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# SDG 5 – A Long, Short, and Unfinished History of the Journey to Gender Equality

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The United Nations 2015 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for Gender Equality is one of the more recent examples of more than a century of global-level codification and commitment to the rights of women and equality of the sexes, variously described and defined. Goal 5 is just a small step in a journey of countering historical inequities based on physiological or social sex and sexuality that have generated discrimination, oppression, and structural inequalities. This chapter will examine the recent and the long history of the issue of relations between the sexes, the concept of gender(s) and the position and status of women, men, and non-binary persons. The chapter will map out the interplay between feminist activism and the women's movement in relation to the unfolding actions of international affairs and moves toward global approaches to shared challenges around the world. Balancing the global or international, with the local and contextual, and the predominance of the Global North and post-enlightenment epistemologies constitute a contested area in studies of gender, a theme woven into the chapter and fleshed out in an example from Peru. That the SDGs are global, and assume certain categories of gendered personhood questioned by some scholars, is a problematic we discuss toward the end of this chapter in view of calls for decolonization of gender scholarship.

Gendered relations between the sexes have long since been understood as the modus operandi of political transaction and gift exchange, acquisition and yielding of territory, resources and power, divisions of labor and social and economic reproduction in the public and private spheres, at least in Western scholarship. Whilst gender is everywhere,[1] the story of women, or

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herstory,[2] and gender identities and expressions beyond a binary, is one that exposes hierarchical structures of inequality and inequity that gained visibility with the rise of capitalism and associated processes of globalization. In the wake of these socioeconomic transformations of the nineteenth century, the women's movement was seeded, not only across Europe and the United States—as often described in the literature—but also, importantly, globally. Literature documents the rise of women's movements in China, India, and across the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand during this period.[3] More recently described as "feminist awakenings" or consciousness referring to the growing global awareness of the position and status of women and other gender minorities, early activist movements dating from the mid nineteenth century were critical in galvanizing action to redress the still unresolved underlying structural determinants of gender-based inequality around the world.[4]

This chapter will trace a few of the many ties that link the past to the arrival of a single gender goal in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and considers to what extent this marks progress in the journey toward substantive gender equality and the ending of "all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere."[5]

The history of women over the centuries is replete with examples of advancement and then sometimes regressions in the status and role of women and other gender minorities. From Queen Ahmose-Neferatari (circa 1570 BCE); Empress Wu Zetian, leader of China during the Tang dynasty (*c.* 618 to 906 CE); Jeanne D'Arc (*c.* 1412–1431 CE) to Ukraine's Yevgenia Bosche, the first woman leader of a modern era national government of 1917, there are plenty of examples where individual women have excelled in typically male-dominated societies.[6] However, leadership in and of itself is no indicator of wider societal equality between the sexes; nor has the periodic presence of women in leadership disrupted the deep axes of inequity—or gender orders[7]—which form the structural girders of societies.[8] Historically, the subordination of women and reproduction of gender

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What Are the Connections—and Why Does It Matter?"; Butler, *Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex*; Butler et al., *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*; MacCormack and Strathern, *Nature, Culture and Gender*; Scott, "Gender"; Connell, "Bodies and Genders"; Crenshaw.

[2]  OED defines *herstory* as a noun to describe accounts from the past "emphasizing the role of women or told from a women's point of view." Earliest usage is F.H.K. Green's 1932 *Through Hollow Oak* iii. 42. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/243412?redirectedFrom=herstory#eid, accessed September 24, 2021.

[3]  Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*; Sen, *Toward a Feminist Politics?: The Indian Women's Movement in Historical Perspective*; Tiesheng, "The Women's Movement in China before and after the 1911 Revolution."

[4]  Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China*; Ramdani, "Women in the 1919 Egyptian Revolution: From Feminist Awakening to Nationalist Political Activism."

[5]  Desa, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

[6]  It is often noted that some of these women were of noble or elite status, and their positions were often but not always in relation to their kin-based patriarchs.

[7]  Acker, "From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions."

