

Decolonizing Feminism in the #MeToo Era

Ritty Lukose, *New York University*

Abstract

This article explores what it means to decolonize feminism in the university today. Pushing against the idea that feminism in the university is disengaged from broader struggles, the article suggests a complex relationship between feminism as a knowledge project and as a political one. While feminism has had a long-standing decolonizing imperative within the university, equally challenging has been the decolonization of feminism. The #MeToo era has foregrounded the universalizing horizon of feminism, posing new challenges for this project. Arguing for a more complex understanding of generations and the politics of location in these debates, the article draws on a recent and not so recent feminist archive, such as the articulation of ideas of intersectionality and the ways in which multiple feminisms have been understood, in order to explore decolonizing feminism today.

Keywords: decolonize, feminism, generations, India, #MeToo, politics of location, postcolonial, race

Feminism in the university is in and of this world. I say this to push back against the idea that the university disconnects feminism from the ‘real world’ or creates a sometimes unbridgeable gap between feminist theory and scholarship and feminist movements, politics and practice. Rather than viewing the university as an intellectual and institutional location that ‘depoliticizes’ feminism, the ‘academicization’ of feminism might more helpfully be understood in terms of the different trajectories for feminisms within and outside the university that create sometimes productive and sometimes unstable relations between feminist scholarship and knowledge formation and feminist politics.¹ Such a view draws our attention to different historical and political moments that have shaped the ongoing struggles of feminism inside and outside the university, which is the primary subject of this article. What does it mean to consider feminism in the university in this moment? How does this moment of feminism in the university relate to other important moments in this history?

The need to understand feminism in the university as in and of this world is of crucial importance today. We are in a newly galvanizing moment for the public articulation of feminism, what has now been dubbed the ‘#MeToo’ moment. In the wake of allegations of sexual harassment, rape and assault against the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, the actress Alyssa Milano started the hashtag that drew millions. Largely focused on the US, it has resonated around the world in differential ways. In industry after industry, including higher education, through personal testimonies and anonymous, crowd-sourced lists, the relationship between sex and power is being newly scrutinized and acted upon. Beyond specific industries and explicit acts of harassment, assault and rape, this moment has also generated a spirited and contested debate about interpersonal dynamics in intimate and workplace relationships across power lines, the meanings of consent and coercion, the quality of women’s sexual lives, and more subtle forms of violation within everyday life. After years of backlash as well as somewhat triumphalist claims about ‘post-feminism’, feminism as a universalizing horizon of justice and possibility seems more alive than ever in recent memory. As many have noted, while feminist struggles against sexual violence within and outside the university have been long-standing, the specificity of this hashtag politics and its reverberations, circulations and resonances must be linked to the Women’s Marches around the world in the wake of Donald Trump’s electoral victory and the political mobilization of women within the US (Crary and Noveck 2018; Tambe 2018). Feminism in everyday life, in the functioning of institutions, in the media and on the street seems to have a new lease on life.

However, even in this galvanizing moment where the universalizing horizon of feminism has newly arisen, the need to remember earlier histories quickly became apparent when it became clear that the African-American civil rights activist Tarana Burke had coined the phrase ‘Me Too’ in 2006, founding the organization Just Be to combat sexual violence particularly among girls of colour. The phrase emerged from her own silence and inability to say ‘me too’ when confronted by a young black woman’s story of abuse (Garcia 2017). The struggle to have this moment be inclusive and ‘intersectional’, a term I will come back to later, was something that confronted not only the emergence of the hashtag but also mass mobilizations. For example, the first Women’s March had to tackle the question of diversity, inclusion and intersectionality from the initial days in terms of what the organizing committee would look like, the extent to which it would be inclusive of racial minority and transgender women and LGBTQ+ issues, whether it would be called ‘The Million Women March’, possibly co-opting the language of recent African-American marches, and the iconography of pink ‘pussy hats’ and the like (Gebreyes 2017). And such struggles continue. As ‘#MeToo’ morphed into ‘#TimesUp’, a hashtag that draws attention to the founding of a legal defence fund to fight sexual harassment, assault and rape, the uneasy coalition between largely white, privileged actresses in Hollywood and the struggles of women of colour came to the fore at the Golden Globe awards in January 2018 when women of colour activists who work with organizations of female farm workers, immigrant

restaurant workers, black women and girls in Britain, domestic workers and Native American women, among others, walked the red carpet with famous, largely white Hollywood actresses.²

One way in which feminism in the university is in and of this world is to recognize that the contours of our current public conversations and mobilizations about feminism are complexly related to concepts and ideas forged by a political movement but also theorized within academic spaces and circulated in and through students exposed to such ideas as they move on to non-academic spaces, policy, research and media networks, the non-profit world, state institutions and the like. A good recent example of this within the US context might be the conversations and debates about affirmative consent that took place at Antioch College in the 1990s, something that was ridiculed at the time but has come to the fore now as part of a new reckoning with the meanings of consent (Stark 2018). Whether it is the category of 'woman', notions such as 'the personal is political', attention to a 'politics of location', ideas of consent, privacy, patriarchy, power, subordination, exploitation, secularism, identity, sexuality, intersectionality, rights, agency, trauma, empowerment, and the very legal definition of sexual harassment, among others, these are all concepts that sit at the complex intersection between feminism as both a knowledge project and a political project. This is a relationship that is importantly related to the highly differentiated institutionalization, since the 1970s and 1980s, of Women Studies, Queer Theory, and Gender and Sexuality Studies around the world.

It is important to remember that feminist interventions within the terrain of knowledge have always had a decolonizing imperative. As feminism critiqued the universalizing assumptions of the category of 'man' within a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, it sought to challenge hegemonic assumptions about subjectivity, corporeality, humanity, reason, culture, society and the like.³ This knowledge project was always tied to a political imperative. In this sense, feminism in the university has always been fuelled by and responded to the pushes and pulls of feminist and women's movements in the world at large. This mutually constitutive, sometimes messy relationship between knowledge formation and political intervention has never been disentangled, nor should it be if feminist knowledge production is going to remain a critical knowledge formation.

