YOUTH MOVMENTS, AUTONOMY AND THE OPPOSITIONAL IDENTITY IN GLOBAL WOMEN’S ACTIVISM: INVESTIGATING THE DYNAMICS OF AGE AND POWER IN TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST NETWORKS

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Abstract:

While literature examining the significance of age and generation in transnational social movements continues to grow, few studies focus specifically on young women and their involvement with global feminism. Making the empirical observation that “young women’s” transnational feminist networks have emerged and gained more visibility in the last decade, this dissertation investigates their existence, asking why young women identifying as part of a “transnational feminist class” form youth-only networks rather than joining – or maintaining membership within – existing and established networks. Data was collected from five young women’s transnational feminist networks using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interview, participant observation and triangulated digital writing analysis. Analysis of this data yielded several findings. First, young women are likely to form “youth-only” feminist networks in three circumstances: 1) when they feel under- and misrepresented within the discursive and political forums of global feminism; 2) when they feel the education they need to further their goals and establish their identities as activists is inadequate; and 3) when they find generation gaps create perceived irreconcilable “differences” of tactical and organizational preference between older and younger activists. Second, young feminists foreground age as an identity marker quite consciously in order to supersede other “differences” historically dividing transnational women’s organizing, such as those of nationality, religion, sexuality and social class. These patterns suggest young women are deploying “essentialist” and collective movement identities strategically, and thus construct a praxis reflective of established but contentious feminist theoretical discussions such as Gayatri Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” (1990), Nancy Fraser’s “subaltern counterpublic”(1990) and Rita Felski’s “self-consciously oppositional identity” (1989). The three main chapters of this dissertation examine 1) the creation and articulation of a “young transnational feminist” counterpublic sphere; 2) the discourse of “difference” permeating young women’s transnational feminist networks; and 3) the effort to construct more “democratic”, “inclusive” and “self-directed” educational programs for young feminist activists. I conclude with the observation that young activist women within the transnational feminist movement draw on but re-conceptualize existing theories of globalization, social movements and transnational feminist activism, and offer suggestions for the ways in which scholars might be more inclusive of young women’s practices and preferences in future studies of transnational activism.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

“Younger feminists to older feminists: if you can’t find us, it’s because we’re online...starting our own communities and pioneering a feminist revolution on our own terms.”

American blogger and activist Stephanie Herold, posting to the progressive youth blog Campus Progress, July 2010

“[Older feminists] tell us ‘Where [were you] in 1987 when I was doing this and that?’ Well I wasn’t here. But now I’m here and I have something to say.”

Egyptian feminist Engy Ghozlan, speaking about her co-founding of the Young Arab Feminist Network, April 2010

“It is young women who are the key to forming better global relationships for addressing gender bias, but we need our own space to sort through ideas before we communicate them to the elders.”

Cameroonian blogger and feminist “Rose”, speaking about her founding of a pan-African young feminist network, September 2011

The flourishing of both grassroots and professional transnational feminist networks (TFN) created for and by young women in the last decade has prompted much speculation – but little theorizing – in both activist and academic feminist communities. Numerous and potentially competing ideas might explain their existence: young feminists reject the politics and methods of their predecessors, practicing “new” forms of activism they feel are more effective. Or, young feminists want desperately to work alongside the older generation, but are not provided any opportunities to do so because of their presumed immaturity and lack of knowledge. Or, young feminists are disinterested in feminist networks per se, and prefer instead to work simultaneously with activists from other social justice movements toward collective goals.
These ideas in part emerge from the literatures of numerous fields in global civil society and transnational activism studies, though none address the motivations and actions of young women in feminist networks specifically – a deficit this dissertation seeks to address. Why have young women individually identifying themselves as part of the “global feminist community” joined to create “youth-only” transnational activist and advocacy networks rather than becoming incorporated into existing networks? If young women are classified as actors within the “transnational activist class” (Desai, 2008) that comprises a significant majority of global activist and advocacy work, then the aforementioned literatures might provide some contextualizing ideas explaining the existence of young women’s TFNs. In their investigation of transnational activism, for example, della Porta and Tarrow suggest changes in the power of the nation state and the flourishing of international institutions produce a “complex internationalism” yielding both threats and opportunities for transnational activism manifesting in a range of units, from “international NGOs” and “transnational social movements” to “grassroots social movements” (2005: 234) enfranchised in global social justice campaigns. Capitalizing on the opportunities often means movements must produce “new” strategies, replacing structures and repertoires that “may have appeared increasingly institutionalized and bureaucratic in the 1980s and 1990s” with “new types of loose organizational structures” (2005: 12) that are more amenable to transnational collaboration, or what Smith and Bandy have suggested are “transnational alliances” between a variety of social justice actors (2005: 1). But collective changes to repertoires, structures and movement identities prompt questions of how actors individually also change – or whether they will change – to meet “new” features of global organizing. More germane to this study’s guiding
questions is whether actors from different generations, who have perhaps experienced very different forms of both activism and “transnationalism”, have such divergent approaches that they are unable to work collaboratively, and whether this could offer some insight into what motivates the formation of youth-only TFNs.

Bennett’s suggestion that we consider “two generations” (2005: 212) of transnational activism might further reinforce this conclusion, as he notes that “second-generation” movement actors are likely to be “more resistant to conventional social movement practices” (2005: 213). Along with Smith (2002), Tarrow (2005) and Juris and Pleyers (2009), Bennett argues “loose activist networks adopting self-organizing communication technologies and advocating multiple issues, multiple goals, and flexible identities” have come to characterize newer generations of transnational social justice organizing. These new structures and identities clash not just with “previous organizational forms” but also social movement theories built on observations of “brokered coalitions, ideological framing and collective movement identities fashioned around national politics” (2005: 214). If applied to feminist organizing, this supposition can offer some insight into younger-generation feminists’ interest in forming their own networks, or at the very least perhaps their “disinterest” in “older” forms of transnational feminist networking which they find too bureaucratic or conventional to be effective in contemporary contexts. Younger activists participating in this study who have attempted to work with existing transnational feminist networks and organizations indeed relayed experiences of tension between generations, particularly over “repertoires” and “identities”. However, as this study will demonstrate, the population in question – feminists under 30 years old, from a variety of global regions who are involved in
transnational feminist activism and advocacy – also identify a number of other factors motivating their decisions to form “youth-only” TFNs. The majority of participants in fact often spoke not only of “clashes” between generations but also of their aim to build more multigenerational collaborations within transnational feminist organizing, with many working carefully to remain connected to older, “established” generations of TFN actors while building their youth-only networks.

This finding highlights how underrepresented young feminists are in the literatures investigating transnational activism. In some ways, young women forming their own TFNs are representative of or subsumed within the classes and networks of actors that these studies often conjure; perhaps they might even be counted among the group informing studies such as Bennett’s and della Porta and Tarrow’s. However, while early stages of this study investigating the motivations of these activists suggested they are multifaceted and difficult to generalize, a consistent finding did emerge: young feminists assert that their locations within both global and local hierarchies – their “positions” as young, female, and in many cases citizens of economically developing countries – create for them unique experiences and conditions that differentiate them from other movement actors, including their older-generation counterparts within the transnational feminist movement. Later stages of this study therefore attempted to both identify these experiences and to consider whether and how they explain the existence, construction and function of youth-only TFNs. While to some degree existing studies focused on the tensions produced by “new” and “old” generations or eras of movements can explain this differentiation, this research suggests there are more complex
explanations to be found when considering individual activists’ experiences more carefully.

“Tension” between “old” and “new” organizational and tactical forms certainly contributes to these motivations and is an undercurrent of many of the findings of this study. The Young Feminist Activism Program (YFA) within the established TFN Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) emerged out of palpable contention, for example; in reflecting on her experiences with AWID prior to the YFA’s creation in 2007, 27 year old Blanca¹, an activist with a youth network for sexual and reproductive health and rights within the Latin American and Caribbean region, recalls that she and other young feminists “from all over the world” were marginalized and “not considered stakeholders” in the decisions and directions of the network. The need for a movement within AWID to fortify the voices of young women and strengthen their representation was obvious to Blanca and her peers: “[We] have many ideas, many problems, many feelings of our own. But how many times did we try to speak and found we could not?... [we] want to be equal.” Why Blanca and other young women her age feel they were not “equal” – and whether and how creating a separate young women’s network has helped redress that inequity – is harder for her to articulate. Maria, another young activist who works both with Blanca and with AWID’s YFA, offers that “young women today are…different than the other, older generation who run the networks. Globalization’s changes have a different way of effecting younger women, especially poorer younger women. Younger [women] have a more unique approach to politics,

¹ As many activists participating in this study reported feelings of a critical nature, their names have been changed in order to protect them from any professional or personal consequences. Where noted, the names of projects and organizations have also been omitted for similar reasons and at the request of the study participants.
too…of approaching ways to deal with the global changes. Sometimes it is harder for the older generation to understand that, or to see what we want to do as being political, as being effective or important. We might get told that we have to learn the correct or better way of working…but even when there are times when we can…work well with older activists who want to understand us, there is still this feeling of wanting to have our own place.”

Within Blanca’s and Maria’s statements lay rich and complex notions of the role age and generation play in the organizational dynamics of transnational feminist networks; more importantly, they illustrate some of the variations and nuances young women express in explaining how they experience transnational activism. This provides an important representative idea of how multifaceted young women’s experiences are, and why while they certainly are part of the “transnational activist community” there is a need to investigate their experiences further, beyond studies that might represent their actions, decisions and priorities in a general way. While the idea of “tension” between generations of activists is most evident in these statements, for example, Maria explains her perception that she is so “different” that even when ageism or tension are not experienced she still “wants her own” network.

Do young feminists involved in transnational advocacy work looking to form a “youth network” find commonalities in experience, priority and tactical preference among activists of the same age group exist? If so, do they produce incompatibility between different generations of feminists prohibiting effective collaboration? More relevant to this study, do feminists feel forming a separate network for young women
redresses issues of generational tension and ageist marginalization, or provides solutions that would encourage a more democratic collaboration?

