts have served as a transformative praxis. This idea can inform studies of current anti-patriarchal and counter-hegemonic feminist struggles.

Further, feminist movements in Africa have cohered around different ideological positions in relation to the emancipation of women, extensive thematic interventions, varying methodological approaches to social and political organising, and distinct theoretical traditions across the disciplines and academic debates. These distinctions demonstrate both contestations internal to feminist movements on the continent and differences from feminisms embedded in the Global North or even other Black feminist traditions outside of Africa. A key terrain of African feminist intervention in social and political life evolved in direct relation to what colonisation did to women's social economies and power, and African women's responses to such interferences, which led to their pivotal intervention in anti-colonial struggles. Women's involvement in anti-colonial struggles is traceable to the early 20th century in much of the continent and gave original expression to modes of organising that continue to find expression in contemporary feminist politics (see especially Omotoso and Faniyi in this Issue; and Naicker in this Issue).

Colonial policies and methods of rule sought to suppress African communal and subsistence practices through policies that depended on the control and exploitation of women's reproductive roles. Such interventions in women's social domains in particular provoked widespread demonstrations in various parts of the continent, and the reactions of rural communities and political movements galvanised around issues that were distinctly gendered (Ossome 2018). African women's actions in anti-colonial struggles show how they appropriated and turned various symbolisms attached to female sexuality into acts of resistance against the colonial State's dispossession of women's reproductive economies including land, labour, time, and community (Wipper 1989; Thomas 2003).

Colonial rule played a decisive part in the subordination of African women. The set of ideas the State engineered compelled women into specific roles, and in the process transformed women's agency, reinscribing their social roles with a "passivity" that belied the highly proactive and transformative nature of women's struggles and activities (Santoru 1996). Presley (1986) also notes the profound influence that the interaction between rural women and the colonial power had on women's political participation. These rural social movements, through which rural women fought against the redirection of their reproductive labour towards the State's accumulation project, should be read as a precursor to today's feminist agrarian movements in Africa. And as colonialism redefined kinship, production, and administrative systems in masculinist terms, so did women's modes of resistance increasingly reflect a feminist consciousness and struggle against their loss of autonomy, exclusion, increased workloads and reproductive burdens.

The early post-independence women's movements in Africa tended to focus on religious, welfare and domestic concerns (Tripp 2003). This was in keeping with the colonial legacy, which, as Seidman (1984) argues, emphasised women's reproductive labour within the context of the male migrant labour system, and exposed the European emphasis on women as dependent mothers in ways that limited their access to education and deepened gender inequalities. Women's contributions and experience in anticolonial struggles did, however, grant them significant space for recognition and political participation in newly independent States, with mixed agendas and outcomes, due in part to the contradictory nature of the State (Manuh 1993). On the one hand, the

push towards democratisation ushered in a greater variety of feminist voices and demands, informed by "feminist analyses of the role of the state as arbiter of gender struggles as they relate to issues of gender equity, equal access, and competition over scarce resources in the society" (House-Midamba 1996, 289; see also Tsikata, 1997). State feminism attained its peak in the early 1990s (Mama 1995), which undercut the voices of women at the margins while continuing to exploit their labour. Concurrently, the neo-liberalising State, indebted from the economic crisis of the late 1970s, ushered in structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) whose devastating social costs have constituted the basis of sustained feminist critique and activism.

Beginning in the late 1980s when structural adjustment took hold of the continent, disguising neo-imperialist interests, the accompanying political and economic liberalisation shifted struggles towards an intensified period of constitutionalism, which fundamentally structured and redirected feminist claims towards questions of human/women's rights, political participation, representation, and a politics of recognition (See Hassanain and Sidig, in this Issue). Furthermore, the professionalisation of the women's movement – the gradual shift from grassroots feminism in the colonial period, towards State feminism in the early post-independence nationalist period, to the neoliberal withdrawal of the social State that paved the way for nongovernmental organisation – what some have termed as "NGOisation", gradually and ironically redirected feminist claims in a more structured manner through identification with the State. NGOisation of women's movements is an organisational form quite distinct from earlier modes of mass organisation and feminist consciousness-raising, with characteristics that have differed across geographical and political contexts. For instance, discussing the nature of this phenomenon in Ghana, Tsikata (2009) traces the rise of women's NGOs back to the 1970s when women's organisations began to take an interest in policy issues. During that period Ghana was under a military regime, but there was also a proliferation of women's NGOs that were small, focused, and working on a diverse range of issues on which they were highly effective.