[8]  Acker, "From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions."

norms and roles have been a determining feature of patriarchal human societies.[9] Whilst patriarchal structures have been the most prevalent, there are historical and contemporary examples of matrilineal societies whereby kinship, lineage, and inheritance are traced through women. Early anthropology documented many examples of matrilineal structures of succession and organization across the globe,[10] and matrilineality and matrilocality remain features of a number of cultures, prompting scholars to consider what lessons to draw in contemporary efforts to address the gender gap in areas such as political participation.[11] However, matrilineal kindship, succession and even leadership, do not necessarily equate with matriarchal power relations, nor even indicate greater societal equality or decision-making power between women, men, and non-binary persons.[12] There is also a recorded human history of varied and multiple gender identities, expressions, and sexualities from Apollo, the Greek and Roman Olympian deity to South Asian Hijra whose existence are recorded in ancient Sanskrit texts.[13] Notably the persistent themes across these non-binary histories are ones of marginalization, othering, stigma, and punitive responses quite often closely connected with European colonialism.[14]

This short telescoping through long history reminds us of the pervasive impact of gendered relations through time, across the globe and throughout economic and political processes of governance. In a 1986 article that has stood the test of time, Joan Scott expounded the notion that gender is a useful category of analysis.[15] As such, and useful to this chapter, gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Reconfigured in international language of the United Nations, power transforms to the active verb "empowerment." The text of the 2030 agenda adopts the concept of "empowerment" to suggest activation and acceleration in the advancement of the position and status of women. The concept appears nine times in the 40-page document in sentences that refer to women and girls, thus avoiding the political embroilments of defining the (patriarchal) structures of power in which or against which empowerment can occur. This positioning is

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[9] The OED etymology of the term patriarchal stretches to the early Christian church but was used to describe male-headed forms of social organization, governance and rule by F. Bacon in 1626 *Conc. Post-nati Scotl.* in *Three Speeches*. It was adopted in early twentieth-century anthropology to describe male and sometime female lineage, and then by the 1970s to describe a pervasive ideology. See Michelle Meagher (2011). "Patriarchy," in George Ritzer and J. Michael Ryan, (eds.), *The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology*. John Wiley & Sons, 441–442.

[10] MacLeod, "On the Significance of Matrilineal Chiefship"; Loeb, "Patrilineal and Matrilineal Organization in Sumatra."

[11] Robinson and Gottlieb, "How to Close the Gender Gap in Political Participation: Lessons from Matrilineal Societies in Africa."

[12] Berge et al., "Lineage and Land Reforms in Malawi: Do Matrilineal and Patrilineal Landholding Systems Represent a Problem for Land Reforms in Malawi?"; Schneider and Gough, *Matrilineal Kinship*.

[13] Rai and Kipgen, "Gender Nonconformance in Non-Western Contexts: Hijras in India."

[14] Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*.

[15] Scott, "Gender."

not value-free, assuming that a notion of empowered women, derived from the international agenda and the Global North, aligns with women's struggles on the ground, notably in the Global South.[16]

The challenge of empowerment, specifically beyond that of the individual—and in relation to all women[17]—has been a collective, organized and documented activity of local, national and transnational citizen activism since the mid-eighteenth century. Before scanning the historical specificities that have led to the seven SDG Gender Goal targets, it is important to unpack further the problems and implications of gender inequalities.

## The Problem of Gender Inequality

Advancing women's equality could add $12 trillion to global growth, calculated the 2015 report compiled and published by the Mckinsey Global Institute.[18] The World Economic Forum 2018 *Global Gender Gap Report* estimated that it would take 202 years to achieve economic gender parity.[19] Econometric modeling was a headline grabbing feature of the second half of the 2010s and the power of parity its rousing call. Whilst business case arguments are appealing to global markets, treasuries and the private sector, they risk eschewing the historical and contemporary concerns of women that often involve structures of society particularly the legal and educational systems. Not only are legal and educational systems critically important to gender equality generally, but also to the realization of the economic observations above. In economies where women have greater economic opportunity, there are lower rates of maternal morality and higher levels of female education. The interlinkages between law, education, health, and sustainable economies with the equal rights of women are axiomatic, as too are the intersections of race, ethnicity, and colonializations.

In 2020, the World Bank published its sixth edition of *Women, Business and the Law*, based on an ongoing analysis of laws and regulations affecting women's economic opportunity in 190 economies. Whilst we are generally familiar with legal histories that have prohibited women from voting and inheriting or owning property; suspended their legal existence upon marriage; restricted their movement and access to public spaces and political realms for example, it remains astonishing that so many legal prohibitions still exist. The 2020 report demonstrates significant recent progress with 40 economies enacting 62 reforms to enhance

[16] Struckmann, "A Postcolonial Feminist Critique of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A South African Application."

[17] https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth, accessed September 24, 2021.

[18] https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth, accessed September 24, 2021.