The second way in which feminism in the university is in and of this world is something that this current conjuncture forces feminism in the university to confront in new ways today. While it is important to attend to the histories of knowledge and power that have shaped how feminism in the university has contributed ideas and concepts that reverberate and resonate more broadly, it is equally true that the university is a workplace like any other, shot through with the same dynamics of sex and power as other workplaces. While much has changed in the university, there is no straightforward line between knowledge and power. This is clearly demonstrated when we notice that while feminist scholarship might have developed nuanced and careful conceptual vocabularies about consent, desire, agency and the like, universities deal with issues of sexual harassment, assault and rape through systematic obfuscation where concerns of institutional liability and

protection override considerations of justice. Within the larger political moment we are in, whatever progress narrative particularly liberal versions of feminism might have had about the seemingly inevitable widening of equality and opportunity for women and sexual minorities has been shot down by the rise of conservative, right-wing populism around the world. Within the context of feminism in the university, it seems clear that the university is only beginning to confront the task of what it means to take the dynamics of sex and power seriously despite decades of scholarship, institutional advocacy and legislation.

What does it mean to 'decolonize feminism' in the university in a contemporary conjuncture where universalizing ideas about feminism seem to have gained new traction and political force and might be under threat in new ways? How should we weigh the pulls of this galvanizing moment with the need to pose questions about power and difference within the movement? The universalizing horizons of feminism and the relations between feminisms have, of course, been long-standing lines of contestation that have also formed the fault lines across which solidarities and alliances have been forged. As I have indicated, the contemporary public discourse about feminism, at least in the US, whether it is the Women's March or #MeToo, seems to have fitfully absorbed, in some measure, the centrality of an 'intersectional feminism'. Yet it might be productive to explore some of the histories of movements and intervention that have congealed into this phrase 'intersectional feminism'. Further, what is the relationship between an 'intersectional feminism' and the task of 'decolonizing' feminism?

While feminist knowledge projects have a foundational decolonizing imperative, the current #MeToo moment has demonstrated how knowledge and power are complexly intertwined in ways that cannot be taken for granted. The decolonizing imperative has become more urgent than ever, as new sites of knowledge and power have come under scrutiny. A good example of how old concerns are newly inflected and continue the project of decolonizing, the current conjuncture of #MeToo has raised important conversations within the discipline of anthropology about gender, race and sexual violence within disciplinary practices and institutions.⁴ While earlier interventions might have argued for the importance of an anthropology of sexual violence in the context of knowledge production, more contemporary interventions tackle more directly fieldwork practices, institutional location and power and the positionality of the researcher. The rest of this article addresses the task of continuing a conversation about decolonizing feminism across generations and moments within the larger horizon of the #MeToo moment.

Intersectional feminism

The task of linking the past to the present is never straightforward, especially today given the ways in which the #MeToo movement has generated a somewhat fractious discussion between ostensibly different generations of feminists (Doyle 2018). The outlines of this debate, as constructed in the media, pit intolerant 'millennial' feminists who are happy to use anonymous lists and social media

accusations against 'older' feminists who worry that hard-won due process and institutional procedures are being too quickly jettisoned. Lines have been drawn between feminists of an earlier era who seem to worry more about 'sex panic' and regulation than younger feminists who are accused of too easily speaking a language of sexual morality, righteousness and an excessive language of victimhood and exploitation at the expense of empowerment and agency. Younger feminists wonder why speaking out about sexual violence implies a lack of agency. These are just some of the ways in which these lines have been drawn.

In drawing on a feminist archive to illuminate the contemporary context, it is not my intention to ask recalcitrant young feminists to pay attention to their histories in some straightforward way. However, while rejecting unproductive narratives of generational strife within feminism, I nevertheless argue that some framework of generations might be useful. A more careful contextualization of how questions of knowledge and politics are impacted by different political moments and events that shape generations is important, I argue, for understanding feminism inside and outside the university today.

Arguably, it is an essay entitled 'The Problem of Generations' by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim that lays the groundwork for our contemporary understanding of generations (Mannheim [1928] 1952). The 'problem' Mannheim identified is a fundamental one – how do societies change and what does knowledge have to do with it? The central assertion of his theory was that there was nothing inevitable or natural about how one generation follows the next. The biological facts of birth and death and aging explained very little about how this transition happens. The transition may be smooth, it could be violent – there was no way to know in advance. He then went on to argue that people are significantly influenced by the social and historical environment, in particular notable events that involve them actively, that predominates their youth, forming, on the basis of that experience, social generations that in turn become agents of change and give rise to events that shape future generations. How does this happen? To explain this, he coined the phrase 'fresh contact' – that is when people 'come into contact anew' with their accumulated cultural traditions of thought and knowledge and develop novel perspectives on them.⁵ While 'fresh contact' can happen for any individual over the life course, Mannheim highlighted the special force and potential of young people, as a cohort, on the verge of adulthood undergoing 'fresh contact' with their inherited traditions in the wake of the events that define their age. Such a formulation understands generational formations as complex conjunctures of knowledge, power and action. It also points to the importance of young people's engagements with their political present as deeply consequential for large-scale social change and compels us to find more productive forms of intergenerational dialogue. For example, the fractious media discussion about 'older' feminists who worry about 'moral panic' and sexual regulation versus 'younger' feminists who too easily speak a language of exploitation and victimhood belies a more complex understanding of how sexual politics has changed over time. Second-wave feminism in the US came of age in and through an insistence on the sexual

liberation of women in the face of sexual repression while younger feminists are engaging questions of sex and power within a sexually permissive and sex-saturated world. How do such shifts shape different ways in which knowledge, power and action are calibrated? It is in the spirit of 'fresh contact' that I look back to some earlier moments that might illuminate the one that we are in today.