Neoliberal economic austerity measures adopted under SAPs provided new sites of accumulation for State-friendly elites as well as alibis for increased violence against those opposed to the elites in power. Illegal privatisation of State instruments of violence and the rise of private groups to protect elite

political interests characterised the period (Katumanga 2010). In many contexts, neoliberalisation created conditions for authoritarianism and conservative public politics. It also fortified the link between militarism and gendered violence that has been well-theorised in the African feminist literature and social movements (Mama and Okazawa-Rey 2008), including due recognition to the reality that women also "contribute to the militarisation of society in both material and ideological terms" (Cock 1989: 50).

Lastly, alongside the strategic significance that violence takes in the contemporary subjective positioning of African women are debates on sexuality and heteronormativity which expose some contradictions in the African feminist project. Writings on queer African feminisms provide an important lens for viewing these contradictions, illuminating the religious and cultural underpinnings of homophobia, and exposing the conventions that link traditional institutions of marriage, rites of passage, and childbearing/rearing to normative sex and gender roles (Tamale 2013; Ekine & Abbas 2013). Furthermore, claiming queer positionalities within African feminism has also opened the possibility of challenging racist, anti-Black-women, homophobic, homonationalist, and colourist rhetoric that have nominally been concealed or marginalised by the universalising rhetoric of a "shared" social orientation among African women (Ossome 2020, 165).

Contemporary Social Movements and Struggles

A decolonial turn fundamentally defines the nature, strategies, and content of contemporary feminist struggles, especially among younger generation feminists. Weary from expending efforts on seemingly insurmountable challenges to the implementation of gender violence laws and policies, and recognising the limits of institutionalised responses to everyday forms of sexual and gendered violence, African women (and more broadly, women of the Global South) believe that any attempt to end violence must be conditioned upon anti-racist, anti-capitalist, decolonial struggles, and struggles against gender inequality. In this regard, Dieng (2023) highlights the resistance embedded in feminist acts of "*speaking up…* when only a few African women [a]re engaged in writing and publishing…[as] in fact articulating a pan-Africanist, anti-racist, and feminist manifesto against

dominant…discourses as well as (neo-)colonialist and hetero-sexist analyses on women's condition" (2023, 1; See also Abena Busia in conversation with Bernardine Evaristo in this Issue for an examination of a life devoted to resistance on the terrain of literature and the arts).

The stand taken by contemporary African feminist activists and movements goes distinctly beyond the liberal feminist mantra of inclusion, recognition, equality, and citizenship. For instance, within the emerging African feminist discourse and struggles around rape and gendered violence – embodied by student movements such as FeesMustFall and RhodesMustFall – the modes of activism are deeply articulated with a critique of ways in which Black women have been reconstituted in the postcolonial State as both already violated and as violable, the ways in which we experience the State as violent, and how the neoliberal State has tended to redirect injury through criminalising women's labour, dress, speech, and sexuality (Ossome 2020).

The tactics for organising among contemporary feminist movements include the formation of strategic alliances that signal a more concrete shift in addressing intersectionality as a postcolonial critique. For instance, as Xaba (2017) writes of the alliances and strategies that foreshadowed the FeesMustFall students' movement in South Africa, "[u]nder the ideological banners of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, Black radical feminism, queer theories and decolonisation, students aligned with outsourced, exploited workers to challenge universities to end the outsourcing of workers, and demand free education and the decolonization of a Eurocentric higher education system" (96). Feminist leadership within FeesMustFall, in particular, was recognised, especially in relation to clarity regarding what feminist and decolonial comradeship ought or ought *not* to be, with many taking a critical stance against what sometimes emerged as a highly masculinised form of the resistance (Xaba 2017). From national struggles to decolonise higher education, to anti-rape organising, movements against police/State brutality, and internationalist solidarity movements such as those demanding the liberation of Palestine, a younger generation of feminist activists and scholars are showing remarkable clarity regarding the fundamental questions of their time and their historical role in confronting them.