These are questions that can both disentangle and investigate some of the speculations about the proliferation of young women’s transnational activist networks, and can offer much-needed insight into the role that factors such as age – and gender – play more generally in transnational organizing. And yet as mentioned above, this is a question that is rarely examined in scholarly research, even where it confronts questions of youth. While there is a burgeoning literature presenting studies of young people engaging in “new” and unique ways with transnational advocacy and activist networks (Lombardo, Zakus and Skinner, 2002; Juris and Pleyers, 2009; Nilan and Feixa, 2006; Martínez, 2007; Jeffrey, 2011; Pleyers, 2011), none of these have examined feminism or young women specifically. Many of these studies in fact focus primarily on young men from the global north in the alter-globalization movement (i.e. Pleyers, 20011; Juris and Pleyers, 2009; Martinez, 2007). While many young feminists engage in alter-globalization activism, sharing the movement’s critiques of neoliberalism, fundamentalism, and militarism, Wilson (2007) points out that these remain distinct movements for many feminists. The “lingering masculinist culture of the left” leaves feminists struggling for integration beyond superficial inclusion or the carving out of “autonomous spaces” (Wilson, 2007: 24). Indeed, Hadl and Brooten’s 2007 investigation into the gendered dynamics of Indymedia2, which Juris and Pleyers refer to as an important tool of communication for young alter-globalization activists (2006: 67),

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2 The Independent Media Center is a global network of “collectively run media outlets”, established by “various independent and alternative media organizations and activists in 1999 for the purpose of providing grassroots coverage of the WTO protests in Seattle”. The emphasis within the center is on “radical, accurate and passionate tellings of the truth” (2011). [http://www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org).
revealed both sexist behavior and organizational hierarchies based on conventional patriarchal stereotypes – despite the project’s proclaimed dedication to feminist issues and gender equity. The subsequent marginalization of young feminists participating in these and other global youth networks frequently renders them invisible within studies attempting to examine age and transnational activism. The resulting information deficit within the literature means young women in feminist transnational networks are a seldom studied group of actors. Young women have persisted in constructing transnational networks despite – or perhaps because of – this marginalization, choosing to coalesce around youth as a common identity that cross-cuts their national, political, economic, cultural, sexual and religious differences. While what constitutes “youth” is contested and fluid, the young women featured in this study insist that the ways in which age “universally” marks them for marginalization within activist networks has served the purpose of creating a shared oppositional identity.

While many factors can contribute to the shaping of an activists’ priorities and preferred methods of organizing and mobilizing, there is an almost universal refrain within this study’s data suggesting age and generation play a significant role. Both older- and younger-generation activists interviewed from a variety of TFNs and regional and global women’s organizations assert that young women “do global activism differently” when compared to their predecessors and older contemporaries. In some cases, this “difference” was presented negatively, with implications about “effectiveness”; in others, it was a simple observation of the ways in which modes of working or priorities differ among generations. Both generations of participants also emphasize that young women have “unique concerns” specific to their age, with the younger women especially arguing
these concerns are often marginalized in established TFNs. This is neither surprising nor anomalous; numerous studies such as Craig Jeffrey’s (2011) and Hava Rachel Gordon’s (2010) have suggested that age is a “socially constructed category of difference and inequality rather than a simple reflection of biology” (Gordon, 2010: 5). This positions “youth” as a “subordinated social category”, which, Gordon observes, often transcends race, class and gender (2010: 6). The young activists in this study’s sample relating these perceptions are all women and predominantly urban, but they are from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. They also represent a range of social classes, with some growing up in elite families in Western Europe, Western Africa and the United States and others in middle and working classes in Canada, Southeast Asia, Eastern Africa and Central and Eastern Europe. Despite this vast difference, the feeling of age-related subordination was universal. Whether and how these young feminists confront and deal with this situation, however, presents several intriguing case studies which offer data for comparison and theorizing.

As this dissertation in part draws on qualitative investigation of the supposed differences in perception, preference, approach, and method between older- and younger-generation activists in TFNs, it ultimately asks why young women form their own networks, and what their choice to coalesce around “youth” as an identity enables them to accomplish in their goal to build a more democratized global feminist praxis. The quotes preceding this chapter, selected from interview data and personal and group blog postings, indicate there are a range of complex ideas about the perceived need for young women’s transnational networks. The bulk of this study’s data collection pursued such perceptions further, through case study and semi-structured interviews with five young
women’s TFNs: the Association for Women’s Rights in Development’s Young Feminist Activism Program (YFA); the Young Arab Feminist Network (YAFN), a grassroots and burgeoning pan-African young feminist network; the Central and Eastern European Astra Youth Coalition; and FRIDA, a global fund established by and for young feminist activists.

From this data, distinct patterns have emerged to suggest young women form their TFNs for three main reasons: first, to convene a counter-public that enables unfettered access to a process of dialogue, discourse, debate and collective decision-making they feel blocked from within established TFNs; second, to satisfy the perception that young women have “different” and “alternative” tactics and organizational preferences, and so need spaces separate from established TFNs where such methods can flourish unobstructed; and third, to function as collaborative learning spaces in which peer-mentoring and other joint efforts can allow for learning that avoids the “training” or “proselytizing” models many young activists feel they experienced within established TFNs.

Discussions of how young women envision their TFNs to function in these various ways constitute separate chapters of this dissertation, with the chapters at times featuring one activist or organizational case study more prominently. It is important to note, however, that there is significant overlap within all cases informing this study’s data, so that, for example, an organization presented primarily as a “learning space” is also one that has been established to offer young women a network in which to engage in “alternative” activist tactics or public spheres. It is the consistency of some responses from a majority of each organization’s participants that informed these findings, but it
must be acknowledged here that there were also at times degrees of difference regarding participants’ visions for their organization. Such differences are in fact quite open within all of the organizations studied, to the extent that during interviews, some participants would name a specific colleague who would not agree with her answer or statement. Far from a disruptive or destructive phenomenon, however, the participants seemed to celebrate such opportunities for deliberation, often citing how “different” they were from established TFNs which, “in the past” had been “destroyed” by disagreement and contention. That they have different ideas and to some extent priorities speaks to the complexity of these young women as individuals with unique life experiences; that they are conscientious and determined to function as a unit utilizing “youth” as a collective identity despite such difference speaks to their effort to re-theorize, re-conceptualize and re-construct transnational feminist networking and activism.

**Transnational Feminist Activism**

Women’s “internationalist” organizing has a long history, as the work of Leila Rupp (1997) has documented. Rupp’s *Worlds of Women* focuses on the alliance between American and European women’s peace and suffrage movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through organizations like the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), later renamed the International Alliance for Women (IAW). Other histories such as that of Keck and Sikkink’s have documented the ways in which the IAW’s “international suffragism focused on Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia” (1997: 58). As Miller points out, while the term *transnational* “came into general use in the 1920s, in reference to the Trans-Atlantic trade” (1997:225), it was a useful descriptor of the collaborative feminist advocacy and activism women were engaged in throughout
the last century, networking with their counterparts in other countries and global regions. This is because the term is often used “to distinguish certain activities from formal intergovernmental activities carried on at the international level”, so that actors in a transnational network met “not as representatives of their government but as individuals or representatives of civic organizations, clubs, unions and other local or regional entities” (1997: 225). To clarify and perhaps build on such usage of the terms, both Desai’s (2009) and Moghadam’s (2005) studies of global women’s organizing locate TFNs within “global civil society” (Desai, 2009: 31) and a “transnational public sphere” (Moghadam, 2005: 4).

This study also operates within such frameworks, utilizing Miller’s application of the term “transnational” and Moghadam’s and Desai’s considerations of TFNs as part of global civil society. As in Moghadam’s description of TFNs, the young women’s networks profiled here are “structures organized above the national level that unite women from three or more countries around a common agenda, such as women’s human rights, reproductive health and rights, [and] violence against women” (2005: 4). Keck and Sikkink’s broader description of transnational advocacy networks (TANs) also applies to this study’s cases, as the young women’s networks are “coalitions of non-state actors operating across state borders…motivated by values, [mobilizing] information strategically to help create new issues and categories and to persuade, pressure and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments” (1998: 2). The young women’s networks featured here also, like Keck and Sikkink’s description of TANs, include both international and domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and
advocacy groups, and community-based grassroots organizations” (1998:9) – all engaged in variations of transnational feminist activism.

Desai (2009) argues that there are “at least three forms” of transnational feminist activism. One involves the activism and advocacy work at intergovernmental levels, such as that of the United Nations Conferences on Women in Mexico (1975), Denmark (1980), Kenya (1985) and China (1995). The other involves “transnational grassroots activism”, and the third involves “transnational activism around global justice” (33).

While these latter types are markedly different from the former in that the proceedings of the United Nations are traditionally inaccessible to grassroots activists outside of the professional NGO community, Desai argues that all forms are nevertheless dominated by a “transnational activist class”. The young activists featured in this study reflect much of Desai’s description of members of this contemporary class; they are “from many parts of the world” and generate a “flow of ideas that is multidirectional” by utilizing “structural mechanisms for ongoing transnational articulations facilitated by information and communications technologies” (2009:34). They are predominantly “educated, middle class women from the Global North but also select countries in the Global South” and are “recognized as providing a critique of, as well as alternatives to, transnational politics dominated by inequalities of power between and within the North and the South” (2009:34). However, since the activists featured in this study are young, they do not “come primarily from” a professional faction of a “transnational class”; while some participants hold or held paid staff positions in professional women’s organizations, the majority identified as “volunteer” or “grassroots” activists³, often claiming these identities as part

³ Appendix B lists interview participants’ “professional status” and years active in transnational advocacy work.
of the reason they are “different” from an older generation of activists and therefore in need of their own networks.

Despite their detailed histories of tensions and Northern hegemony within early transnational feminist organizing – explored here more extensively in chapter 3 – scholars of contemporary TFNs also present evidence suggesting a more democratized, participatory politics. Desai, for example, points to the Huairou commission, formed after the United Nations Conferences on Women (in 1995) “in response to the lack of grassroots women’s voices in the UN conferences, which were dominated by middle-class and professional women and activists” (2009: 40). The commissions’ aim to “bring grassroots women’s voices into global politics” is enacted by “consulting grassroots and indigenous women as key experts” and developing “Grassroots Women’s International Academies” to facilitate networking, capacity building and participation among grassroots and community organizations and between these organizations and “government officials, bureaucrats, academics, think tanks, and the UN” (2009: 42-43).

These efforts, and many others like them, Desai concludes, demonstrate TFNs’ “commitment to an intersectional analysis and transversal politics”, and “[enable] transnational women’s gatherings to form solidarities across differences” (2009: 54).