With this in mind, I now turn to a discussion of 'intersectional feminism'. How can such a contextualization help us open up 'intersectionality' in the current conjuncture? Calls for an 'intersectional feminism' today have proceeded under the banner of diversity and more often than not been linked to the idea that women have multiple identities that need to be included. Discussions and debates about intersectional feminism often hinge on how racially and economically privileged feminists need to 'check their privilege' so that a more inclusive and diverse feminist movement might be constructed. All of this, whether one is white and middle class or otherwise, hinges on the identities that women possess that need 'inclusion'.

However, this is precisely a view of intersectionality that the person who coined the term argued against. As is well known, the term 'intersectionality' is most specifically linked to an article by the legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term to talk about the complexities of racism and sexism within the institutional and legal lives of women of colour, particularly in domestic violence cases (Crenshaw 1991). In other words, she was not interested in the self-identifications of the women in question and precisely not focused on identities they seemed to 'possess'. Rather, she was interested in the ways in which the law and institutions constructed ideas in and through the operations of sexism and racism about women of colour. Seeking to go beyond the idea that it was important to include discussions of racism when talking of sexism or vice versa, the weight of Crenshaw's intervention was to highlight how the intersections of racism and sexism created something altogether new that required attention. When the law or institutional arrangements cannot 'see' the specificity of what the intersections of sexism and racism produce, it fails women of colour positioned with respect to the law and institutions in particular ways. Importantly, quite apart from a focus on the law and institutional arrangements, Crenshaw highlighted how anti-racist mobilizations fail women of colour when they cannot apprehend sexism and feminist mobilizations fail women of colour when they cannot apprehend racism.

As Crenshaw has noted, she might have coined a term but certainly not the concept. One can go back to the nineteenth century to find a long line of black and brown feminists who have drawn attention to race and racism when talking about gender and sexism, something I will come back to. If one looks forward from Crenshaw's formulation, the term intersectionality has been mobilized and used in a variety of ways that Crenshaw did not intend (Cho et al. 2013). One basic difference I have already highlighted: while Crenshaw was focused on intersecting power structures that created identifications that impacted women's lives, more contemporary mobilizations of the term focus more on the possession of identities that women bring to the feminist table. Every generation makes 'fresh contact' with its inherited traditions.

One of the striking things about the current moment of publicly mediated feminism is the ways in which it has worked through industries and workplaces, using extra-legal social media networks and testimonies, that have then widened to include discussions and re-evaluations of other spaces and activities such as dating, sex and the like. While the definitions of sexual harassment, assault and rape continue to rely on earlier legal definitions, it is the extra-legal dimensions of disclosure, naming and shaming through social media and the individual and collective testimonies of survivors that seem to be changing actual institutional arrangements that is new. In this context, it might behoove us to note that Crenshaw's 1991 discussion of anti-discrimination law and her insistence on the need to recognize intersectionality as an effect of structural discrimination on the grounds of race and sex was an attempt to push back against a universalizing legal definition of sexual harassment as it was pioneered and defined by legal theorist Catherine MacKinnon a decade earlier in 1979. It is MacKinnon's definition and codification of sexual harassment that we live with today, while the willingness to take that definition into extra-legal forms of activism is what has unsettled so many. Interestingly, it has not unsettled MacKinnon who, though almost entirely focused on legal activism, has endorsed the #MeToo moment and its varieties of media-based activism (MacKinnon 2018).

The tensions between MacKinnon's universalizing definition of sexual harassment and Crenshaw's arguments about intersectionality as it profoundly interrupts any such definition demonstrate the persistence of feminism as a horizon that seems to always trip over a universal definition of patriarchy, sexism and womanhood. How will this current moment of 'intersectional feminism' contend with intersectionality defined as a challenge to any universal understanding of sexual harassment? While intersectionality defined in terms of multiple identities that women possess might be included within organizational structures and speeches made – all important forms of inclusion – will intersectionality as Crenshaw envisioned it transform how we think about sexual harassment? As the movement deepens and widens, will the #MeToo movement do more than 'check its privilege' and extend its resources to the women of colour who make up the bulk of farm workers, domestic workers and service workers? Or will our very ideas and definitions of sexual harassment be transformed through a thorough interrogation and reckoning with how racism and sexism, among other vectors of difference and inequality, shape experiences of gendered and sexual violence across class lines?

What this discussion of MacKinnon and Crenshaw brings to the fore is that however decolonizing the intentions of feminist interventions within the academy, in this case the legal academy, struggles within feminism to decolonize feminism are equally acute and challenging. While inclusion of multiple voices is an important part of any decolonizing effort, such attempts at inclusion should not elide the ways in which rigorous attention to the workings of difference and inequality among women also raise important stakes for foundational concepts that feminism might rely upon to do its decolonizing work.

Along these lines, the pioneering work of anthropologist and feminist Saba Mahmood is a good example of what it means to try and decolonize a foundational assumption of Western feminism, namely secularism (Mahmood 2004). Within the rising tide of post-9/11 Islamophobia, Mahmood's ethnographic work and discussion of a women's piety movement in Egypt challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions of agency and resistance within secular feminism in the West. Here, Mahmood is not simply asking that Muslim women be included within a broader, more intersectional feminist community. Through the example of their life experiences, she is challenging what it means to be agentic within feminist imaginaries.