Intergenerational, class, thematic and regional differences remain present among contemporary feminist movements and reflect diverse readings of the social imperatives driving feminist activisms on the continent. For instance, in a recent study of post-revolutionary Sudan, SIHA (2021) showed nuanced differences between an older generation of rights activists and younger women advocating for human rights. These differences are most pronounced around issues, political approach, and ideology. The archiving of feminist activism, continuity, and memory emerge as distinct features of intergenerational dialogues, as do the issues being raised by different generations of feminists. In the Sudanese context, for example, women's positions at the time of the founding of the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU) were conservative as the union focused on questions of education, political participation, equal pay for equal work, and labour rights (e.g., paid maternity leave and spousal transfer). Many of these struggles were directed towards the State and were linked with traditions and religion. The current issues in Sudanese youth activism have shifted the basis of claims from tradition to a (liberal) rights perspective (SIHA 2021).

Varying interpretations and expectations in women's movements also seem to amplify intergenerational tensions. In the South African context, for instance, Clark, Mafokoane and Nyathi (2019) illustrate this point with an incident that occurred during the #TotalShutdown intersectional womxn's march against gender-based violence in August 2018, when in response to the familiar call "*Wathinta abafazi, wathinta imbokodo*" (you strike a woman, you strike a rock), a group of young Black women responded in continuous chant in English, "We are not rocks!" (68). Reading this moment of challenge as a rupture, Clark, Mafokoane and Nyathi (2019), citing Matandela (2017), also see in the younger feminists' response a "recognition of an emergence of an emancipatory discourse that critiqued the political project of democratization that had not adequately addressed the substantive representation, leadership, safety and dignity of Black womxn and queer bodies" (68). Such tensions are not necessarily antagonistic to a shared desire for liberation across generations of feminists but rather may reflect an insistence that difference remains constitutive of our feminist struggles and movements. Naicker's account of the hashtag struggles (in this Issue), which references the use of the hashtag #mbokodo lead by young women as

well as Omotoso and Faniyi's account of the #EndSARS struggles (in this Issue), suggests that both continuities and difference are constitutive of feminist struggles and movements.

The Common Themes of the Issue

FA 5.1's seven feature articles and other contributions (a conversation, a standpoint essay and two book reviews) discuss aspects of struggles and movements in Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan and the United Kingdom on a range of terrains of struggle: national, sub-national, in particular institutional locations, and in States and societies marked by over five decades of neoliberal economic and social policies and varying levels of political openness and democratic cultures. The feature articles examine struggles against dictatorship, bad governance, and economic crises; neoliberalism and privatisation; the exploitation of workers and their families; State-sanctioned corruption and violence, gender-based violence ignored by the State; expensive colonial education; the existential questions of making a living; and everyday resistance to oppression. The forms of struggle range from individual acts of agency and resistance, to local grassroots struggle, to dispersed and decentralised national and transnational movements. The contributions take up some of the themes and debates in the feminist literature that were flagged in the earlier sections of this editorial. We examine some of these briefly.

Neoliberalism at work

In recognition of the far-reaching effects of over five decades of economic globalisation and neo-liberalism on the terrain of resistance, a major theme in three of the feature articles is how neoliberalism has shaped the demands and divisions in Africa's feminist struggles and movements (Hassanain and Sidig in this Issue; Eddouada, in this Issue; Torvikey, Gyapong and Adomaa, in this Issue). Hassanain and Sidig's aptly titled essay "Bread or Representation" focuses on the limited emancipatory potential of representation politics when neoliberal policies create immiseration and render struggles for representation cosmetic and divisive. Middle-class women are pitted against their working-class

counterparts in contexts characterised by multi-faceted crises that arise from authoritarianism, corruption, and the failure of public spending.