Moghadam similarly points to a transcending of “earlier political and ideological differences” among TFNs through the “adoption of a broader feminist agenda that included a critique of neoliberalism and structural adjustment policies as well as an insistence on women’s reproductive rights, bodily integrity and autonomy”, pointing to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as evidence of such a “common agenda” (2005: 9).
Both Moghadam and Desai acknowledge that tensions and inequities within TFNs persist, as “reproductions of inequalities and influence among women from the North and South” (Desai, 2009: 40) continue. This is made evident by the ways in which women in developing regions of the global south and central and eastern Europe “adopt feminist strategies and feminist issues that are dominant in the West, such as violence against women”, making them “visible” but also “incorporating them as ‘victims’ and the exotic other of the West” (Desai, 2009: 40). Hawkesworth has also cautioned that “compromise language” evident in the UN Conferences’ Platforms for Action “can mask a host of disagreements” (2006: 123). Narratives of “conflict resolution” among “development” and “rights” paradigms foregrounded by Southern and Northern women’s organizations respectively are “heartening”, Hawkesworth continues, but “tend to overestimate the degree of convergence among contemporary feminisms, rendering important continuing contestations invisible” (2006: 131-132).

Given this study’s findings that first, young transnational feminist women articulate a “youth feminism”, claiming their status as “young” as a part of their activist identities, and second, these young women argue this is *not* a “feminism” routinely incorporated into or recognized by the transnational feminist public sphere, Hawkesworth’s observation, along with Moghadam’s and Desai’s cautions, are supported. Despite the wide variation of participants’ locations, experiences, interests and pursuits within transnational feminist organizing, they universally articulate that “young women’s feminism” – manifesting in tactical, organizational and / or issue priority – is underrepresented. At the same time, some also assert that – largely due to the efforts of young women’s TFNs – established TFNs have “recently” begun to recognize the issue
of youth marginalization and have also begun to collaborate more regularly with young women in decision-making and agenda setting. As this study demonstrates in the following chapters, this includes the large TFN Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) responding to young women’s lobbying for more access to decision-making and leadership roles by increasing their participation in regional and international conferences. It also includes regional TFNs such as the Fondo Centro-Americano de Mujeres (FCAM) providing management and technical assistance to several young feminists interested in establishing a fund exclusively supporting young-women led initiatives (FRIDA).

As noted above, this study presents three main findings in relation to the question of why young women form their own transnational feminist networks. All of the young women interviewed and profiled here had participated in transnational feminist activism and advocacy, some through already-existing “youth” programs sponsored by women’s divisions within intergovernmental organizations and established TFNs. All expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with their experiences in these established programs. This dissatisfaction and the subsequent motivation to establish a youth network are linked for these young women, as many express their desire to “get it right” or “change things” within transnational feminist organizing as their main motivation for their work. They are concerned with the “democratization” of global women’s organizing and “diversity of leadership” and “voices” within the movement. The following three sections introduce these young women’s motivations and visions for their transnational networks.
“No one is listening”: Young Women’s TFNs as “Counter-Publics”

If TFNs as transnational entities have been specifically committed to opening up collaborative spaces within global organizing, the sentiments expressed by many of the young women participating in this study suggests that age remains a seldom-addressed factor problematizing this collaboration and constraining who has a voice within the movement and its networks or organizations. When American activist Stephanie Herold blogged about young feminists’ preferences for organizing online, she was motivated by frustration over a flurry of discussions lamenting young women’s supposed absence from the national and global feminist movements. The discussion, set off by NARAL president Nancy Keenan’s August, 2010 interview in Newsweek, led Herold and others to their blogs. “It's really irritating to read yet another article insisting that you don't exist,” wrote Herold, 27. American blogger and activist Amanda, 22, recalls that she was also part of the “young feminist blogosphere response” to Keenan’s interview: “We got seriously fed up. [Keenan] said [in the interview] that young women don’t care about reproductive or feminist issues…but she’s just not listening to us – no one is listening.” A month prior to the publishing of Keenan’s interview, Amanda attended “a luncheon for a global women’s reproductive rights center”, where the keynote speaker, a human rights attorney with extensive global experience, “also went on and on about young women not being “present” in activism at any level. There were so many of us in the room… we were in her face, right there, and she was saying we didn’t exist!”

Both women insist that young women do actively mobilize in response to feminist issues, but may do so in ways that “older women don’t [understand] or approve of”. “And what winds up happening,” Amanda continues, “is that we just never get heard. There is
no dialogue, no ‘tell me how you do this differently’.” The Abortion Gang\(^4\), a site Herold founded “in the aftermath of the Keenan debacle”, offers some redress for Amanda, who also blogs there. The space, created specifically for young people in the reproductive rights movement, is meant to provide “community and understanding” as well as “space for hashing out ideas and discussion” the young women struggled to find in established networks and organizations.

Many of the young women in this study had similar stories of feeling marginalized within organizations and networks led by older generations of feminists, despite their vastly different national, political and cultural contexts. 23 year old Marika, from Hungary, involved in a regional sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) network, explained that women who established the network in the 1990s “do not want to share any power at all”. The older generation women, Marika continues, express their efforts to “control the whole [network]” by “excluding us from discussion during meetings, leaving only very little opportunity for anyone who is not on the board to give feedback or thoughts on our direction.” Fatima, an Egyptian activist, also points to how unwilling heads of feminist organizations are to “step down” and “make room for [younger women]”, just as Ore from Nigeria expresses she and her peers are “only meant to listen and to model” what the established activists do in the pan-African women’s network she is a member of.

Interestingly, a number of older-generation feminist activists cited similar concerns with young women being “silenced” within established networks. Peggy Antrobus, a founding member of the long-standing TFN Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), offers that older activists do often raise questions about

\(^4\) [http://abortiongang.org/](http://abortiongang.org/)
bringing young women into global feminist movements, but they frequently do so without recognition of young women’s agency. Antrobus acknowledges in the forward to *Defending Our Dreams*, one of the few anthologies on global feminist movements featuring younger-generation activists’ writing, that young women are often justified in their frustration and perception of older-generation activists as “patronizing [and] arrogant”. Moreover, Antrobus finds this division disconcerting. As young women coming of age in the context of the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) witnessed the evolution and growth of global feminist movements in different ways, Antrobus writes, “their interpretation of what is happening…[their] altered contexts and perceptions….are] invaluable both in understanding the current world order and in shaping a better future. For this reason, more attention needs to be given by the women’s movement…to the ways of opening up intergenerational dialogues that can move beyond mutual suspicion, perceived threats and insensitivity to finding the complementarities that would allow both to work on common agendas” (2005: xvi).

Older generation feminists interested in developing this intergenerational dialogue have created young women’s programs within established transnational networks. Interview participants have alternately expressed – positively – that these are “genuine” and “successful” efforts at multigenerational organizing and have also expressed with cynicism that these are “training programs” which stymie rather than facilitate young activists’ participation. Interview participants who were critical of “youth” programs in established networks argued they were “top down”, emphasizing a set of outcomes and objectives determined exclusively by the older generation. The feeling that this leaves little room discussion and engagement reifies young women’s sentiment that the “older
generation” maintains exclusive discursive control within transnational feminist networks. Marika, Amanda, Stephanie and to some extent Peggy Antrobus are expressing that young women are blocked from the kinds of discourse taking place in transnational forums, from regional meetings and global conferences to various forms of media. If, somewhat contentiously, these forums and organizational or network dialogues are conceived of as transnational public spheres in the Habermasian sense, and young women express that they are blocked from participating, then it follows young women may secede from established TFNs in order to construct “counter” spheres and spaces for discourse and dialogue.

The “public sphere” as both discursive medium and literal arena in modern society emphasizes that political participation is enacted through “rational critical debate” (Habermas, 1989: 32) and other forms of talk. This underscores the importance of access, which for Habermas became more open than exclusive in the eighteenth century, signifying a turn from autocratic control over knowledge and public space. For feminist theorists such as Nancy Fraser (1992), however, conceptualizing the “public sphere” as an open political forum becomes problematic when the reality of “significant exclusions” can be observed: as an “arena” and “training ground” for bourgeois men, Fraser has argued the eighteenth century public sphere in fact reified particular social norms and distinctions, such as those delineating “higher and lower social strata” and gendered power constructs (131). The result, Fraser argues, is in fact a restricted space rather than a public or “accessible” one.

Where feminist activists have made efforts to construct more collaborative and accessible spaces of global public engagement (Moghadam, 2005; Desai, 2009), both in
statist international forums such as the United Nations and within civil society organizations such as their own transnational networks, the participants in this study find that age often remains a critical factor restricting access. As a result, young women construct their own alternative spheres through which they engage in the “rational critical debate” and political participation of Habamas’ model.

Ghadeer, a young Palestinian feminist, identifies similar concerns motivating the construction of the Young Feminist Activism Program (YFA) within the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). AWID was progressive in recognizing the need to address young women’s participation in global feminist advocacy and activism, and began to offer in 2001 a series of young women’s leadership initiatives. “The program didn’t at all address the age-power dynamics the young women participating at the time felt were such an issue within the network,” Ghadeer explains, nor an opportunity to engage in “intergenerational” debates and forums, “so they pushed for more.” The resulting YFA program, established in 2007, offered young women a separate networking and organizing space but also encouraged the ongoing engagement with older generation feminists as part of its mission. This way, Ghadeer explains, young women were able to “develop and establish leadership though forums where they felt their voices would be heard”, but at the same time were able to construct “real dialogue” with each other and eventually, with older generation feminists. Ghadeer is adamant that while the YFA is organized under AWID’s Building Feminist Movements and Organizations Initiative, it remains a “very autonomous space when it needs to be”, so that young women are able to discuss, develop and produce “their own ideas and priorities”. This is
the only way, Ghadeer continues, that young women’s voices can be strengthened to stand alongside, “not just under”, older generation leadership.

Feeling marginalized in existing TFNs because of their age, many young women seek out and construct alternative networks foregrounding “youth” as a particular identity. Within these networks, young women feel they are “able to speak”, being “listened to” by their peers, and ultimately “better represented” in the context of global feminist dialogues and a “global public sphere”. The story of AWID’s YFA illustrates the notion of a young women’s “counter-public”, and will be further explained in chapter 4.