[19] http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf, accessed September 24, 2021.

gender equality. However, it still finds that women have just three-fourths of the legal rights afforded to men across the eight indicators.[20] Just two years earlier, the 2018 report found that 104 economies or 2.7 billion women in the world are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men. As an example, in the Russian Federation, Regulation No. 162 prohibits women from undertaking 456 jobs in the economy.[21] There is a longer history to workplace restrictions on women dating back even to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions of 1919,[22] Night Work (Women's) Convention, and Convention on No. 45 Underground Work (Women) of 1935,[23] which called on states to prohibit the employment of women underground or at night. The argumentation at the time centered on women as having special status and in need of sex-specific labor protection standards.[24] This logic was enshrined in the preamble to the constitution of the ILO, which provided for the "protection of children, young persons and women" and further asserted that when the ILO and its committees were dealing with questions related to women, at least one delegate should be a woman.[25] Protection of, or special status of, arguments have been a cause of fault lines across the feminist movement, with some arguing for equity-based approaches that recognize intersecting difference reflecting heterogeneity and so the particularities of women in male-dominated societies, whilst others advocate equality approaches that emphasize homogeneity and so equal and the same treatment, opportunities, resources for all. The special treatment of women as a category has an early history in the first wave of feminism, variously dated from around events of the late 1840s including the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. Early international law, including the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols, have adopted provisions that are women-specific; for example, the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War specified, "Women shall be treated with all consideration due to their sex."[26] Second wave feminists problematized the "protection" arguments by questioning what is was that women needed protecting from—many

[20] Report can be found at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/32639/9781464815324.pdf, accessed January 2021. The eight areas of measurement are Mobility, Pay, Parenthood, Assets, Workplace, Marriage, Entrepreneurship, and Pensions.

[21] PP. 1 in World Bank Group. 2018. Women, Business and the Law 2018. Washington DC: World Bank. © World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29498, accessed September 24, 2021. License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

[22] C004–Night Work (Women) Convention, 1919 (No. 4) https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C045, accessed September 24, 2021.

[23] C045–Underground Work (Women) Convention, 1935 (No. 45) Convention on No. 45 Underground Work (Women) of 1935.

[24] Zimmermann, "Globalizing Gendered Labour Policy: International Labour Standards and the Global South, 1919–1947."

[25] For a book length study of women and the ILO see Carol Riegelman Lubin and Anne Winslow, *Social Justice for Women: The International Labor Organization and Women* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

[26] Article 3 in The Geneva Convention of 27 July 1929 relative to the treatment of prisoners of war https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/57jnws.htm, accessed September 24, 2021.

concluding that patriarchal power and hegemonic masculinities were the structural aggressors against which women were needing protection. In this logic, if patriarchal power structures were challenged and dismantled, special provisions to protect women would become unnecessary.[27] The fault line emerges today in approaches to policy initiatives such as women's quotas in politics.[28]

Access to financial services and banking is another area that has a gendered history and a continued presence. Married women (who had their rights suspended as a legal entity upon marriage) in most of Western Europe were prohibited from opening bank accounts without their husband's permission until the mid 1960s. It is notable that in the global development sector, women's access to financial services and banking became a priority during the late twentieth century—however, only insofar as "micro-finance" rather than appropriate finance, suggesting persistent gendered bias. The targets for SDG 5 address some of these issues in commitments 5.a: "to undertake reform to give women equal rights to economic resources as well as ownership of property and control of land" and in 5.c: "to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation."

Inextricably bound to these observations on the economic and legal fronts are gender inequalities in education and two targets in Goal 4 of the SDGs set out to address these. Historically, when permitted, girls' education typically took place in the private sphere and only to those born of certain socioeconomic privilege. The nineteenth century saw the first significant growth in the education of girls from China,[29] India,[30] and across many parts of Europe and the Americas,[31] a trend that has continued but slowly. UNESCO estimates that today around the world, 132 million girls are out of school because of discrimination, poverty, violence, and child marriage. The COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020 has seen these figures reach astronomical levels as schools around the world have faced closures. It is widely documented that this has had a disproportionate impact on girls. Tracking this issue, Plan International reported the devastating impacts of home schooling as traditional gender roles in the family resurfaced, access to technologies for online education was limited, and gender-based violence within the home escalated.[32] The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many of the deep underlying gender inequalities across the globe in many of the areas that the SDG agenda sought to target, including the elimination of all forms of violence against women

[27] Bagshaw, *The Feminist Handbook: Practical Tools to Resist Sexism and Dismantle the Patriarchy*; Enloe, *The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy*.

[28] See recent actions at the Inter Parliamentary Union for further insights https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2019-03/new-ipu-report-shows-well-designed-quotas-lead-significantly-more-women-mps, accessed September 24, 2021.