Eddouada's article explores how women farmers rewrite a gendered land reform in Sidi Kacem, Morocco, by negotiating the women's rights rhetoric of international agencies with neo-liberal agendas such as land privatisation. She argues that while women's inclusion in the 2019 land tenure reforms was the outcome of women's struggles around collective land expropriation and privatisation, it was also informed by the need to comply with the Millenium Challenge Corporation's stipulation that the programme be gender-inclusive, the demands of the middle class-led Association of Women of Morocco, and the Moroccan State's gender policies. The result of this convergence, which provided moral support for extraction that benefitted urban capital at the expense of local peasants, is what she describes as "[forcing] an abstract, urban, middle class and Western feminist lexicon on working-class peasant women farmers' complex experiences of land and agrarian change." Not surprisingly, the reforms resurrected the tensions for women of having to choose between communal, rural peasant values and market-based bourgeois urban values. Eddouada concludes, quoting Rignall (2021), that while women might not have overtly opposed or resisted the pressure from global capitalism, they expressed their agency and reinvented the commons through their investment in the education of other women, their labour on family farms and cooperatives, and their contribution to family support and their children's education, actions that suggest that capitalism does not completely erase solidarity and reciprocity although it makes them less effective (Eddouada, in this Issue).

Similarly, the article by Torvikey, Gyapong and Adomaa on Ghana focuses on women's struggles against the privatised and extractive models of salt-mining in Ghana, while drawing attention to the Ghanaian State's use of a development discourse of modernisation and productivity to justify its support and protection of large-scale industrial salt mining accompanied by dispossession and enclosures of common property resources.

What makes struggles feminist

Several of the articles point to the challenges of distinguishing what is truly emancipatory from what props up the status quo and therefore cannot be characterised as a feminist struggle or movement. Eddouada uses the concept of governance feminism to frame her discussion of the relationship between corporate capitalism and feminism and to argue for a distinction, following Nancy Fraser, between global capitalist feminism and the feminism devoted to achieving true justice. Similarly, Hassanain and Sidig conclude that while the political representation agenda is not necessarily a problem, to be credible it must lead to economic rights that benefit all women. Therefore, by shelving economic justice demands and failing to take ethnic and class differences into account in decisions about movement priorities, the middle-class proponents of representation had missed an opportunity to make the women's movement more influential and relevant after the Sudanese revolution.

Torvikey, Gyapong and Adomaa on their part conclude that class differences among women in salt mining communities had become more evident as the privatisation of the commons evolved and different groups of women experienced the process in different ways. The ensuing protracted livelihood crises eroded women's shared gender identities as workers in a communal production system and fragmented their struggle for their livelihoods, upsetting their sense of how to reclaim the commons and who to ally with.

This issue also features in Naicker's argument that it is not simply how women define themselves, although that is important, but also how they identify, examine, and contest the gendered nature of their experiences as a basis of struggle against gendered power relations, that makes a struggle feminist. Thus, while women in the student movement were explicit in identifying their campaign as feminist, the women of Marikana, without using the language of feminism, raised similar issues of women's bodies - rape, trauma, abuse, bodily safety and access to reproductive health and services - thus demonstrating the error of separating such issues from politics.

Spatial and temporal continuities and discontinuities in feminist struggles

Several of the feature articles engage with the question of spatial and temporal continuities and solidarities in feminist struggles (Naicker, in this Issue; Ndakalako, in this Issue; Odoi and Baidoo, in this Issue; and Omotoso and Faniyi, in this Issue). Naicker's article examines the spatial and temporal continuities between South Africa's hashtag movements and earlier struggles of women against pass laws under apartheid, on the one hand, and those between the urban university-based hashtag movements and the struggles of working-class women of Marikana, on the other. In doing so, the article demonstrates that spatial differences and socio-economic and political specificities of the actors notwithstanding, all movements were within the same spectrum of contemporary feminist struggles. This is because women's common and differentiated experiences of patriarchal orders and gendered representational politics have been problematic even in domains of struggle considered popular or progressive. In Naicker's view, this is what led women to constitute themselves separately in both spaces, either through their hashtags or through the demands they made of university authorities, the owners of mines and male-dominated collectives for the redress of unequal gender power relations.