“*We speak a different language*”: Generation and “Difference” in TFNs

Like many global-scale campaigns, transnational organizing around women’s rights has a divisive history (Hawkesworth, 2006; Moghadam, 2005; Bolt 2004; Rupp, 1997; Kabeer, 1994). Feminist activists continue to find their efforts at collaborative movement building forestalled by contestations over political and cultural difference and hierarchies based on global hegemony (Hawkesworth, 2005; Sassen, 2004; Joseph, 2001). At the same time, as autonomous young women’s feminist organizations have flourished, many declare that they are interested in creating “new” and separate spaces for opening up dialogue about difference, and that coalescing around youth as a common identity enables them to do so. Members of the Young Arab Feminist Network (YAFN) explain “acceptance of diversity” is one of the networks’ foundational and organizational principles. Some members are “completely secular”, and some “come more from the Islamic feminist movement”, but, as member Engy explained in a statement to the Egypt Daily News (May 5, 2010), just because the young women differ in “our approach to feminism… that does not make one of us less than the other”. Engy and her colleagues saw divisions over
religion and culture fragmenting past regional and global women’s movements. “That way of fighting over differences, the silences and exclusions that would follow, it was obviously moving nowhere,” explains Fatima, another member affiliated with the network. The young women of the YAFN explain that they remain consciously and “strategically” committed to a form of what Davis (1999) has identified as “transversal politics”: a “conceptual – and political – differentiation between positioning, identity and values”, so that “people who identify themselves as belonging to the same collectivity or category can be positioned very differently in relation to a whole range of social divisions” (95). Embracing this approach to their different backgrounds and beliefs, the young women explain, means they do things “differently” than their predecessors. Many of the YAFN members perceive not just age-related discrimination to be a significant obstacle to their ability to access dialogue and decision-making processes within established TFNs, but a truly different set of “core values” and “approaches” to activism as well. Only within these alternative spaces a separate network provides, Fatima explains, could the women pursue the transversalism they feel is central to the forward movement of feminism in the Middle East and North African (MENA): “Of course we have different ideas and concerns, and sometimes those conversations can become heated. But here, we can talk about them – the point is to talk about them. No one is walking away.”

Another perception is that tactical and methodological variation among older and younger generations of activists also creates “difference” complicating multigenerational feminism. This difference, whether real or perceived, is also cited as a factor motivating the construction of young women’s TFNs, as is suggested in the case of the Astra and
Astra Youth networks for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the Central and Eastern European and Balkan regions. As this study has a core focus on the methods and priorities of young transnational feminist activists, interview questions posed to both older- and younger-generation feminists in the Astra and Astra Youth networks yielded some interesting findings. One question asked about the ways in which, given the political, economic, cultural and religious diversity in the CEE and Balkan regions, young women – and older women – negotiate resultant “differences” and disagreements. How, in other words, do young feminists from a variety of backgrounds and regions organize around “youth” and reach some consensus about goals, tactics, and targets in a transnational network – especially if the older generation struggled to do so?

It seems, however, this was not the right question to ask. “Why do we need to reach an agreement?” asks Oliwia, a Polish activist and member of the ASTRA Youth network:

We do not reach agreements, because our work does not need to be about consensus. We have women in the network who will never admit out loud that they accept our lesbian or trans members’ concerns as part of their agenda. But that does not mean they get up and leave our regional dialogues, or that they refuse to work with those lesbian or trans members on how to mobilize resources to fund our projects. Maybe they are conservative religiously or culturally, and to them ‘women’s sexual health and rights’ is only about domestic violence in heterosexual marriage. But we have never had a problem with those same members signing off on a regional statement or report to the European Commission that included everyone’s concerns with equal attention. We’re not here to convert people into being pro-gay, or anything like this…. We’re here to learn from each other how to get resources, how to talk to our politicians, how to address our communities for change. Whatever that change is about is up to each member individually.

In part, the design of this question flowed organically from what older and established feminists within the Astra coalition had reported when asked about the nature of their collaborations within both regional and global networks. Most tended to emphasize in interviews the need to reach a consensus “despite” difference, or to reach an
agreement that incorporated difference. “How else would we be able to make statements to the European Commission, submit shadow reports to the United Nations?” one 52 year old activist working with Astra since its inception in 1992 asked. “Yes, there is tremendous difference based on culture and politics, language, idea…but we have learned ways to accommodate for that difference and reach agreements.”

The activists who made the statements above work within the same network – the Astra coalition, collectively – often collaborating on the same projects, and yet have different perceptions of what is necessary to produce an outcome such as a joint statement on SRHR in the region. A majority of the young activists in Astra Youth and older activists in Astra repeatedly cited “difference” in methods, approaches, perceptions and a “knowledge base” between generations as a reason for the construction of a separate network for young women. Like the AWID’s YFA, Astra Youth is a youth network organized under an established TFN, the Astra regional network for SRHR in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkan regions. Unlike the YFA, however, Astra Youth members do not foreground ageism or patronizing as their reason for maintaining a separate network. “Our work is valued by the older activists”, Katya, an Astra Youth member from Kazakhstan, explains, “the youth perspective on SRHR issues is so critical and helps them broaden their understanding of the region’s problems.” Katya proceeds, however, to explain that different ideas about what constitutes activism and what sort of targets SRHR advocacy focus on are often delineated by age, and are often irreconcilable. “It’s as if we speak a different language than the older generation… [and] rather than trying to find a ‘translator’ we just work on our own. It saves a lot of frustration.” For the activists in Astra Youth, the creation of a young women’s TFN thus comes not from
conceptualizing a counter-public, necessarily, but in the interest of creating spaces for “alternative” perceptions and ways of working to flourish. While most of the participants from Astra Youth did not cite “marginalization” as a motivating factor in the formation and continuation of their network, Aygun, from Azerbaijan, does express that “different ideas for what works best” between older and younger activists “sometimes leads to a struggle”, one that results in younger activists capitulating. “Having a youth network,” therefore, “allows us to do what we think is best, to direct the action.”

Marya from Poland acknowledges Aygun’s reasoning for the importance of a separate network, but also offers that “we do collaborate well [with older generation activists] when it really matters…having the youth network is what helps us offer a stronger statement for those collaborations”. Chapter 5 illustrates the ways in which members of ASTRA Youth utilize the youth-oriented TFN as an alternative space through which they develop and strengthen their “different” approaches to targeting SRHR advocacy and activism in the region, but it also illustrates the ways in which collaboration between generations – and a merging of the “different” ways of working – becomes a fundamental part of transnational feminist praxis under situations of urgency, such as the rise of religious opposition to SRHR within the European Union.

“There are things we must learn”: Young women’s TFNs as educational spaces

A spate of research on young actors in transnational networks suggests many movements and parties conceptualize youth as political actors-in-training, with any agency they possess projected “toward the distant future” (Juris, 2006) rather than recognized in the present. In some cases, youth is also framed as a period of impulsivity and restlessness
that will eventually settle with age. Juris provides the example of the response Brazilian president Ignacio Luis da Silva (Lula) gave to young activists heckling him at the inauguration of the 2005 World Social Forum: “These people that don't want to listen are sons and daughters of the P.T. [Leftist Workers Party] who rebelled. That's typical of youth, and one day they are going to mature, and we'll be here with open arms to welcome them back”\(^5\). Dismissing as immaturity the young crowds’ anger over his “allying himself with…elites against the interests of his grassroots base” (Juris, 2005) not only enabled Lula to circumvent the critique, but more importantly to frame youth as a point in life requiring intervention and training, and young people as a group that needs to be “taught”.

While TFNs are often cited as organizations that pursue anti-hierarchical, consensus-based methods of organizing and decision-making, there is widespread, multi-generational acknowledgement within this study that youth is often framed in the ways cited above: as a period of immaturity, as a state which requires training and molding, and as a “temporary” condition that will eventually give way to a more “mature” politics. Many study participants acknowledge that these perceptions create “poorly conceived stereotypes” of young people, as one older-generation activist put it, and thus contribute to the conceptualization of young women’s leadership as “impulsive…[and] not to be trusted”.

Many older-generation activists participating in this study nevertheless expressed belief in the “value” and “importance” of young women’s perspectives on global women’s issues and transnational activism and organizing, and cited the training

programs aimed at younger women as networks’ and organizations’ methods of incorporating them. Peggy Antrobus, for example, cites the 2003, 2005 and 2007 Training Institute in Feminist Advocacy organized by the well-established TFN Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), wherein young women “already engaged…in global advocacy work for gender justice” were selected to share in “the accumulated knowledge, analyses, debates and experiences of DAWN in the past years and to also provide DAWN a way of regeneration through the recruitment of the graduates into DAWN's global and regional work” (DAWN 2009). That training institute alum participated in global advocacy work at the United Nations and World Social Forum has been presented as indicators of the program’s success, but some of the Institute’s graduates find this “success” one-dimensional. “Inviting young women into this [advocacy] process is really important in terms of building resources and knowledge,” one alum explained in an interview, “but that knowledge only comes in one direction – from the top down. I was excited to be [at the Institute] and appreciated the opportunity, but it was more about learning and absorbing than participating or interacting.”

Many of the young activists interviewed for this study agree that perceptions of young women as “actors-in-training” or “unknowledgable” are what often drive age-based divisions within TFNs. They contest the notion that their affinity for particular models of organizing and mobilizing stem from immaturity or impulsiveness; as 23 year old Ore from Nigeria explains, she is “consistently frustrated” that her “preference to use [online social media] for activism” is construed as “child behavior” by her older-
generation counterparts, fueling their complaints that “I need to learn more about ‘real’
activism”.

At the same time, many young women constructing their own TFNs acknowledge
they do need space to “practice” wider varieties of activism and advocacy work and to
learn more about the “mechanics” of transnational activism and advocacy work, from the
processes of globalization to strategies for resource management. Treating their
autonomous or semi-autonomous “youth” spaces as places of learning, some young
women expressed they will gain much needed confidence, and feel less “inept” and
“inexperienced” when engaging with others in a range of established forums.

Adamant that she and her colleagues are actors with agency and a “strong and
reasonable point of view” of their own, 24 year old Cameroonian Rose nevertheless
acknowledges that many young feminists “cannot stand face to face with their elders”
because they lack the confidence to do so. Interested in creating opportunities to enable
young feminists to develop their identities as activists “in a safe space”, Rose created a
grassroots network for women under 30. She explains that this is currently a “small, pan-
African peer-to-peer social networking site” with a “collaborative blog space” and
“interactive web forum”. Rose became inspired to create a network when she
encountered other young African feminists at a regional meeting for the first time. “We
were scattered,” Rose explains, “working in our separate organizations among the elders,
and did not have many [opportunities] to work together. When we did meet [at the
conference], I saw…[that] there is so much we could learn from each other, so much we
could learn together. I wanted to find a way for us to connect every day in our own space
so that we could build our self confidence and work toward gender issues together.” Like

6 The network’s name and online identity have been omitted at the request of the study participants.
the young activists in YFA, many of those participating with Rose in the pan-African young feminist network cite some frustration at feeling marginalized in established networks, both global and regional. Also, like the young activists in Astra Youth, these young women expressed in interviews that they “work differently” than older generation activists but emphasize the importance of eventual collaboration. Most important to these young African women, however, are the learning opportunities they feel they gain from peer mentoring and from regularly connecting to other young feminists across the continent and globally. Rose explains that the partnering of members and the ongoing dialogues produced by the networks’ various applications – the collaborative blog, the discussions that evolve over the web forum – are strategic, aimed at building the self-confidence of young activists. “We have learned that some people work better in certain teams, and we are always trying to make good matches, make good suggestions, so that we can learn from differences but also continue to encourage each other as sisters. This is the only way we will strengthen ourselves to become parallel with [older generations] of leadership.”