Some sense of how questions of intersectionality and feminism are inflected by this #MeToo moment in ways that do not create a straight line between our concepts and our politics and that reveal some of the complexities of making 'fresh contact' with traditions of scholarship is revealed by recent debates about the Dominican and American writer Junot Diaz. As I have already discussed, questions of race have been a long-standing vector for decolonizing feminism. The feminist archive is wide and deep, in and through the writings of women of colour, on the multiple and intersecting effects of racism and slavery, colonization, race and class, among other vectors of difference, for understanding the lived experiences of gender and sexuality on the lives and imaginaries of women of colour. A noteworthy attempt to bring that tradition of scholarship to bear on the current #MeToo moment involves Diaz, who recently penned a piece detailing his childhood rape and the ways he feels it shaped his intimate relationships with women (Diaz 2018).⁶ In the wake of this piece, several younger women of colour writers revealed, on social media, the ways in which Diaz treated them in sexist and sometimes violent ways as students and fellow writers, arguing that his piece was intended to forestall allegations that he had mistreated women. Drawing on a tradition of scholarship attentive to the ways in which dominant representations treat black and brown bodies, some prominent women of colour feminists penned an opinion piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, arguing that he was being unfairly targeted by the media because of his race.⁷ This has generated a fractious debate among women of colour feminists, some of whom see this letter and follow-up statements as an uncritical defence of Diaz at the expense of the women of colour writers who have spoken out (Gyamerah 2018). This debate has been rendered in terms of networks of affiliation, with the letter writers being accused of defending Diaz because he is their friend. Running through this debate is also a sense of generational conflict and betrayal, with many who reacted negatively to the letter of support for Diaz lamenting how much they have learned about the intersections of racism and sexism from the more established feminists who signed the letter and their dismay that the letter seemed to highlight attention to racism at the expense of sexism and did not adequately ground their criticisms of the media in solidarity with the women who have publicly spoken.

How might attention to the complex dynamics of generations help us better understand this fraught and fractious debate? It might be productive to recognize

the different strands within feminist scholarship that are being brought to bear in this instance and how they are shaped by the complex locations in and through which they were articulated. The signers of the letter criticizing how the media has supposedly targeted Diaz are drawing on a long-standing tradition of feminist criticism by women of colour, now inflected by the politics of mass incarceration and police killings of black men, that has sought to point out how persistently gender, sexuality and masculinity have been racialized within dominant representations. However, the notion that there is a hegemonic mass media painting black and brown men in particular ways, while overwhelmingly and brutally true, seems to negate the more complex terrain of social media in and through which women of colour have found 'voice'. Those who found the letter of support for Diaz objectionable drew on another strand of feminist criticism, centralizing the articulation of women's 'voice' at the intersection of racism and sexism. How should we calibrate a feminist criticism attentive to the workings of dominant media while navigating the complex and differentiated terrain of blogs, Facebook posts and the like? This example suggests that even within the terrain of a feminism placed squarely at the centre of considerations of intersectionality, 'fresh contact' with our inherited traditions is never easy, always fraught, and unstable within new contexts that define the differential horizons of generations.

Feminisms

Having drawn out some trajectories of the term 'intersectionality', I would now like to turn to another dimension of the feminist archive, namely how one contends with what has always been a long-standing insistence on the existence of multiple feminisms, not just across generations but also across spatial boundaries shaped by colonialisms, imperial formations and nationalisms around the world. Counter to a dominant, Eurocentric and Western view of women's and feminist history that typically runs from women in the French Revolution to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to the suffragette movement of the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century to the establishment of formal equality and the second wave of activism in the 1970s, all rendered as a teleological unfolding of a singular conception of the feminist movement, many scholars and activists have persistently drawn our attention to multiple forms of women's activism and feminist theorizing across borders and boundaries.⁸

While a full analysis of this process of decolonizing singular and teleological conceptions of feminism is beyond the scope of this article, one can gesture towards its beginnings in the 1970s within American feminism by pointing to the publication of the Combahee River Collective Statement in 1977 that articulated the simultaneity of oppressions across the lines of race, gender and sexuality and created a genealogy for Black Feminism in the US, the influence of anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (2015 [1981]), and the essay 'Notes Toward a Politics of Location' by Adrienne Rich (in Rich 1986).⁹

Some discussion of the phrase and concept ‘politics of location’ is a productive way of understanding how we might apprehend the different locations of feminisms around the world.¹⁰ Caren Kaplan examines the career of this term, warning us that ‘whether it [‘the politics of location’] encourages resistance to hegemonic formations, whether it becomes its own academic reification – turning into a hegemony itself – or whether it marks important shifts in discourses of location and displacement depends upon who uses it, in what context’ (1996: 162–163). She reminds us that the term emerged in the early 1980s, in Rich’s essay, as a ‘particularly North American feminist articulation of difference ... deconstructing ... whiteness’ (1996: 163). Rich proposes a politics of location in which white, Western feminists explore the meaning of ‘whiteness’, ‘recognizing our location, having to name the ground we’re coming from, the conditions we have taken for granted’ (Rich 1986: 219). Kaplan tracks uncritical uses of the term, ones in which ‘location’ gets rendered in terms of identity designations understood as authentic and primordial, while recognizing its appropriation and positive integration into an anti-imperialist, anti-racist feminist cultural criticism. As Kaplan states:

Recognizing the limits of a politics of location does not obviate the need for terms and concepts that help us address the tensions between conventional oppositions such as global/local and West/non-West. Feminists continue to revise the concept of location, stressing and stretching its ‘original’ meaning in working toward more progressive practices of transnational cultural politics. (1994:148).

This tracking of the term firmly locates the origins of a ‘politics of location’ within an American feminism as it seeks to apprehend itself in the world at large. In Rich’s formulation, the term enables her to name the ‘unmarked ground’ of race, nation and class that she stands on to produce her feminist politics. Taken up, from the ‘other side’ so to speak, the politics of location became a productive and important strategy for postcolonial feminists inside and outside the North American academy, as they struggled to create an anti-imperialist and anti-racist feminist criticism.