Omotoso and Faniyi also take up this issue by focusing on transgenerational continuities in Nigerian feminist activism as a strategy to transcend studies that focus on class, gender and generational divides, drawing on the work of Dieng (2023), in contrast with work that has emphasised the generational divides (Bawa 2018; Clarke, Mafokoane and Nyathi, 2018). In examining the #EndSARS activism as an aspect of transgenerational feminist struggles against State repression, they recall the traditions of struggle of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU), under the leadership of Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, and draw attention to explicit connections that #EndSARS activists made between their struggles and those of the AWU. The article also draws attention to the activism of young urban multi-ethnic middle-class women and men as legitimate and beneficial as a feminist rallying force within the wider decentralised national movements against State authoritarianism. Rather than see the digital divide as separating this struggle from those of AWU in the 1940s and 1950s, the article identifies points of convergence and similarities in patterns of organisation,

conceptualised as an ethic of vigour born out of radical care. It is an ethic that uses strategies such as the persistent pursuit of specified goals, conscious networking across classes, a strong feminist identity, prioritising communications and the intentional documentation of the struggle through pamphlets and digital media; such strategies establish a continuum of women resisting oppressive structures across time (Omotoso and Faniyi, in this Issue).

While these accounts of the spatial and temporal continuities are compelling, we know from the literature that feminists of different generations operating within the same space and time have drawn attention to efforts to bridge inter-generational differences. This issue is explored in the essay by Odoi and Baidoo, which discusses the connections, commonalities, and differences between an older generation of feminist activists (operating between the 1980s and 2017) and digital feminist activists (working from 2017 to date), and the efforts to understand and bridge their expressed differences through dialogue. While acknowledging some differences in issues of focus and methods, the article concludes that digital feminism in Ghana is a continuation of older forms of organisation. The divide they highlight is the lack of inter-generational communication within contemporary feminist movements, a concern which African feminist movements, including the one under study, have made efforts to address through dialogue and representation. Their examination of a series of inter-generational dialogues found that while the older feminist movement included scholar-activists who played a pivotal role in the agenda setting and knowledge production for struggle, the younger generation did not reference that work and relied instead on the literature emanating from the global Black feminist movement (Odoi and Baidoo, in this Issue).

Ndakalako's account of the 2020 #ShutItAllDown protests by young women mostly under 25 years, which saw a demographic with little political influence and traditional cultural power take on the State to protest its inaction on gender-based violence, examines why older women and feminist activists with a long tradition of activism largely failed to support their movement – the one exception to this being Sister Namibia, that country's oldest feminist organisation. The essay concludes that while there is a generational divide in protest practices between contemporary protestors and feminist activists of previous generations, the acts of solidarity and collaboration between them and

Sister Namibia, facilitated by social media, speak to feminist solidarity practices that bridge the generational divides. However, Ndakalako's finding that the main value of the movement's strategic use of social media and disruptive protests was to give it visibility and link it to contemporary transnational and global hashtag movements, with which it had a clearer connection, is similar to Odoi and Baidoo's that younger feminists in Ghana draw inspiration from global feminist scholarship (Ndakalako, in this Issue; Odoi and Baidoo, in this Issue).

Questions of representation, multiple identities and vocalities

The four other contributions to the issue take up a common theme - representation and multiple identities and vocalities. Abena Busia's conversation with award-winning feminist writer Bernardine Evaristo draws attention to the importance of biographies of struggle to a fuller understanding of the makings of feminist leaders and their times. It also speaks to the act of writing as an indispensable instrument that can bear witness to struggles, to specific contributions of writer-activists to struggles around representation, and to polyvocality and consciousness. Both this lively and inspiring conversation between two leading feminist writers and literary scholars and Desiree Lewis' excellent review of Gertrude Fester's *Prison Notebook V2957/88* showcase the ways in which the struggle identities of remarkable leaders are forged in everyday lives of courage, endurance, and commitment to fighting the adversities of race and all other inequalities. At the same time, they speak to the power of feminist collectives and solidarity in the struggle against multiple and intersecting oppressions as well as the complicated politics of identities and representation.