[29] Lee, "Women's Education in Traditional and Modern China."

[30] Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement and Women's Education in India."

[31] Joyce Goodman (2007) "Social Change and Secondary Schooling for Girls in the 'Long 1920s': European Engagements," *History of Education* 36 no. 4–5, 497–513, DOI: 10.1080/004676007014967

[32] *Under Siege: Impact of Covid 19 on Girls in Africa*, Plan International and the African Child Policy Forum, June 2020.

and girls in public and private spheres and the elimination of harmful practices such as early and forced child marriage. Girls' education remains an intractable challenge, sometimes as a consequence of these practices. Today, two-thirds of the world's 700 million illiterate adults are women, a figure that has not changed in the past two decades.[33] The disparities in education run deeper and are more complex than only literacy with significant barriers and gendered specializations, particularly in science and technology, replicated in the workforce and economy.

This section has sought to elaborate just two of the areas in which gender inequality has impact, history, and very contemporary concerns. A more detailed example of the ways in which the histories of gender have contemporary impact is provided in the final section of this chapter concerning maternal mortality among Indigenous women in Peru.

## An International History of the SDG Gender Goal

To complement the thematic discussions around gender inequality and the SDGs, it is necessary to walk through the very significant antecedents that fueled the journey toward a stand-alone gender goal.

### The Rise of the Women's Movement

The early days of women's activism in Europe and America were critical mobilizations in the establishment of the League of Nations and later the United Nations, as well as other international organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the previously mentioned ILO. In Britain, the women-only Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst under the banner of Votes for Women, was an early example of highly coordinated national activism, among a number of suffrage movements that were at work throughout the late nineteenth century.[34] Similarly, in Seneca Falls, women gathered to claim their rights and privileges as citizens of the United States.[35] As movements grew in strength, so did the likelihood of world war and many organizations found that their feminist agendas were in tension with the buildup of

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[33] UNESCO provides regular updates on these data http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/international-womens-day-2014/women-ed-facts-and-figure/, accessed January 2020.

[34] Rosen, *Rise up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903–1914.*

[35] The Declaration of Sentiments," Seneca Falls Convention, 1848. For more on the convention at Seneca Falls, its participants, and the larger movement it spawned, see Ellen DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in the U.S., 1848–1869* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

militarist foreign policy and aggressions. Countering the moves to war, and later fostering early peacebuilding, the women's movement found new international spaces in which to operate. The foundation of the still global, still active Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) occurred in April 1915 when over 1000 women gathered in The Hague to discuss how to end the war and ensure permanent peace.[36] Suffragists aligned their political struggles for women's rights with the struggle for peace that cleared a seat at the table of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference that formerly ended the war, launched the ILO and with it a cohort of women who had at least some, albeit limited, access to the international negotiation table.[37] The women's delegation to Paris presented The Women's Charter which aimed to set an agenda for the League of Nations "if such a body is formed."[38] The following year, 1920, the League of Nations was established with a headquarters in Geneva. The Charter drafted many calls, including reforms to nationality inheritance (an issue that remains unresolved in many countries), a ban of the trafficking of women and girls (a target in the 2030 SDG agenda), and equal rights in the labor force (a pervasive challenge still).

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter also identifies issues around colonialism and decolonization, and the Women's Charter, like many such international documents, is problematic. The Charter talks of "civilized women," a term that needs some critical historical deconstruction; it refers to and capitalized the "Great Powers" referring to those geographical and political territories under colonial machinery. It would be an error of interpretation to fail to mention that these early feminist movements were not outside of the deeply problematic geopolitical powers and culture of European colonialism of the former half century, a discussion of which continues in the conclusion.

The Charter was however important in setting forth some issues of great concern to the movement and provided a pipeline of technical and expert women who could shape the formation of the League. The Covenant of the League of Nations, Article VII, ensured, on paper, that woman had the right to work at all levels of the League. However, as Geneva became a transitional hub for the women's movement, it soon became clear that women and men were not being treated the same at the League of Nations. They did not write the same entry exams, did not receive equal pay, and there was discrimination against married women, inequalities that the movement protested to change. The interwar period was a pivotal moment for feminist organizations to stake out claims and make visible the glaring inequalities between the sexes, usefully raising the question of whether women's

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[36] Ballantyne, "WILPF History: Past, Present, Future"; Plastas, "'A Band of Noble Women': The WILPF and the Politics and Consciousness of Race in the Women's Peace Movement, 1915–1945."