Mary John, who uses the term to interrogate her location as a postcolonial feminist at the intersection of US and Indian feminisms, finds the framework of a politics of location more productive than ‘the static and pointillist connotation of “race, class, gender, sexuality”’ which she sees as ‘ritualistic’ (1996: 6). While Kaplan has reminded us that this framework can be used in multiple and contradictory ways, it has enabled a productive and important rethinking of hegemonic forms of Western feminism, moving away from ritualistic ‘naming’ of one’s identity designations to a fuller treatment of the dynamic interactions between fields of power such as the production of knowledge, geopolitical relations and intellectual, disciplinary and political locations. As John states:

Locations play a constitutive role in structuring the frames of reference within which we develop our projects ... this includes our institutional and disciplinary affiliations, the milieu of intellectual debate, the ‘background practices’ and grain of everyday life ... Indeed, the very nature of ongoing intellectual production could be

described as an interplay between what becomes a problem for thought and what is allowed to go without saying. Such an interplay takes its cue from one's location, the site of one's questions and interventions, the place of accountability. (1996: 110)

This understanding of location moves beyond identity designations to include a fuller sense of the context of power and knowledge that shapes the intersection of our political and intellectual projects. This 'place of accountability' incorporates where one has come from and where one would like to go in terms of one's political, critical and intellectual aspirations, a productive tension within a locational critical practice that leaves open the limits and possibilities of one's own theorizing and political practice.

The alternative, of course, is a form of theoretical and political totalization and closure, encapsulated for example in the framework of 'global feminism' and sometimes even 'transnational feminism', in which the First World location of this formulation is effaced and erased into a universal of global oppression and corresponding sisterhood.¹¹ A politics of location, then, is crucial to the enactment of 'progressive practices of transnational cultural politics', as Kaplan puts it, because it names and locates what John calls the 'frames of reference' that underlie theoretical and political formulations, rather than naturalizing and universalizing them.

Drawing on the framework of a politics of location highlights some contemporary trajectories in decolonizing feminism that are important to note. One of the earlier ways in which a politics of location engendered a decolonizing of feminism was by denaturalizing the national as a site of feminist theory and practice. While discussions of multiculturalism might absorb and neutralize the claims of a variety of feminisms into identity markers, this often stopped at the boundaries of the nation. It is in this sense that John mobilizes the term in order to produce a postcolonial feminist interrogation of US and Indian feminisms.

Attention to the politics of location illuminates some important aspects of a seminal text that contributed to our understandings of multiple feminisms around the world, namely Kumari Jayawardena's landmark and enduring *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, first articulated as a series of lecture notes in 1982, published in 1986 and republished in 1992. One of Ms. Magazine's twenty feminist classics that everyone should read, recently reissued by Verso in 2016, it has been absorbed into a Western canon, as Western feminism seeks to dutifully recognize feminisms 'in the East' to use Jayawardena's language. The text itself is a conjuring up of a Third World horizon of radical possibility for feminism in and through the complex dynamics of liberal and left and sometimes left liberal struggles for an emancipatory feminism in and through the varied terrain of colonialism and anti-imperial and national liberation struggles. Mapping a Third World largely through the Middle East and Asia and focusing on Egypt, Iran, Turkey, India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia, the text skilfully weaves in and out of the reform agendas across the colonial–anti-colonial divide, tracking the role of religion, transformations in the family, education, and regimes

of labour, and charting middle-class and working-class women's emergence, embedded and enmeshed within national liberation struggles with varying degrees of elite and mass resonance.

The text is shaped by a complex politics of location. Wanting to argue against those who dismiss feminist politics as a 'foreign ideology', something that concerns her greatly in her own struggles with left politics in Sri Lanka, the book is an attempt to stress that feminism, like socialism, has 'no ethnicity' while simultaneously conjuring up the Third World as a radical space of articulation forged in and through anti-colonial resistance, nationalism and the struggle for women's emancipation. While her location as a Marxist feminist located in Sri Lanka is important for understanding the text, so are some other aspects of the text. It was written in the early 1980s while Jayawardena was teaching a course on the subject of women and development at the International Institute for Social Studies in The Hague, a key node in the creation of development practitioners from the Third World. As a political scientist, she forcefully asserted the importance of politics against the reigning hegemony of development economics, as a politicized Third World project was being arguably defeated in the late 1970s and 1980s. Here was an attempt to articulate a universalizing horizon for feminism from a very specific location, that of a postcolonial, Marxist Sri Lankan feminism. A politics of location draws our attention to the national as a grounding for feminism but this national is not simply an identity designation. It is a very complex national that sits at the intersection of internationalist Third World and developmental visions.

How might these insights about the productivity of attention to the politics of location in the context of multiple feminisms inform the current #MeToo moment? As I have shown, the #MeToo moment is nothing if not viral, drawing in millions and circulating around the globe. How should we understand these circulations in relation to the politics of location that frame feminisms around the world? I end with some discussion of how the #MeToo movement has inflected debates within India in order to explore these questions.

While a US-centric perspective might name this conjuncture 'the #MeToo moment', and certainly the terminology has travelled and been invoked to name multiple struggles around the world, the circulations of #MeToo seem complexly related to the impact of 'the list', often referred to as the List of Sexual Harassment Accused (LoSHA) in India, an anonymously sourced google spreadsheet, posted on Facebook by a law student, Raya Sarkar, that named male academics and scholars within Indian academic spaces as well as foreign universities (Cassin and Prasad 2017; Chowdhury and Deep 2017). This list, along with other lists, such as the 'shitty media men list' in the US, among a proliferation of others in the wake of #MeToo, has generated much discussion and debate, not only about issues of sex and power within the institutional spaces we occupy, but also about due process and tactics of naming and shaming within feminist politics.