The issue of representation is also raised, albeit in a different way, in Radwa Saad's reflections on the recent controversies about the depictions of Cleopatra in cinematic productions. This critique of both the racist tropes of Egyptian nationalist postures and strands of problematic Afrocentric interpretations of Egypt's Black heritage argues for a more nuanced understanding of race when navigating complex historical legacies. Saad's standpoint is an important contribution to wider debates about the legacies of slavery, colonisation and racism, Pan-Africanism, and the struggles against anti-Blackness in Africa and the African diaspora. Her conclusion that Africa is a mosaic of colours, cultures

and civilisations that ought to be celebrated equally is not likely to end the struggle between Afrocentricity and Egyptian nationalism about Egypt's Black heritage. However, her argument that we need to emphasise the common experiences of alienation and marginalisation of Arab Muslim and African American women, who are considered persons of ambiguous racial and ethnic identities, speaks directly to questions of intersectional oppressions and the global character of 21st century feminist struggles that feature prominently in this Issue.

Kamal's review of Rusha Latif's 2022 book, *Tahrir's Youth: Leaders of a Leaderless Revolution*, brings valuable insights from one of the remarkable struggles of the 21st century. The book debunks the idea that Tahrir is a spontaneous leaderless revolution of young, Westernised Egyptians deploying the power of social media, arguing that the uprising was a result of years of organising and protests by opposition parties and civil society in Egypt, which had leaders across ideological and class divides, whose achievements were due more to the power of Egyptian youth than the power of social media. This interrogation of the role of social media and the influence of struggles in the West against oppression is also taken up in the feature articles on feminist youth movements in Ghana, Namibia, and Nigeria (Odoi and Baidoo, in this Issue; Ndakalako, in this Issue; Omotoso and Faniyi, in this Issue). Kamal's review raises another salient question, namely the gender gap in women's representation and the gendered nature of leadership roles despite the equally substantial contributions of women to the struggle. Putting this in conversation with Naicker's account of the struggles for intersectionality in demands and representation of the women of Marikana and the hashtag movements at the university draws attention to how patriarchal leadership cultures permeate even the most progressive of spaces.

Conclusions

FA 5.1. sheds light on 21st century feminist struggles and movements in Africa, drawing attention to their rootedness in Africa's predicament as an adjunct in a global economic system of capitalist exploitation, the continuities, discontinuities and connections between African and global struggles for emancipation, and the inter-generational dynamics of struggles. In providing fresh empirical evidence supported by the existing literature, and in making efforts to theorise and reconceptualise feminist struggles in Africa, the Issue contributes to a more informed sense of the terrain of struggle and its exigencies. However, this is by no means the last word on this issue. That there is more research planned under this project on the histories of feminist struggles and on struggle biographies speaks to the ongoing character of knowledge production.

Related to this, certain movements and issues of struggle appear only tangentially in the case studies. One of these is the feminist movements' response to the rise of homophobic and transphobic violence and harassment on the ground and State actions that criminalise and expose LGBTQ persons and communities to attacks amidst the growing influence of foreign evangelical forces who have exported American and European cultural wars to Africa. Sections of Africa's feminist movements have either integrated this issue into their work or engaged in acts of solidarity with LGBTQ struggles, although this is not a uniformly positive development. Several of the features in this Issue, particularly those focused on the #hashtag struggles (Ndakalako; Naicker; and Odoi and Baidoo) raise this issue as part of the process of identifying the membership and concerns of younger feminist movements. However, it deserves fuller consideration given its topicality and the ways in which it exposes a particularly virulent form of homophobic gender backlash that threatens fundamentally the gains of Africa's feminist and gender justice movements.

Furthermore, certain themes that were raised in the contributions require more systematic research. These include the role of Africa's postcolonial patriarchal States which perpetrate and stabilise the conditions of gender oppression through their actions and inactions. In this connection, several articles have discussed the African State's use and misuse of its monopoly on legitimised violence (Omotoso and Faniyi, in this Issue), the disciplining and ideological roles

of sections of the State apparatus and the question of feminist governmentality (Naicker, in this Issue; Eddouada, in this Issue), the State's neglect of gender oppression (Ndakalako, in this Issue) and its collusion with capital, traditional leadership and conservative forces to depoliticise, delegitimate and demobilise feminist struggles and sustain gendered systems of oppression (Naicker, in this Issue; Torvikey, Gyapong and Adomaa, in this Issue; Eddouada, in this Issue; Abdelazzin and Sidig, in this Issue).