[37] Lubin and Winslow, *Social Justice for Women: The International Labor Organization and Women.*

[38] The Charter is achieved at https://biblio-archive.unog.ch/detail.aspx?ID=197168, accessed September 24, 2021.

rights were an international question. This question feeds directly into the glob-alization, or transnationalism of feminist and women's movements today—and one that is still a source of debate. To what extent are the experiences of women across the world shared? Are all women the same and can they be grouped as such? The work of Kimberle Crenshaw[39] is critical here as such debates continue in an era of decolonization and the political and policy implications of intersectional-ity. Rooted in Black feminist writing, post-colonial theory and feminism from the Global South, intersectionality has come to be a cornerstone of gender policy in in-ternational contexts. The significance of the intersectionality paradigm derived, in part, from its concern to engage axes of power and discrimination beyond gender as interdependent systems of oppression. Although intersectionality approaches have made very significant headway across the agencies of the UN systems and international organizations, as evidenced in the policies of UN Women, the ILO, and other organizations,[40] as well as in the scholarly and feminist literature,[41] it is not an approach that appears in the SDGs. This is perhaps because, as in ear-lier women's movements—issue-based activism toward gender equality are better able to galvanize global consensus. This is clear in the targets of Goal 5 that focus on consensus-building issues of violence, discrimination and participation, sealed under the increasingly normative concept of empowerment.

Similarly, Equal Nationality Laws could draw consensus among the many and various feminist and women's movement actors in the 1920s. Nationality law re-form became a test case for the UN Treaty System in the use of international law to advance the status of women. The issue was the nationality of married women who were forced to take that of their husband. As noted above, the issue remains today with 27 countries in the world limiting a woman's right to pass on her citizen-ship to her child or spouse. In pursuing a single goal in the 1920s, it was possible to create and institutionalize structures, served by and serving women within the processes of the League of Nations. Persistent lobbying by Alice Paul, an Ameri-can activist and leader of the National Women's Party who later secured the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States, and several other campaigns, saw the es-tablishment of the Women's Consultative Committee as an official League body

[39] K. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics (University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989), 139–167."

[40] See examples at https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/12/take-five-empowering-women-and-girls-with-disabilities

https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer-intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters

https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/170313am-csw61-se-netherlands.pdf

https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/gavis-commitment-diversity-equality-and-inclusion

http://ilo.ch/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_norm/—declaration/documents/publication/wcms_170015.pdf, accessed October 2021.

[41] Hankivsky and Cormier, *Intersectionality: Moving Women's Health Research and Policy Forward*; Hancock, *Intersectionality*; Kapilashrami and Hankivsky, "Intersectionality and Why It Matters to Global Health."

with a mandate to speak on all matters regarding women. The detailed history of the inter-war women working within and around the League is given elsewhere.[42] It suffices in this chapter to highlight the work involved in the establishment of the Status of Women Inquiry of 1937, which resulted eventually in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 1946. The CSW remains today the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

These histories tell a story of activism and the part it played in constituting a global multilateral system that placed equality of women and men (and in more recent years, but still problematically for some member states, people of all gender identities) on the agenda—even if great gaps persist. It is notable that so many of the issues raised in the early twentieth century are yet unresolved and still listed as 2030 SDG targets.

## Post-War Gender Agendas

President John F. Kennedy's response to Eleanor Roosevelt in a 1962 televised interview must have surely disheartened the woman who chaired the drafting committee of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 when he exclaimed:

> "We want to be sure that women are used as effectively as they can to provide a better life for our people, in addition to meeting their primary responsibility, which is in the home."[43]

Hansa Mehta of India, the only other woman delegate to the UN Commission of Human Rights, is widely credited in changing the phrase "All men are born free and equal" to "All human beings are born free and equal" in Article 1 of the declaration. Other women, in particular, Minerva Bernardino of the Dominican Republic, Begun Shaista Ikramullah of Pakistan, Bodil Begtrup of Denmark, Evdokia Uralova of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, and Lakshmi Menon of India, made their contributions to the drafting of key post-war documents of the United Nations including the UN Charter, which in 1945, became the first international document to recognize the equal rights of women and men. All these documents remains active today and form the basis of the 2030 SDG agenda, with the addition of the Millennium Declaration, the 2005 World Summit Outcome and the declaration of the Right to Development.[44]

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[42] Miller, "'Geneva–the Key to Equality': Inter-War Feminists and the League of Nations [1]."
[43] Interview of JFK by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1962. Footage of the interview is available here https://vimeo.com/85280922, accessed January 2021.
[44] See p. 8 of the Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This following section will tour the post-war activities first in the international spheres and then in the context of case study from Peru. It serves to map out the momentum of international cooperation and the mechanisms of international conventions that cement countries' agendas and commitments aimed at advancing gender equality.