Rose underscores the importance of establishing a young women’s TFN that is organized by young women, and more importantly “young feminists”. Though there were some “training programs” offered by the established TFNs and national organizations she works with that in part are designed to help young women network, the Rose and her partners found these did not facilitate deep or sustained relationships between young women, and thus failed to create the sort of holistic “alternative” space the network was seeking: “They were always temporary, with few opportunities to really stay in touch,” Rose explains, “and the idea was training rather than listening.”
Before they came to establish their own network, Rose and her partners found connecting through existing social networking and media channels to be unsatisfying. Rose explains that her interest in creating close, learning-oriented partnerships among young women activists did not mesh with a site that is a “useful tool” but “too large” to be “focused enough on gender equality”. Rose found that on Facebook in particular African women “do not organize around the young or African identity” and “do not stand out or speak up specifically for gender concerns”; it is “too busy of a place for us to do our work,” she concludes.

Citing this and other concerns such as privacy, Rose felt it was essential to work with other founding members from across the continent to pioneer a young feminist social networking and media site. Interestingly, this pan-African network thus conceptualizes itself as a young women’s TFN which is “autonomous” in two ways: it is separate from an established “older generation” TFN, but as an online community is also distinct from mainstream social networking sites as well. Ultimately, for Rose and her colleagues, the construction of a young women’s TFN responds directly to the need for separate and “self-managed” places where young feminists can learn from each other, debating, negotiating and ultimately fortifying activist identities.

**Conclusion: Study Significance and Research Questions**

Rose is just one example of a young feminist who, in constructing a TFN specifically for young women, disrupts many of the dominant narratives in the literature about transnationalism, youth, women, and activism. Where many studies suggest “global classes” of youth – and young women especially – are at best simply consumers of technology (Robins, 2002; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006), for example, Rose and her
colleagues have *produced* and innovated technological applications, motivated by their interest in democratizing global feminist activism by creating more visibility and opportunity for young women. This case, along with the others presented in this study, demonstrate that young feminists are engaging in a variety of dynamic processes in order to construct spaces for themselves they feel are absent in established transnational feminist organizing. Data from these cases enables the process-oriented research many scholars find lacking in studies of youth and transnational activism (Harrell, 2006; Pollack, 2006), and I argue is virtually non-existent in the literature on young women and transnational feminist networks, where it exists at all. While the few investigations that do exist offer descriptive and empirical discussions of young feminists’ experiences in transnational networks or with transnational activism, virtually no comparative analysis or theoretical conclusions are offered.

In addressing this deficit, this study provides insight into both the formation and the processes of young women’s TFNs. The inductive, qualitative nature of this study enabled questions related to *formation* to emerge from questions related to *process*; specifically, as a preliminary set of research questions comparatively investigated older- and younger-generation activists’ mobilization tactics, organizational preferences, and methodological priorities⁷, distinct patterns of explanation regarding the formation, conceptualization and functioning of young women’s TFNs began to emerge⁸. This led to the findings introduced above; as these were present in varying degrees in all five of the networks used informing the case studies, these findings can be used to construct a

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⁷ See Appendix A: Phase 1 Interview Questions  
⁸ See Appendix A: Phase 2 Interview Questions
broader and more inclusive understanding of the direction and future of transnational feminist organizing.
Chapter 2
Study Design and Methodology

This research compiles process-oriented data on the activist practices and organizational preferences of young feminists engaging in advocacy work at the regional and global levels. Analysis of this data, drawn from qualitative research conducted with samples of both younger- and older-generation activists, thus enables the investigation of youth-oriented transnational feminist networks (TFN) and their empirical growth in the last decade. Grounded in constructivist and feminist approaches to analysis of global phenomena, this study finds that when young feminists feel blocked from discourse, decision-making, and other forms of political power within established transnational feminist networks, they actively utilize their age as an identity marker to form “young women’s” autonomous and semi-autonomous networks. These young women’s TFNs are conceived of as both supplanting and supplementing established TFNs, with their existence specifically performing three functions: providing the members with “counter” publics in which discourse and debate are freely accessed, providing members with opportunities to pursue and practice “different” approaches to organizing and activism, and providing members with opportunities to design participatory and collaborative learning methods.

Fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation, was conducted with a sample of activists from both younger (aged 18-30) and older (aged 30 and over) generations from North America, Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkan Region, West and East Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. All participants are currently or were very recently (within the last two years) involved in transnational feminist activism and advocacy, with some broadly identifying their work as targeting
“gender equity” and “women’s leadership”, and some more narrowly focused on an issue, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In its initial stages, this project conducted structured interviews with participants divided into the two cohorts identified above, investigating the following:

- What are the mobilization tactics and preferences of activists participating in “global” feminist campaigns and networks? What variations exist among young or older women or between young and older women, if any?

- What are the organizational preferences of transnational feminist activists (i.e., organizational affiliation with “professional” networks; informal online communities; etc.)? What variations exist among young or older women or between young and older women, if any?

- What targets and goals do transnational feminists prioritize (i.e. local/community government; national policy; global institutions) in pursuing activist and advocacy work, and what, if any, variations exist based on age?

These questions were constructed in response to the observation of a cross-cultural phenomenon; while “youth” movements within activism, both local and transnational, have arisen throughout the 19th and 20th century, the last decade of transnational feminist organizing in particular has produced a substantial number of “youth” or “young women’s” programs, many of which have been constructed to stand autonomously or semi-autonomously from existing networks. This observation led to questions about whether or not age could be considered a variable influencing the responses to the above.

There is certainly a degree of regional or cultural difference among women of the same age groups that can be observed; activists from both cohorts working in the MENA region, for example, stated that there are “strong relations” between younger and older women based on cultural norms, and that these might produce similar preferences and practices that transcend generational division. As one young activist from Lebanon
explained, “here, we are more likely to feel ties to older women – especially those in our families or from our towns – than we are to feel ties to other young people we do not know.” Age, the young activist continues, “can be less important than gender in terms of who we trust…we certainly would work more closely with older women in a network related to our interests than we would with young men in a network related to our interests.” The same activist expressed that she “did not see” these “ties” or cultural norms influencing the relationships of young women from other cultures, and so in her experience, “this makes being female, Lebanese, Arabic, Muslim, and young very unique.” That said, differences among younger (and older) women emerged as well, suggesting personal – not just “cultural” or “national” – difference plays a role in shaping perceptions about age and multigenerational relationships.

But while women activists might position “age” within their identities differently depending on both cultural and personal experiences, the subordination of younger women and the identification of this as problematic to effective transnational praxis appears in the study to be universal. Another young activist from Lebanon working within the same organization explained that while she experiences the “strong relations” to an older generation which her peer referenced, “there is little respect between the generations, which has pushed us to find our own organizations based on something we do have in common as youth”. This offers a possible explanation for the cross-cultural emergence of young women’s TFNs, but more importantly findings like this prompt further questions, which led to the later stages of this project.

As these first-phase interview questions helped to illuminate some age related differences, disagreements, priorities, preferences and tactics within TFNs cutting across
issues and cultures, they also revealed patterns regarding how young women coalescing around “youth” to construct a transnational feminist network envision their work. This facilitated the second phase of the research, or the multi-case study and semi-structured interviews involving the networks described below. In tandem, these collection methods helped to develop the aforementioned observations of young women’s TFNs, ultimately addressing this study’s central questions of why young women form “separate” transnational networks foregrounding youth and how they utilize those networks to advance a more democratic transnational feminist praxis.

**Research Design: Ethnography and Case Study**

Techniques from methods in political science and anthropology have been integrated to facilitate and organize data collection. First, the investigatory nature of this research, conducted in part to address a deficit of knowledge about the practices of young women in transnational feminist networks, calls for ethnographic methods following Geertz’s conception of “thick description” (1973), Marcus’ (1995) model of multi-site ethnography, and Hannerz’s framework of a “translocal” multi-sited ethnography (2003). Appadurai (1995) is among the most prominent voices arguing that globalization challenges “locality” as a fixed concept, and that anthropologists in particular must be aware of how a community’s mobility can pose a challenge to research on “the local”. As mobility itself can have shifting meanings in the digital age, arguably ushering in “deterritorialized conceptions of communities, kinships, and identities” (McKee & DeVoss, 2007: 21) accessed from within a “locality”, there is a greater need to be sensitive to such fluidity in current research.
Hannerz (2002) and others (Gille and O’Riain, 2002) have also argued these realities pose a challenge to the methods of social science inquiry. Gille and O’Riain suggest researchers seek out “place-making projects” which “define new kinds of places, with new definitions of social relations and their boundaries” (2002: 271), while Hannerz underscores the importance of projects drawing not just on “multilocal” ethnography as it consists of multiple sites in various locations, but translocal ethnography as it enables the examination of relationships between sites. That researchers thus will have opportunities to examine a variety of translocal relationships follows; in the case of this study, fieldwork at multiple sites of feminist praxis, including online networks, intentionally considers relationships among a “world-wide community” connected through “local and long-distance ties” (206).

Nevertheless, an awareness of the limitations this creates is also necessary: “the people whom we focus on in multi-site field studies tend to be the more mobile ones, those who contribute most to turning the combinations of sites into coherent fields, and who also make the sites themselves…more like translocalities” (210). Being attentive to limitations ranging from cultural practice to dearth of computer access is therefore a necessary step in deepening understandings of how young women activists, even the “less” mobile ones, persist in pursuing and forging transnational relationships in order to access the “global public sphere” they find established networks exclude them from. Geertz’s “thick description” is particularly helpful here to employ, as it positions the interpretive practice of considering context as an essential part of analysis and meaning.