While it was evident that the research underpinning this issue was concerned with feminist principles for ethical research, there has not been a sustained effort to fully examine methodological questions and their implications in the feature articles. The space restrictions of feature articles make this a difficult proposition. However, what is presented in the articles does provide a basis for addressing and documenting questions of methodology. For example, an issue which was addressed in some detail in the essays was the positionality of the researchers. Odoi and Baidoo identify as part of the young feminists in Ghana whose politics and practices they were studying. Similarly, Kamal's (in this Issue) review of Rusha Latif's 2022 book, *Tahrir's Youth: Leaders of a Leaderless Revolution* notes that the author starts with her own experiences in Tahrir, providing a "detailed, first-hand eye-witness mapping of the location, slogans, chants and 'the Rules of the Square', thus situating the author as a reliable participant observer in the research project." Torvikey, Gyapong and Adomaa argue that feminist research requires multiple methodological approaches embedded in reflexivity and participation, which represents a double conscientisation in which researchers and their target groups share ideas, strategies, and tools (Torvikey, Gyapong and Adomaa, in this Issue).

Grey material, whether online or in print, as well as public statements, press releases and other relevant documents, constituted a particularly important source of information for the study on Sudan. This was no different for the Ghana studies and the hashtag struggles of Namibia, Nigeria, and South Africa. In this connection, the significance of online spaces as sites of research on contemporary movements is important. This is because such movements, particularly the hashtag struggles, have been extensively documented on social media platforms and in interviews on YouTube and podcasts, according to Ndakalako (in this Issue). The value of digital archives for documenting the

histories of feminist movements, even those that have not traditionally relied on digital spaces, cannot be underestimated. All these questions of positionality, ethics, methods and instruments as well as theorising, when considered in relation to the subject matter and subjects of research, will contribute to the quest for epistemic justice and the strengthening of feminist research cultures, issues long championed by *FA*.

As a model of how African feminist knowledge can be produced, disseminated, and used, the research project underpinning this Issue has potential and possibilities for replication. We are hopeful that the emergent Pan-African community of scholarship will grow beyond the research and catalyse even more such communities that teach us about the changing terrains, formations, and politics of feminist struggles of the 21st century while contributing to *FA*'s project of epistemic justice.

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Notes

1. We are grateful to Charmaine Pereira who served as supervising editor; to Akosua Darkwah, Desiree Lewis, and Samuel Ntewusu, resource persons at the first in-person project workshop; and to the anonymous reviewers of feature articles for their invaluable contributions to the Issue.
2. Aisha Yesufu was a prominent leader of the #EndSARS campaign of 2020, while Alaa Salah was the woman in a white toub addressing rallies during the Sudanese revolution of 2019.
3. The call received 23 submissions from across Africa. Feminist Africa Research Projects are an important instrument of inter-generational Pan-African collaboration and learning which provide the space for addressing urgent questions that support feminist struggles for Africa's emancipation from neo-colonial underdevelopment and epistemic injustice. The research project format is to provide space and time for empirical research, theorising, reflection, and skills-building workshops and writing to sustain the interest and commitment of a new generation of scholars to producing rigorous scholarship for FA and other journals.
4. Eddouada (in this issue) argues that it might appear to be anti-feminist to choose group rights over individual rights and autonomy; women's calculations about not risking the clear benefits of solidarity and reciprocity for the uncertain gains of individualised land interests cannot be dismissed. This points to the complexity in the determination of what is feminist.
5. The conversation was organised as a session of the 3rd Kwame Nkrumah Festival, the first to be fully digital, which was curated by the 4th holder of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies at the University of Ghana, Amina Mama on the theme "*Pan Africanism, Feminism, and the Next Generation: Liberating the Cultural Economy*."
6. An example of such an approach is "An Archive of Activism: Gender and Public History in Postcolonial Ghana", led by Kate Skinner and Akosua Adomako-Ampofo, which has interviewed women activists; collected photographs, footage and memorabilia; and produced a documentary film. https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/historycultures/departments/dasa/research/archive-of-activism

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