Whilst much was happening on the international stage—progress on women's rights and gender equality did not take place in a vacuum and grass roots activism of second wave feminists across the globe steered much of the agenda. Unlike the earlier movement mentioned above, feminists in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were more diverse than previous generations that tended to be driven women of education and socioeconomic privilege. Second wave activism formed on the streets as much as in the ivory towers or drawing rooms of elite women. It brought the patriarchal power structures into view whilst also elevating women's bodies as highly politicized spaces upon which the patriarchy affected its power. The issues of concern reflected this embodied turn with a focus on bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, and sexual violence. The landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision of the supreme court of the United States in 1973 has become emblematic of the work of the movement during these decades and mirrored activities in the international arena, including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

In 1967, the international community adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in response to concerns of continued and considerable discrimination against women. The non-binding Declaration was the precursor to the 1979 CEDAW Convention. The convention brought together, in a single legally binding instrument, provisions on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It builds firmly on the documents mentioned earlier with the addition of other conventions. These include the 1952 Convention on the Political Rights of Women; The Convention on the Nationality of Married women in 1957, the same issue that the early suffragists tried to resolve; and finally the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage and Registration of Marriages in 1962. Two other drivers ensured the final CEDAW convention were the 1975 World Conference of the United Nations International Women's Year and the proclamation by the UN General Assembly that set 1976 to 1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women. Alice Paul, mentioned earlier in the chapter in relation to her early work at the international level, is one of the cohort of suffragists who continued her work at the national level pursuing the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which she drafted together with Crystal Eastman. Throughout the 1970s, attempts to pass the amendment that sought to end legal distinctions between women and men in matters of divorce, property and employment faced stiff opposition and processual stalling. To date, 38 states ratified the ERA, but it remains contested.

As in all the histories plotted in this chapter, we see that the international system relies on a process of precedent and cumulative traction, agreed upon by all member states, as it moves forward with gender issues. Moving from local and national women's activism of the earlier centuries toward something we now describe as "global" or international, is an exercise in historical patience. However, there were notable strides made in the initiation of the world's first UN Conference on Women, held in Mexico 1975, launching the United Nations Decade for Women. Narrated in book-length, Jocelyn Olcott provides a detailed account of the two-week event, which many, including Olcott, claim launched global feminisms and the emergence of transnational feminist networks.[45] Kick starting a global momentum, Women's International Conferences followed: Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995) each delivering progressively more far-reaching agreements advancing international law. The Beijing conference, considered the most significant, agreed the Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by 189 countries.[46] The conference cemented human rights as women's rights—famously proclaimed by then First Lady of the United States, Hillary Clinton, in her address to the conference.

As the world moved toward the millennium, the United Nations took its first step to developing global targets, including around gender equality. The promotion of gender equality formed Goal 3 of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the precursor to the SDGs. With hindsight, the simple MDG *promotion* of gender equality seems a rather unambitious goal lacking in concrete or assertive action in contrast to the elimination targets of the SDGs, but represents another step in the mapping of the long and short international history of gender equality.

Despite the efforts described in the chronology above, the United Nations faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally in the early twentieth century. Whilst the number of initiatives acted in their own, mainly legal, spaces, there was no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues. In 2010, the General Assembly addressed this institutional issue with the establishment of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, or UN Women, the latest of multilateral attempts to accelerate progress on the mandate of its name. It is historically interesting but disappointing that UN Women's four strategic priorities in 2020 so closely echo those of the interwar activists whose voices were, at least partially, included in the establishment of the League of Nations. UN Women calls for women and girls to have greater influence in building sustainable peace; to live lives free of all forms of violence; to have decent work and economic autonomy; and finally, to participate and benefit equally from systems of governance, much like the issues of concern of the women's movements of 1900 to 1946. Whilst the pervasive issues

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[45] Friedman, "Gendering the Agenda: The Impact of the Transnational Women's Rights Movement at the UN Conferences of the 1990s"; Prügl, "The Global Construction of Gender."

[46] https://undocs.org/en/A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1, accessed September 24, 2021.

of concern may not have changed much in a century, it has become vitally important that approaches to the issues change to ensure the local, the marginal and the intersectional axes of oppression and subordination stand at the foreground of transnational moves toward gender justice.

The final section of this chapter draws on an example to illustrate how transnational or multilateral gender agendas can affect women in a country outside of the corridors of international geopolitical power discourses, but yet also subject to their targets and implementation programs.