Case study used in this research aids in data collection and facilitates analysis of the perceptions of and relationships between young feminists in transnational networks.
In identifying case study as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units”, Gerring (2004: 342) has argued that, with “no temporal variation”, a case study comprised of multiple units can be most useful when (1) the research strategy is exploratory rather than confirmatory, (2) propositional depth is prized over breadth and boundedness, (3) causal mechanisms are more important than insight into causal effects, and (4) the causal proposition at issue is invariant rather than probabilistic. The framework Gerring proposes is followed since the intention of this study is not to confirm a particular X:Y relationship, nor to offer comparative analyses of units within a case study of youth feminist activism in order to construct a causal relationship between variables such as age and gender. Rather, the intention of this study is to provide much-needed insight into the transnational activist community by providing a diversity of voices from within it, giving priority to those voices and activities that are underreported in the literature. A study of young women utilizing global networks for their activism offers an opportunity to assess one case of spatial modes and organizational dynamics of transnationalism, and can therefore provide an understanding of transnational activism as a “larger class of (similar) units” (ibid.). Such a method also provides an opportunity to focus on mechanisms rather than effects; in this way, the “motivations of the actors involved” will be illuminated by considering the interrelation among rather than the specific causal effect of age and transnational networking as variables.

**Case Study Units and Research Samples**

The research participants in this study were configured through non-probability sampling. The limited number of both established and “young women’s” transnational feminist
networks – or established networks which have youth initiatives or programs – creates a specific and somewhat limited sample; from this pool, several networks were chosen both because of their willingness to participate and their organizational type. Established TFNs with semi-autonomous young women’s programs as well as grassroots, entirely autonomous and self-created young women’s networks are represented in the sample and described in the following chapters.

During the first phase of research investigating age as a variable influencing transnational feminist activists’ organizational, tactical and mobilization preferences, several activists from both cohorts (older and younger generations) were interviewed. Some were “unaffiliated” with any organization specifically and were located in several ways: through online global feminist communities such as WorldPulse\textsuperscript{9} and Gender Across Borders\textsuperscript{10}, through mobilizations and street demonstrations in the United States, Canada, and Western and Eastern Europe, and through participation in regional conferences, such as Association for Women’s Rights in Development’s recurring International Forum\textsuperscript{11}. Others were members of a professional and established organization or TFN, including those referenced above but also other regional groups such as the Network of East West Women (NEWW) and the KARAT coalition, both headquartered in Poland, and the Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Health Network, headquartered in Chile. Finally, some participants were part of recent ad hoc,

\textsuperscript{9} WorldPulse is a “global communications network connecting women from around the world into a powerful force for change” (2011). http://www.worldpulse.com/
\textsuperscript{10} Gender Across Borders is “an international feminist community where issues of gender, race, sexuality and class are discussed and critically examined” (2011). http://www.genderacrossborders.com/
\textsuperscript{11} AWID has held 11 International Forums in various global cities since 1983. http://awid.org/Our-Initiatives/The-AWID-International-Forum
grassroots mobilizations, including Occupy Wall Street Movement\textsuperscript{12} demonstrations in New York City and Rome, and SlutWalk Movement\textsuperscript{13} demonstrations in Toronto, New York City, Cardiff, and Johannesburg.

**Defining “Youth”**

While *youth* and the identity marker “young” are fluid and can be subjective categories, changing in definition based on cultural or demographic differences, the term in this study encompasses participants under aged 30 for several reasons. First, four of the five young women’s TFNs participating in the case studies described below have presented “under 30” as a definition for “young”. AWID’s Young Feminist Activism program, for example, divides its membership into two categories: *members* are under 30, and *allies and supporters* are over 30. As they share some lineage and membership cross-over, the Young Arab Feminist Network and FRIDA also utilize the “under 30” delineation as a “guideline”, and the pan-African young feminist network has also clearly affiliated “youth” with being “under 30”. While the ASTRA Youth program members did not articulate a specific “cut-off” for what is considered “young”, the majority of their network are activists who are “post-secondary school aged” (18-22) or “in their twenties”. Two activists interviewed who were in their early thirties expressed that they “had” worked with ASTRA Youth but were “moving on”. This also suggests they identify their current age as one which prompts a transition out of a “youth” network.

\textsuperscript{12} Occupy Wall Street organizers identify as a “a people powered movement…fighting back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process” (2011). \texttt{http://occupywallst.org/}

\textsuperscript{13} “SlutWalk” is an anti-violence against women movement and “mobilization…[created] to fight back against victim-blaming and slut-shaming around sexual violence” (2012). \texttt{http://www.slutwalktoronto.com/}
There is some global precedent for defining “youth” as under 25 originating within international organizations and advocacy work. This was also cited by two young activists from AWID and the Pan-African young feminist network respectively, and also by an older-generation activist from the ASTRA coalition. The United Nations, for example, has constructed age categories identifying those aged 15-24 as “young”, with those below this number classified as “child” or “adolescent” (UN ECOSOC, 2010). Accounting for differences of member states’ definitions, the UN also acknowledges youth can be defined within a country as the age at which a person is given equal treatment under the law, and further distinguishes between teenagers (13-19) and young adults (20-24) since “the sociological, psychological, and health problems they face may differ” (UN ECOSOC, 2010).

This study uses the age suggested by the young feminists themselves (30) as a point at which one is not considered “young”. This enabled the dividing of the sample interviews into two cohorts to analyzed; it is however important to once again consider the cultural fluidity of this number and how young women negotiate and consistently re-conceptualize it. Young study participants explained that while many of them might be considered “social adults” – income earners, married women or mothers, for example – in their respective countries or cultures, they might still be situated as “young” within precedent-setting global governing institutions such as the United Nations, or within the realm of global civil society organizing and the “norms” of what constitutes “youth”.
Case Study Profiles

The Association for Women’s Rights in Development and the Young Feminist Activism Program

The Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) is one of the largest and best known transnational feminist networks, with a professional staff and initiatives aimed primarily at mobilizing funding and resources for women’s rights organizations, challenging religious fundamentalisms, documenting violence against women’s human rights defenders, and building feminist movements and organizations. The organization was imagined at its founding in 1982 as one that would enable development practitioners, academics and activists “concerned with women in development” to converse “across sectors and improve their effectiveness as professionals” in the new field of gender and development (AWIID, 2008). As the organization developed, negotiating and confronting “the intersections of global forces and women’s disempowerment”, it also sought to broaden its membership, “amongst young women and amongst regions in the global South and Eastern and Central Europe in particular” (AWID, 2008). AWID worked to include young women activists such as those involved in student or labor movements. But existing organizational and procedural forms, such as the “trialogue program” enacted with the intention of a more inclusive discourse and decision-making process, did not account for these younger voices. While expanding and developing multilingual programs, no-fee memberships, and on-site forums and trainings in developing regions resulted in over two thirds of AWID’s total membership being

16 http://awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Women-Human-Rights-Defenders
17 http://awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Building-Feminist-Movements-and-O rganizations
18 The organization estimates 4,000 members as of 2009.
located in the Global South and Eastern Europe, “inclusion” did not always account for considerations of the ways age could marginalize some members. The eventual establishing of a “young leaders” program, many of the younger activists within AWID felt, was not sufficient to meet the organization’s goals of full “multigenerational” engagement and participation. The resultant formation of AWID’s Young Feminist Activism (YFA) program is the subject of one of the case studies informing this research. The transition from AWID’s “young leaders” program to the semi-autonomous YFA, as well as the current organizational practices and “different ways of working” the young feminists who comprise the network pursue, help to illustrate the aforementioned claims regarding young women’s motivations and objectives in creating their own networks. The YFA engages in numerous activities and programs which will be described further in the following chapters, including e-Learning sessions, regional dialogues, maintaining a database of young women’s local and transnational networks, and engaging in global research activities highlighting the perspectives of young women.

The Young Arab Feminist Network (YAFN)

Gathering under the auspices of a YFA regional dialogue that took place in Morocco for members in the MENA region in 2008, the 7 founding members of the YAFN, originating from Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine, discovered common concerns: they were experiencing marginalization not just within their local and national civic contexts, but from within the established feminist networks they were members of. This feeling of marginalization occurred regardless of whether or not these activists were paid staff or volunteer, and whether or not an activist was relatively new to feminist organizing or had been active for several years. While predominantly, the YAFN is an organization
focused on gender equality for Arab women and thus shares in the goals of many transnational women’s rights organizations in the region, it is also envisioned by its founders as a place where young women will be “taken seriously”, have “space to incubate ideas and activities…gain knowledge, and [make] linkages” (YAFN, 2010).

Specifically, the YAFN is interested in pursuing new “feminist discourses”, transcending both the divisiveness and bureaucracy they had experienced as “common to most Arab women’s organizations”; founding members explain in interviews and on their website that the construction of a “progressive, inclusive, safe space” will enable several goals:

To build a community of activists where we break the isolation of young women activists and provide an avenue for collective work on various women’s issues; to provide information and knowledge on feminism and critical analysis of women’s rights work in Arab societies; to [offer] a progressive platform for debate and discussion of all mainstream and taboo issues affecting women’s rights in Arab societies; [and] to expand the discourse on women’s rights in Arab societies to be more inclusive, progressive and politically charged (YAFN, 2010)

Maintaining a “youth only” space is an important key in pursuing these goals, YAFN members assert; while they recognize that the effects of patriarchy and patriarchal globalization are widespread and traverse age boundaries, “young women deal with specific issues and as a result have particular needs… We aim to provide the space for these issues to be untangled and have open conversations without worrying about navigating gender and age dynamics” (YAFN, 2010). Interviews with YAFN members, profiles of YAFN-related projects and a more detailed discussion of the organization contribute to the theorizing and illustration of the findings presented in the following chapters.

The FRIDA Fund for Young Feminists
Members of both the YFA and the YAFN are also heavily involved in the construction of another transnational network: the FRIDA Fund for Young Feminists. The same regional meeting of young activists in Morocco facilitated the discussion of how infrequently young women-led feminist initiatives receive funding. “[Young activists] are told their ideas might be good,” one FRIDA advisory member explained in an interview, “but that they should team up with a ‘more established’ organization and seek out funding ‘later’. I think that ‘later’ contains some idea about maturity, and young women’s groups as bad or risky investments”. The idea to create a separate “young feminist fund” is contextualized by, its website explains, “the emergence of young feminist activism in all corners of the world and the resource needs that stem from this growth and expansion”; in addition, the potential that “rising interest” by “large donors” (FRIDA, 2011) in the local and transnational advocacy work of girls and young women seemed “like an opportunity”, one of its advisory-board members explains.