The alignments between the US and Indian contexts are striking even though what we might call "#MeToo" moments have unfolded with differential impact.¹² While Donald Trump embodies the rise of right-wing nationalism in the US,

Narendra Modi's brand of right-wing Hindu nationalism has been in power for several years longer. The long history of feminist struggles against sexual harassment has become entangled with the contemporary rise of conservative, right-wing nationalisms. One can see this in the US with the Trump administration's attempts to roll back Obama-era provisions for implementing Title IX legislation, the 1972 federal legislation to ensure non-discrimination on the basis of sex in educational institutions, in cases where campus sexual assault charges have been brought (McClintock 2017). Also, in India, one can see this in the ways in which Narendra Modi's right-wing Hindu nationalist government, through the appointed Vice Chancellor at India's premier research university, Jawaharlal Nehru University, which has been in a protracted struggle with the Modi regime, has dismantled the Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) in favour of a far less robust and independent Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) (Saksham Report Task Force 2017).¹³ Within this context, the emergence of 'the list' quickly generated a 'statement' by a group of feminists in India that raised questions about the use of such lists and the damage it might do to mechanisms of due process that were at that moment being dismantled.¹⁴ The example of Junot Diaz mentioned earlier mirrors many dynamics of this earlier and very fractious debate about LoSHA. In the wake of the 'list' and the 'statement', a sustained debate emerged on grounds that pitted younger versus older feminists, the use of the law versus social media, faith in traditional methods of redress as opposed to non-legal methods.¹⁵ The broad contours of these debates align with similar discussions within the US.

Academic and media networks have created a moment of articulation between feminist politics and the ways in which we talk about sexual violence, harassment and coercion across the US and India within and outside university spaces. However, no matter the circulations, locations matter for how things are taken up or not taken up, the histories and movements and histories of movements they enter into, the institutional and political effects they have. It is impossible to simply assert difference along the lines of identity to mark the boundaries between US and Indian feminism. The circulations and alignments are too powerful and fluid. However, a complex sense of location might allow us to understand how circulations enter specific contexts that do importantly create differential effects. If one does not pay careful attention to the politics of location, certain crucial elements of these debates might be missed. A key aspect of the debate centres on the politics of caste. Raya Sarkar, who published the list, is a young Dalit feminist who spoke to a constituency of young university students from a variety of caste backgrounds within Indian universities who have entered such spaces in increasing numbers because of policies of affirmative action, called reservations in India. Many argue that these students face what is often called 'caste apartheid' in Indian academic spaces.¹⁶ What was glossed as a generational tension between older and younger feminists emerges from a politics of location shaped by struggles about caste and transformations of Indian university spaces.¹⁷ A fraught generational debate about how feminists should address questions of sex and power is complexly related to

the post-independence trajectory of Indian higher education and importantly inflected by issues of caste and gender. Though this is not the only vector of debate, it is an important one that is at the heart of key debates in Indian feminism.

I hope this brief discussion of how debates within Indian university spaces have resonated with but also need to be differentiated from the larger circulations of #MeToo provides some window into why understandings of locations, shaped by postcolonial dynamics, matter for navigating the universalizing horizons of feminism. So far, I have used the terms 'postcolonial' and 'decolonial' somewhat interchangeably. What is the relationship today between postcolonial and decolonizing feminisms? For some, the fluid boundary that I have created between the two approaches might feel a bit contentious. In recent years, there has been an explicit line drawn between the two.¹⁸ While both approaches focus on the impact of colonialisms, the trajectories of these approaches have differed. The framework of the decolonial has emerged through a sense of disappointment with a variety of postcolonial forms of critique. This dissatisfaction stems from a view that a variety of postcolonial forms of criticism, largely focused on South Asia, the Middle East and Africa, draws attention to colonial forms of knowledge without adequately addressing other forms of colonialism, particularly settler colonialisms and its impact on indigenous forms of knowledge located largely, though not exclusively, in the Americas. Secondly, decolonial perspectives suggest that postcolonial criticism does not sufficiently bring critiques of colonialism to bear on the contemporary workings of institutions and politics. It is the language of 'decolonizing', after all, and not the 'postcolonial' that has animated recent student attempts to transform curricula in the #RhodesMustFall movement at the University of Cape Town and within UK universities, among other sites. While productive conversations happen across these divides, the shifting relationship between postcolonial criticism and decolonizing feminisms points to the ways in which a politics of location might help illuminate the multiple registers of decolonizing at work in the academy today.

Conclusion

I have tried to chart some aspects of what it means to think about decolonizing feminism in the university today by beginning with an insistence that feminism in the university is in and of this world. To that end, the #MeToo era poses some interesting challenges for decolonizing feminism given that the universalizing horizon of feminism has been so centralized. By drawing on different moments from a recent and not so recent feminist archive, mapping other moments of decolonizing feminism, I hope to enable 'fresh contact' with inherited traditions of feminist thinking and politics. I have sought to do this by arguing for a more complex understanding of generations and invoking a politics of location as a frame for understanding the multiplicity of feminisms around the world. I have focused on questions of race vis-à-vis a discussion of the ways in which intersectionality has been understood and highlighted the ways in which the national has come under scrutiny through attention to a politics of location. Along the way, I have pointed

to some of the ways in which the #MeToo moment has shaped new engagements with ongoing feminist concerns.

Ritty Lukose is Associate Professor in the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at New York University. Her areas of interest include Anthropology, Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and South Asian Studies. She is the author of *Liberalization's Children: Gender, Youth and Consumer Citizenship in Globalizing India* (Duke University Press, 2009) and co-editor of *South Asian Feminisms* (Duke University Press, 2012).