## Maternal Mortality: Global Goals, Local Realities among Indigenous Women in Peru

Concern about maternal mortality has been an issue that garnered consensus across all waves of feminisms and has been central to multiple global efforts on gender, gender equality, and women's health. Initiatives have been typically top down and from North to South, carrying with them very particular histories of gender, feminist activisms, science and internationalism that are a far stretch from the experiences of many women in the Global South. For a country like Peru, international development actors typically operationalize global agendas in national and local programing guided by the priorities of the international declarations and commitments such as the MDGs and later SDGs.

According to the World Bank, Peru is an upper-middle income country that—before COVID-19—ranked as one of the fastest-growing countries in Latin America, with an average GDP growth rate of 6.1% annually.[47] Yet, such economic growth has not benefited the population homogenously and those who are Indigenous, and live in rural areas, experience the highest concentration of extreme poverty.[48] The high levels of exclusion and inequity translate into poor health indicators, including maternal mortality. Although maternal mortality fell between 1996 and 2009 from 265 to 103 per 100,000 births, it remains stubbornly stuck at these levels with a disproportionate burden among Indigenous rural women.

Whilst Peru marks 200 years of independence from Spain in 2021 and Indigenous Peruvians represent 25% of the population,[49] it was not until 1993 that the constitution recognized Aymara, Quechua, and Amazonian Indigenous languages as official languages.[50] Despite these recognitions, and efforts from the Ministry of Culture to ensure Indigenous people have state-funded interpreters in key public services, this is not the case, for example, in Primary Health Care facilities

[47] www.worldbank.org/en/country/peru/overview, accessed January 2021.
[48] Vargas Valente, "Gendered Risks, Poverty and Vulnerability in Peru. A Case Study Othe Juntos Programme."
[49] INEI, "Censo 2017."
[50] EZLN, 1993. First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle, Today We Say 'Enough is Enough!' (Ya Basta!)," EZLN Command (1993).

in rural areas. Indigenous people across Latin America share a common history of subjugation and displacement and the lingering legacy of colonization is ever-present.[51] It is reflected in access and provision of health services, and particularly in women's health. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is the specialized international health agency for the Americas that also serves as the regional office of the World Health Organization (WHO). As such, its gender-related activities and goals are somewhat formed as part of international dialogues described in the histories above, and with that, biomedical models of care that do not align and sometimes conflict with Indigenous epistemologies of health, well-being, the body, and gender. In the area of maternal health, these schisms expose the challenge of global approaches to two pillars of the international development system, and the need to think about ways of re-balancing the relations of geopolitical power through decolonizing approaches to gender.[52]

Maternal health was one of the eight MDGs and responded to global data that showed around half a million women a year were dying from direct or indirect obstetric causes in the year 2000, of whom 99% were living in low- and middle-income countries.[53] Increased international support and accompanied funding resourced Peru's Ministry of Health and other international and local actors to commence interventions to address the high burden of maternal mortality among Indigenous women in rural areas. Whilst well intentioned, Indigenous women in Peru have experienced unintended consequences of global efforts to meet first the MDG, and now SDG on maternal mortality, including a devaluation of Indigenous knowledge, loss of power and control in decision-making and increased reliance on a biomedical system that is not always available or free.[54] In examining some of the actions promoted by the WHO to improve maternal health, studies illustrate the multiple ways that Indigenous women have faced barriers.[55] For example, pre-natal visits to clinics is one such action promoted—but is far less likely among Indigenous women in rural areas where access is limited.[56] Similarly, the national average for births attended at a health facility and by a Skilled Birth Attendant, a key component to be able to solve an obstetric emergency in a timely fashion is 85%, but only of 17% among women whose mother tongue is an Amazonian language. Such stark realities are variously explained in the literature but include a

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[51] Batalla and Dennis, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization.*

[52] Somerville and Munguambe, "The Rise of Non-Communicable Disease (NCDs) in Mozambique."

[53] World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Population Fund (2004) *Maternal Mortality in 2000: Estimates Developed by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA.* Geneva: World Health Organization.

[54] Schwartz, "Introduction to Indigenous Women and Their Pregnancies: Misunderstood, Stigmatized, and at Risk."

[55] Paulino, Vázquez, and Bolúmar, "Indigenous Language and Inequitable Maternal Health Care, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia"; Bristol, "Dying to Give Birth: Fighting Maternal Mortality in Peru"; Gabrysch et al., "Cultural Adaptation of Birthing Services in Rural Ayacucho, Peru."