The organizational composition of FRIDA, its methods of developing funding decisions and models, and philosophy of “participatory philanthropy” are presented by its members – who are all young feminists engaged in transnational activism – as an effort to further democratize global women’s organizing and feminist activism. Their tactics, philosophies and goals are further described in the following chapters.

The Astra Coalition and Astra Youth

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) have become contested and crucial areas of women’s rights in the Central and Eastern European and Balkan Regions,
particularly in the face of rising religious fundamentalisms and some more recent moves on the part of state governments to reduce or completely eradicate sex education from public schools, de-fund women’s health and family planning clinics, and criminalize abortion. These issues “cross borders” and “transcend cultural difference” (Astra, 2009), particularly for women living in regions where they bear “a large portion of responsibility for child rearing and domestic work,” are underrepresented “socially, politically and economically,” and “receive lower wages than men for equal work” (IWHC, 2011). With member organizations in 15 different countries, Astra is the only SRHR network in the region. Astra partners with the medical community to improve reproductive services and access to safe abortion, works with relevant European Commission and United Nations bodies to monitor the implementation of international commitments on SRHR and women’s rights, and most importantly creates a fund and resource for local and national organizations in the network. Like AWID, the Astra network recognized in 2003 the crucial role of young activists as “allies” in women’s health and reproductive rights movements, but the “forum” space allotted to young members in 2003 was, for those members, not sufficient for full engagement. The subsequent development of the Astra Youth network, which is forthcoming in presenting its inception as resulting from the need for a specific “youth space” separate from parent NGO coalition Astra, offers an additional case study enabling the examination of young feminist activists’ pursuit of semi-autonomous networks. Because Astra and Astra Youth members do work separately but frequently collaborate, this case study also enables the investigation of how those age-related “differences” are negotiated in collaborative projects.
The pan-African young feminists’ network

This pan-African network of young women is a small, grassroots project led by Rose, a young feminist activist from Cameroon and several of her peers in Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia. This “online community space for African women under the age of 30”, was created following its members’ “experiences with [established] women’s movements” in the Central and West African regions. Rose explains that she observed “young African women absent from [both] local and national movements,” with those who were engaged “not really present at all, but passively participating without anyone much noticing their worth”. The best way to “ensure a steady flow of discussion and knowledge” between young activists but also among young activists and their older counterparts was to create “some kind of space” for young women that “could be their own.” Not satisfied with what she felt were insufficient existing social networking sites and tools, Rose created her own online community. Their website has a collaborative blog space, a discussion forum, and a peer-to-peer mentoring feature that pairs young activists “newer to the movement” with those who have been active in African feminist movements for a few years, for example those within the network “who are working regularly with other NGO[s], INGO[s] and community networks in Africa”.

This case offers the opportunity to look not just at grassroots configurations of young women activists entirely separate from an established and existing TFN, but also enables a close examination of the ways in which information and communications technologies facilitate the construction of young women’s self-styled education. Because the dominant narrative relating to gender and technology in developing regions of Africa

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19 The network’s name and online identity have been omitted at the request of the study participants.
tells us that women are at best users and consumers of technology and typically struggle to become functionally technology literate and access various forms of ICT, this network’s story of creating and *adapting* technologies for the purposes of activism and education also presents evidence that some reconsideration of these existing conclusions is needed.

**Data Analysis**

Exploratory semi-structured interviews conducted during the initial phase of this research were analyzed and coded using a conceptual framework. This framework, containing categories and descriptors based in part on themes in the sparse but burgeoning literature on youth and transnational activism and more established literature on transnational feminist activism, enabled the identification of patterns informing the later phases of the project: open-ended interviews and case study. Data from each case study has been reviewed and interpreted with a combination of analytical tools: process-tracing through detailed narrative (George and Bennett, 2005), DeVault’s model of “women’s standpoint” (2004), and DePew’s suggested method for “triangulating data from digital writing” (2007: 49).

George and Bennett have pointed out that the research field constitutes “a world marked by multiple interaction effects,” which can make it “difficult to explain outcomes in terms of two or three independent variables” (2005: 206). But by close analysis of detailed narratives, the tool can be helpful in locating “the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable and the outcome of the dependent variable” (207). In the case of this study, tracing the
“processes” of an activist’s experiences can help narrow our understanding of what shapes the “outcomes” of her interaction with and perception of transnational feminism, and motivation to pursue alternative and autonomous networks. Process-tracing as a tool has limitations, George and Bennett explain, in that “it may be difficult to eliminate all potential rival explanations but one, especially when human agents are involved – for they may be doing their best to conceal causal processes” (2005: 207). As this method nevertheless “forces the investigator to take equifinality into account”, it is most useful here: it is the “alternative paths through which the outcome could have occurred” (2005: 208) – the alternative ways in which young women come to participate in “transnational activist cultures” – that is under investigation. Understanding that there are many potential causal paths and mechanisms at work is essential to the nature of this study. This is consistent with the feminist methodology that also guides the research design here. Haraway’s emphasis on “situated knowledges” (1991: 183) locates this study within the realm of a “feminist objectivity” (1991: 583) that construes “truth” and objective social research as a “particular and specific embodiment” (ibid.: 582). This sidesteps feminist critiques elsewhere of “objectivity” within the sciences as “a false vision promising transcendence of all limits” (582). This study examines multiple, even “partial” paths and mechanisms, thus allowing for the pursuit of “truths” specific to study participants. This is legitimated by Bhavnanai’s call for a “partiality of vision”, which must not be equated with “partiality of theorizing” (2004: 66); indeed it is this “partiality” of transnational feminist networking – young women’s experiences with transnational activism and advocacy work, as a collective but also as individuals – that can contribute to a broader understanding of global feminist praxis in contemporary contexts.
Devault’s “women’s standpoint” provides a framework for both collection and analysis of transcripted interview data. Devault suggests employing interview protocol that “allow the exploration of incompletely articulated aspects of women’s stories” (2004: 232), as “language is often inadequate for women” (246). Examining the “halting, hesitant, tentative talk” DeVault claims typically characterize marginalized populations’ “difficulties of expression” (235) is therefore an essential analytical and interpretive process within this study. In addition, as the work of Gordon (2010) and various feminist theorists (e.g. Trigg, 2010) suggests, young women activists’ age and gender position them as marginalized actors in transnational activist politics, and their status (in some cases) as developing-country residents can further distance them from the “center” of activist communities. Many are therefore likely to be hesitant with responding to interview questions and unfamiliar with the process of being interviewed.

Language “can never fit perfectly with experience”(229), DeVault argues, particularly for women who constitute a “socially muted group” (Ardener, 1975). It is thus the responsibility of the researcher to “represent talk completely”, including close attention to details and recurring conversational features often ignored or seen as “minute”: pauses, hesitations, emphasis, “indrawn breath”, “elongated vowel sounds”, etc. (DeVault, 2004: 241). Noticing “ambiguity” and “problems of expression” in interview data can be particularly telling: this sort of conversation and discourse analysis represent “much more completely” women’s experiences, as “the words available” to women under more structured, traditional methodological strictures “often do not fit” (233). Systems of notation following that of Todd and Fisher (1988) are used to produce a detailed analysis
of interview transcripts, yielding a “strategy of rich and complex description” to attend to generally “neglected features of talk” (DeVault, 2004: 241).

Finally, DePew’s (2007: 49) suggestion that digital writing, such as that which can be found on blogs and within the forums of online communities, be interpreted through a triangulation method is followed in this study. This involves not just site-content analysis of, for example, the AWID’s YFA website Young Feminist Wire and the YAFN collaborative blogs, but interviews with participants as well as the designers of the sites. While the “online discourse under study” is straightforward here, and features narrative postings to online forums for activists in journal and response-based comment forms, the researcher must also “position the technology” being used within the study, and this includes its construction and design. If we “do not bring the individuals who inhabit and visit these spaces into the epistemological process” by varying – and triangulating – data collection and analysis methods, we risk as researchers “becoming the single voice that re-creates the space” for academic peers and participants, and thus potentially masking “how actual users articulate” and value the space (DePew, 2007: 55). Interviews with site users about their use and postings, as well as interviews with the site designers, are therefore conducted to provide a more comprehensive picture of these online communities. Since many of the young women participants in this study expressed that they have “constructed” or “found” a space they feel functions as an alternative public sphere through online communities, this is an essential and important part of this research.
Participant Observation

Babbie (2010) has suggested participant-observation as field research can be particularly informative, revealing details that wouldn’t otherwise be apparent from other types of data collection. Working alongside several activists who are members of a young women’s TFN enabled me to observe some interview participants’ ideas, motivations and frustrations in a more sustained, comprehensive and active way. It also enabled me to observe interactions between young women as they pursue the public sphere engagement they find so crucial to building a successful transnational feminist praxis.

E-Learning with the YFA

My participation in AWID YFA e-learning sessions enabled me to observe network operations and procedures in action. Noting that global social unrest has led to “more discussions… in online spaces such as Twitter and the blogosphere,” the YFA decided in 2011 to launch a series of e-learning sessions through its website, The Young Feminist Wire.

The Young Feminist Wire serves as a coordinating and operationalizing space for the YFA. Network members (and allies) who are also “Wire” members receive regular updates about YFA’s work, and also gain access to initiatives like the E-Learning project. The e-learning sessions are presented by the network as a way to create space for young feminist activists “to reflect on their own organizing practices by drawing from examples in the current changing global political context.” It is also presented, organizer Ghadeer explains, as a place meant to “make conversations happen that might be difficult.” The sessions are meant to inform and teach the community about “global realities and new issues”, but also to “ask for feedback so that the direction of the initiative might change.
over time” as the coordinators consider members’ responses. By participating in two sessions, the first on feminist movement building and the second on religious fundamentalisms and women’s rights, I was able to engage with a broader section of the membership, but more crucially was able to observe the coordinators and organizers who had participated in interview sessions as they worked to navigate the program.

Listening with WorldPulse

My participation in a young women’s program run by the global women’s media organization WorldPulse enabled me to work closely with young feminist activists like Rose and several of her colleagues, and thus led to my eventual observation of their network’s procedures for one of the case studies informing this study’s findings.

World Pulse, a global non-profit media and communications network based in Portland, Oregon and founded by 28 year old Jensine Larsen, was created to provide a platform for the “vital yet untapped voices and solutions” of young women Larsen observed in her work as a journalist in Burma and the Amazon. “The stories of women, especially in developing countries, had rarely been mentioned in mass media” Larsen says of the climate World Pulse emerged into in 2004. Sent to cover ethnic cleansing in Southeast Asia a few years earlier, Larsen’s submission of stories from the perspective of “Burmese women who had lost everything, but were determined to keep focused on a better future” were often rejected, dismissed as “special interest pieces”. “These stories had to be told,” Larsen continues, “but there was no place to tell them, to document them – for the women to document their own histories and ideas themselves”.