Notes

1. See Strathern (1987) for an important articulation of some of the tensions between feminism as a knowledge project and a political project within the context of anthropology. For a discussion of the ways in which Strathern problematically erects a self/other distinction within anthropology that naturalizes anthropologists as unproblematically 'Western', see Abu-Lughod (1991) and John (1996). For a discussion of the complexities of feminism as a knowledge and political project within the terrain of interdisciplinary feminist and sexuality studies, see Weigman (2012).
2. For a statement by these activists about why they attended the awards show, see Clemente (2018). For a defence of their participation against detractors, see Sen (2018).
3. The seminal text that inaugurated this tradition in anthropology, though there were many antecedents, is Reiter (1975).
4. For some sense of this contemporary disciplinary reckoning with the #MeToo era, see the special issue of *Anthropology News*, published by the American Anthropological Association (*Anthropology News* 2018). See also Berry et al. (2017). To get some sense of the arc of the conversation about decolonization and Anthropology see Harrison (1991).
5. For a discussion of this concept and its relevance for the anthropology of youth, see Cole (2008).
6. For an overview of the controversy surrounding Diaz, see Alter (2018).
7. For the letter, see 'Open Letter against Media Treatment of Junot Diaz', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 14 May 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/letters/open-letter-against-media-treatment-of-junot-diaz/>. Linda Alcoff, a signatory, responded to some of the criticisms of the letter in a *New York Times* piece (Alcoff 2018).
8. A full rendering of this wide-ranging terrain of scholarship and its many iterations is impossible here. Key edited volumes that have taken up these questions across the boundaries of the West/non-West include Mohanty, Russo and Torres (1991), Grewal and Kaplan (1994) and Mohanty and Alexander (1996). For a discussion of how a universalizing horizon of feminist theory and politics engages differently located feminisms within the South Asian context, see Loomba and Lukose (2012).
9. For a recent revisiting of the relevance of the Combahee River Collective Statement for the contemporary moment, particularly the Black Lives Matter movement, see Taylor (2017). See also Cassin and Prasad (2017).
10. There is a wide-ranging literature that has absorbed and interrogated the notion of a 'politics of location'. While I refer to several important discussions of this term, it is by no means exhaustive. Michelle Wallace has taken Adrienne Rich's formulation to task for performing its own gate-keeping along racial lines (1989). More broadly, one can find resonances between discussions of locations and feminist epistemological formulations such as 'standpoint theory' and discussions of 'situated knowledge' in feminist theory.

11. Reflections on the dynamics of 'global' and 'transnational' feminism are vast and varied. For a recent attempt to think through why the framework of a 'transnational feminism' might need to be decolonized, see McLaren (2017).
12. As Vohra argues, India has not had its 'Weinstein' moment where accusations have been vetted through investigations across industries that have led to punishment (2018). However, as this article goes to press, the situation is changing rapidly with the journalistic and entertainment industries in India, along with the NGO sector, facing its #MeToo moment through the testimonies of women who are naming alleged perpetrators.
13. For a contextualization of the struggles at Jawaharlal Nehru University and other such public universities in the wider context of neoliberalization of higher education, the rise of right-wing Hindu nationalism and issues of caste in contemporary India, see Arunima (2017).
14. 'Statement by Feminists on Facebook Campaign to "Name and Shame"' (Kafila 2017). For a reaction to this statement, see Shukla and Kundu (2017).
15. While much has been written within and about this debate, a special issue of India's leading academic journal, *Economic and Political Weekly*, is a useful place to get some sense of the issues thrown up by the 'list-statement' (Chadha and Sen, 2017).
16. Within the context of the debate about the list, this point has been made most prominently by V. Geetha (2017).
17. Geetha (2017) and John (n.d.) have sought to focus attention on these broader transformations in university spaces, issues of caste and what the meanings and experiences of pedagogy and intellectual mentorship might look like in such spaces. John contextualizes the emergence of sexual violence as an issue within educational spaces in broader trajectories of women's extremely low rates of labour participation in India, raising questions about structural forces in relation to individualized narratives of violence.
18. For a specifically feminist engagement with debates about the postcolonial and the decolonial that seeks some kind of bridging, see the special issue of *Feminist Studies* entitled 'Decolonial and Postcolonial Approaches: A Dialogue' (Ramamurthy and Tambe 2017).

References

- Abu-Lughod, L. 1991. 'Writing against Culture'. In R. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 466–479.
- Alcoff, L. 2018. 'This Is Not Just about Junot Diaz'. *New York Times*, 16 May. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/opinion/junot-diaz-metoo.html>.
- Alter, A. 2018. 'Junot Diaz Cleared of Misconduct by M.I.T.'. *New York Times*, 19 June. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/books/junot-diaz-cleared-of-misconduct-by-mit.html>.
- Anthropology News*. 2018. '#MeToo'. *Anthropology News*, 10 May. <http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/tag/metoo/>.
- Arunima, G. 2017. 'Thought, Policies and Politics: How May We Imagine the Public University in India?' *Kronos: Southern African Histories* 43: 165–184.
- Berry, M. J., C. Chavez Arguelles, S. Cordis, S. Ihmoud and E. V. Estrada. 2017. 'Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race and Violence in the Field'. *Cultural Anthropology* 32 (4): 537–565. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.05>.
- Cassin, E. and R. Prasad. 2017. 'Student's "Sexual Predator" List Names Professors'. BBC News, 6 November. <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-41862615>.
- Chadha, G., and R. Sen (eds). 2017. 'Power and Relationships in Academia'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 December. <https://www.epw.in/engage/special-features/power-relationships-academia>.