[56] UNICEF, "Estado de La Ninez Indigena En El Peru." 2010.

persistent imposition of norms and values strongly associated with ways of think-ing, typically biomedical and gendered, that contrast with the expectations that Indigenous women hold around childbirth and maternal care, place, gender and ethnicity.[57]

The international pressure to address maternal mortality or the "MDG-linked birth policy" in Peru has received critique from several quarters, for failing to con-sider Indigenous knowledge and practice around birthing—in short, it has ignored Indigenous women and imposed a set of detrimental practices exposing the limits of a global approach to women's health issues.[58]

What we learn from such examples is the necessity to reflect critically on the transnational gender histories that have shaped the journey to the current SDG agenda. Just as early twentieth-century feminists sought to bring women to the table—albeit of a certain class of privilege—we should ensure that women that have sat at the structural margins of these efforts are now placed at the geopolitical center where they can exercise their rights to set the agenda.

## Conclusion

Nigerian feminist scholar Oyeronke Oyewumi provides an important cautionary entry point to thinking through the long and short history of gender in relation to the geopolitical power structures that have dominated internationalism and its recent manifestations in United Nations global goals:

> The Women questions is a Western-derived issue—a legacy of the age-old so-matocentrality in Western thoughts. It is an imported problem, and it is not indigenous to the Yoruba.[59]

If the category of woman is not universal—and in the case of the Yoruba, an import from colonialism—where do such globalized SDG targets sit in a decol-onizing world? What are the implications for transnationalism and the march of globalization? Was gender ever a universal, as suggested in the introduction of this chapter? In proposing a working definition of gender in this chapter

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[57]   The following literature explore these issues in depth and are central to thinking about relations of gender and local realities. Babb, "'The Real Indigenous Are Higher up': Locating Race and Gender in Andean Peru"; Babb, "Introduction: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Indigeneity in Andean Peru"; Vargas et al., "An Exploration of Patient-Provider Dynamics and Childbirth Experiences in Rural and Urban Peru: A Qualitative Study"; Matute, Martinez, and Donadi, "Intercultural Childbirth: Impact on the Maternal Health of the Ecuadorian Kichwa and Mestizo People of the Otavalo Region."

[58]   Guerra-Reyes, "Implementing a Culturally Appropriate Birthing Policy: Ethnographic Analysis of the Experiences of Skilled Birth Attendants in Peru"; Guerra-Reyes, "Numbers That Matter: Right to Health and Peruvian Maternal Strategies."

[59]   Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies: A Reader*. Pp.XI. See also Oyewumi, "Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenge of African Epistemologies."

(see footnote 1), this history has sought to think beyond the current UN definitions of gender that are typically limited, categorical, and confined by international legal texts such as the Rome Statute of 1998, and therefore also binary and constructivist. Thinking through *a dynamic relation of power that operates in all spheres of human activity on the assumption of axes of difference, in part, but not always from classifications of sexes,*[60] is an attempt to decouple gender as a concept from its European, post-enlightenment epistemology and address the problem of women as only a category of analysis.[61]

As we see from the long and short walk through the history of Goal 5 of the SDGs, there are oscillations of conflict and consensus throughout the history of women's movements that have had varying degrees of impact from the table of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, to the UDHR of 1948 and Black Lives Matter.[62] With each generation, the dialogue between the center and the margins, feminist activists and politics, iterate to produce new renderings of the relations of power between women, men, and non-binary persons, often reflecting current local and global political economies, trends, and events. The complexity of the history of gender, and its presence on the international stage and its dialogue with grassroots, has been an increasingly important feature of the global gender agenda, and never more so today at a time of backlash against women's rights and bodily autonomy,[63] feminist calls to action on Black Lives Matter,[64] decolonization,[65] and a global pandemic.[66] Without such activism, it is possible that gender and the rights of women would not be on the agenda.

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[60] Somerville and Munguambe, "The Rise of Non-Communicable Disease (NCDs) in Mozambique: Decolonising Gender and Global Health."

[61] Scott, "Gender."

[62] Cohen and Jackson, "Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy J. Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism."

[63] Cupać and Ebetürk, "The Personal Is Global Political: The Antifeminist Backlash in the United Nations"; Biroli and Caminotti, "The Conservative Backlash against Gender in Latin America."

[64] Bell et al., "Making Black Lives Matter in Academia: A Black Feminist Call for Collective Action against Anti-Blackness in the Academy"; Thompson, "The Intersectional Politics of Black Lives Matter."

[65] De Jong, Icaza, and Rutazibwa, *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning.*

[66] Wenham, Smith, and Morgan, "COVID-19: The Gendered Impacts of the Outbreak."