- Cho, S., K. Williams Crenshaw and L. McCall. 2013. 'Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications and Praxis.' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38 (4): 785–810. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669608>.
- Chowdhury, S. R. and A. Deep. 2017. 'Universities Respond to Raya Sarkar's List of Alleged Sexual Predators: Mostly Silence, Some Denials.' *Scroll*, 4 November. <https://scroll.in/article/856589/universities-respond-to-raya-sarkars-list-of-alleged-sexual-predators-mostly-silence-some-denials>.
- Clemente, R. 2018. 'Why We Went to the Golden Globes: Statement from Gender and Racial Justice Activists on their Attendance at the Golden Globes Alongside Activists.' Facebook, 10 January. <https://www.facebook.com/rosa.clemente.779/posts/10155382507928741>.
- Cole, J. 2008. 'Fresh Contact in Tamatave, Madagascar: Sex, Money and Intergenerational Transformation.' *American Ethnologist* 31 (4): 573–588. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2004.31.4.573>.
- Crary, D. and J. Noveck. 2018. 'Resentment over Trump Election Helped Fuel Weinstein Case.' Associated Press, 25 May. <https://www.apnews.com/6bb9d49b24d444c6ab475fad63d3f420>.
- Crenshaw, K. 1991. 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color.' *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–1299. doi:10.2307/1229039.
- Diaz, J. 2018. 'Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma.' *New Yorker*, 16 April. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/04/16/the-silence-the-legacy-of-childhood-trauma>.
- Doyle, S. 2018. 'It's Not (All) the Second Wave's Fault.' *Elle*, 22 January. <https://www.elle.com/culture/a15841808/second-wave-feminism-sexual-harassment-generational-divide/>.
- Garcia, S. E. 2017. 'The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long before Hashtags.' *New York Times*, 20 October. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html>.
- Gebreyes, R. 2017. 'Women's March Organizers Address Intersectionality as the Movement Grows.' HuffPost, 27 January. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/womens-march-organizers-address-intersectionality-as-the-movement-grows_us_5883f9d9e4b070d8cad314c0.
- Geetha, V. 2017. 'Important to Name Perpetrators Says V. Geetha on Raya Sarkar's Crowd-Sourced List of Sexual Harassers.' *Indian Express*, 27 October. <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/oct/27/important-to-name-perpetrators-says-v-geetha-on-raya-sarkars-crowd-sourced-list-of-sexual-harasser-1684340.html>.
- Grewal, I. and C. Kaplan (eds.) 1994. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gyamerah, A. 2018. 'Our Side Can Never Accept Silence about Abuse.' *Socialist Worker*, 18 June. <https://socialistworker.org/2018/06/18/our-side-can-never-accept-silence-about-abuse>.
- Harrison, F. 1991. *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Towards an Anthropology of Liberation*. Washington DC: Association of Black Anthropologists, American Anthropological Association.
- Jayawardena, K. 2016. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. New York: Verso.

- John, M. 1996. *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory and Postcolonial Histories*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- John, M. n.d. 'Insight and Blindness: Sexual Violence and the Changing Feminist Landscape in India Today'. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Kafila. 2017. 'Statement by Feminists on Facebook Campaign to "Name and Shame"'. Kafila, 24 October. <https://kafila.online/2017/10/24/statement-by-feminists-on-facebook-campaign-to-name-and-shame/>.
- Kaplan, C. 1994. 'The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice'. In I. Grewal and C. Kaplan (eds.), *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 137–152.
- Kaplan, C. 1996. *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Loomba, A. and R. A. Lukose. 2012. 'South Asian Feminisms: Contemporary Interventions'. In A. Loomba and R. A. Lukose (eds), *South Asian Feminisms*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1–29.
- MacKinnon, C. 2018. '#MeToo Has Done What the Law Could Not'. *New York Times*, 4 February. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/04/opinion/metoo-law-legal-system.html>.
- Mahmood, S. 2004. *The Politics of Piety: Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mannheim, K. (1928) 1952. 'The Problem of Generations'. In K. Mannheim, *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 276–320.
- McClintock, A. 2017. 'Whose Afraid of Title IX?'. *Jacobin*, 24 October. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/10/title-ix-betsy-devos-doe-colleges-assault-dear-colleague>.
- McLaren, M. A. 2017. *Decolonising Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization*. London: Rowman and Littlefield International.
- Mohanty, C., A. Russo, and L. Torres (eds). 1991. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mohanty, C. and M. J. Alexander (eds). 1996. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. London: Routledge.
- Moraga, C. and G. Anzaldúa. 2015 [1981]. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. 4th Edition. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ramamurthy, P. and A. Tambe. 2017. 'Preface'. In 'Postcolonial and Decolonial Approaches: A Dialogue', Special Issue, *Feminist Studies* 43 (3): 503–511. doi:10.15767/feministstudies.43.3.0503.
- Reiter, R. R. (ed.). 1975. *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Rich, A. 1986. *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979–1985*. New York: Norton.
- Saksham Report Task Force. 2017. 'On Dissolving GSCASH in JNU'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 52 (39): 4–5.
- Sen, R. 2018. 'The Lefty Critique of #TimesUp is Tired and Self-Defeating'. *The Nation*, 9 January. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-lefty-critique-of-timesup-is-tired-and-self-defeating/>.
- Shukla, M. and A. Kundu. 2017. 'Et Tu "Feminists"? A Response to the Kafila Signatories'. Round Table India, 28 October. http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9216:et-tu-feminists-a-response-to-the-kafila-signatories&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132.

- Stark, S. 2018. "I Kept Thinking of Antioch": Long before #MeToo a Time Video Journalist Remembers a Form She Signed in 2004. *New York Times*, 8 April. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/08/insider/antioch-sexual-consent-form-metoo-video.html>.
- Strathern, M. 1987. 'An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12 (2): 276–292. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494321>.
- Tambe, A. 2018. 'Reckoning with the Silences of #MeToo'. *Feminist Studies* 44 (1): 197–203. doi:10.15767/feministstudies.44.1.0197.
- Taylor, K.-Y. 2017. *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.
- Vohra, P. 2018. 'Friends in High Places'. www.mid-day.com, 5 August. <https://www.mid-day.com/articles/friends-in-high-places/19670150>.
- Wallace, M. 1989. 'The Politics of Location: Cinema/Theory/Literature/Ethnicity/Sexuality/Me'. *Framework* 36: 42–55.
- Weigman, R. 2012. *Object Lessons*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.