Following the creation of a print magazine called *World Pulse*, Larsen, her staff, and an editorial and advisory board including American, Cuban, French, Iraqi, Nigerian, Cambodian, and Cuban journalists, lawyers and women’s rights activists, “saw the fast advancement of communications technology in the developing world” and created PulseWire. An “online sanctuary” and “global community newswire” providing social networking, discussion forums and blogging space, PulseWire is accessed by women from “every global region”. The idea, explains Larsen, was to “hear women through their own words...[and] to look for new solutions coming from the ground up. We know women access PulseWire from Internet cafés and cell phones, just as often as they reach us from home computers and laptops. We look through the site constantly, seeing what other women see and are discussing. We know the women writing range from members of parliament in Kabul to nurses in Jamaica to landless workers in South America. When something comes up, we investigate, we listen – and often wind up commissioning stories for our online and print magazines from the women living these experiences on the ground.”

Providing community, social networking and an “ideas exchange” was always part of Larsen’s goal, but ultimately she envisioned PulseWire as a more pro-active “training program” as well, both informally, through the process of young women connecting within the network, and formally, through programs like Voices of Our Future (VOF). As a “new media, citizen journalism and empowerment training program”, VOF provides young grassroots leaders with technology stipends and Web 2.0 training, and

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20 O’Reilly (2007) has defined “Web 2.0” as “the network as platform, spanning all connected devices”, with “applications...that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from
connects them with an international group of volunteer mentors who have professional experience in journalism, law and the non-profit sector. In the three years since its inception in 2008, over 1600 women from 103 countries have applied to be part of the VOF program, and since that time young women community leaders in countries ranging from the United States and Australia to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Colombia and Liberia have been engaged with the program. Over 90% of women participating in VOF training completed it in 2009 and 2010, “despite political turmoil and violence, natural disasters, technology challenges and competing priorities for their time” (World Pulse 2010).

Since I participated in the VOF program as a “Listener” – a volunteer who would read and critique stories written by young activists applying to be website correspondents – I was exposed not just to the perspectives of those applicants, but to a community of young grassroots women leaders also serving as Listeners through the program. It was through this interaction that some early and exploratory interviews were conducted, but more importantly, meeting and working alongside members of the pan-African young feminists’ network enabled these interactions to evolve into the case study presented on their network.

Participant Privacy

The identities of each participant have been somewhat disguised through the use of pseudonyms; participants’ age, region, and network affiliation (if applicable) remain accurate as described both in-text and in Appendix B. This protective measure has been taken because of the potentially sensitive nature of the information relayed in these multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an architecture of participation…”. From “What is Web 2.0”, in Communications and Strategies 1 (17).
interviews. Many of the young women participants were openly critical of established TFNs they had worked with or for; some were more reserved and would only make generalizations or refer to “an organization I used to work with”. Given that such sentiments regardless of their specificity have the potential to impact not just a participant’s friendships and possible employment but funding opportunities and future relationships within the transnational activist and advocacy community as well, the decision was made to obscure identities as much as possible. While permission was obtained to utilize the names of young women’s projects, organizations, networks, and blogs or website contents prior to data collection, over the course of the study one group of women – those comprising the pan-African network for young feminists – retracted that permission to some extent. They kept intact their permission that I used their interviews in my writing, but asked that the name of their project be disguised. As a new network, the founders were particularly concerned that any criticism they made of established women’s and feminist organizations, non-governmental organizations, or intergovernmental organizations could affect their relationships and specifically their likelihood of receiving funding. As their case illustrates a group of young women organizing transnationally around both “youth” and “feminism”, and utilizing innovative methods to participate democratically in advocacy work with the aim of integrating more effectively into the transnational feminist public sphere, it has remained in the study despite its obscured identity.

Conclusion

This qualitative study of young women’s transnational networks contributes to the theorizing of women’s organizing at the global level, and how age becomes a variable
impacting the nature of that organizing. It does so by identifying three reasons young women form autonomous and semi-autonomous networks, and how from these networks they envision a more democratic and participatory transnational feminism.

In the overview of research on transnational youth movements and transnational and internationalist feminisms that follows, I provide a review of the existing theory and most recent field studies attempting to investigate these subjects. This is followed by an explanation of the conceptual framework clarifying the analytical categories operationalizing this study. Findings further elaborating on the proliferation of young women’s TFNs follow in the subsequent chapters.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

This study investigates the proliferation of youth-oriented transnational feminist networks in the last decade by exploring the conditions that facilitate their construction and the ways in which young women use the networks to pursue their vision for a more democratic transnational feminism. While the conclusions offered stem from data collected via interview, case study and participant observation, a critical review of several literatures was completed to contextualize and inform the research design, methodological approach and theoretical grounding of the study.

This critical review draws from several fields relevant to the study’s question and participants. As young women activists engaged in transnational advocacy work, members of youth TFNs confront and engage with the movements and mechanisms of globalization, various incarnations of transnational feminist theorizing and praxis, and questions related to their political representation and participation in civil society organizations. As these thus become interconnected fields for the participants, this chapter offers an overview of the current and historical research and theorizing that contextualizes the experiences presented. Specifically, several major areas are reviewed in this chapter. The first section provides an overview of the literature identifying age as a social construct and identity marker in global contexts, and also reviews studies examining young actors in global social movements. Because such research and theorizing has emerged out of broader studies related to democratization in global advocacy networks and civil society organizing, some attention is given in the second section to studies investigating representation and collaboration in global movements and
organizations. As questions of representation and democracy have been particularly problematic in the history of transnational feminist organizing and global women’s movements, the third section reviews both current and historical investigations into whether and how the dynamics of representation within global feminist organizing have changed. Finally, an overview of the literature investigating and theorizing the “public sphere” is presented to both ground and facilitate later discussions of young feminists’ efforts to construct alternative arenas, as they seek more consistent and holistic access to such forums for debate and decision-making.

Considering the literature on these subjects in aggregate reveals they contain interrelated and intersecting processes. Such observations, discussed in detail below, have in part formed the basis of the conceptual framework used in this study’s design and data collection methods. Categories emerging from this process have directly informed both research questions and data analysis, so that this study builds on the existing fieldwork and theories related to these subjects even as it offers a new line of inquiry. Because research into global advocacy and civil society organizations, transnational feminist networking, and in particular “youth” in global contexts is relatively new, no limit regarding time frame was used to narrow this search. While the movement of global activism and in particular the tools utilized by activists are consistently and rapidly developing, reviewing only the more recent findings would preclude information that is both relevant and necessary to this research, such as historical studies related to how “internationalist” women’s movements of the past set some precedent for contemporary dynamics of transnational feminist networking. In each section of the review, attention is given to gaps, omissions and marginalization, such as the aforementioned exclusion of a
focus on young women from developing regions in the literature on “transnational youth activism”. In addition, contested issues or areas emerging from these literatures are presented specifically because they both inform and exemplify some of the difficulties in conducting research related to youth and global activism and advocacy.

Each of the following sections closes with a synthesis that connects the review to its implications for the design and analysis of data within this study; in addition, the chapter concludes with a summary interpreting the literature review and the ways in which it has contributed to the development of this study’s conceptual framework.

Literature on Youth and Youth Activism in Global Contexts

Constructing and Globalizing “Youth”

The United Nations’ International Year of the Youth (1985) was precedent setting in identifying youth as occurring between 18 and 25 years of age. When the UN General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth in 1995, it reiterated this definition and also framed “youth issues” as *global* (UN ECOSOC, 2010). This had a resounding impact in that a number of global organizations, advocacy networks, and intergovernmental institutions accepted these parameters for the definition of youth.

This impact was not unproblematic, however; as Tyyksa has suggested, there is a worldwide lack of consistency in defining the category “youth”, “both in everyday usage and government policy” (2005: 3). de Waal (2002) points out that the UN classification overlaps with further disaggregated categories often used by states, such as “childhood”, a term commonly used for those under 18, and “teens”, which “in Anglo-American usage is reserved for those 13-19 years of age” (Tyyksa, 2005: 3).
Beyond “overlap” and conceptual problems rooted in the logistics of age, resistance to the hegemonic tendency to assert a homogenous and rigid framework for youth within globally northern and western institutions has highlighted the fluid nature of youth worldwide. Scholars outside of these regional and hemispheric contexts, such as those featured in Nilan and Feixa’s 2006 volume on “subaltern youth studies”, refute universalizing frameworks for “youth” produced by “the colonialist discourse of cultural globalization” (Nilan and Feixa, 2006: 3). Featured instead are studies that examine cultural, religious and political discourses producing notions of youth, such as Nilan’s study of the ways in which Indonesian Muslims identify as “young” when they choose to participate in particular cultures of “hybridity”: the purchasing of “appropriate halal cosmetics and hair products, nasyid music, Islamic clothing tweaked in the direction of modern trends, and portable phones, IPods and other technology personalized with Islamist iconography, Koranic verses, and so on” (2006: 92). Nilan’s study, suggesting markers for “youth” can be as arbitrary as the artifacts adopted for use by particular cultures or subcultures, shares characteristics with much of the literature challenging the “globalization” of youth as both idea and identity. de Waal’s findings in conducting research on child rights in Africa (2002), for example, revealed notions of “adulthood” and transitional age to be so highly localized that even populations within the same region showed vast differences. As de Waal and others (Tyyksa, 2005; Ogwal-Oyee, 2002) point out, however, there are often similar circumstances across the southern hemisphere in that many children and teens experience “shorter” childhoods: neoliberal development and global economic crises have reduced the time children spend in schools and propelled many into child labor and prostitution, while environmental degradation,
war, and collapsing infrastructure have shortened life spans and made young people particularly vulnerable. While studying “youth” in the context of globalization can include research into “global youth cultures” of entertainment, consumption, and activism, the more prominent focus for this type of research often attends to this issue of vulnerability, interrogating especially the ways in which a nation’s or region’s predominantly youthful population\textsuperscript{21} impacts political and social infrastructure.

Comparing the regional and hemispheric realities to those of the industrialized West, wherein a “prolongation of youth” means the term extends “well into the twenties and beyond” through “lengthened education, part-time employment and the corresponding lengthening of young people’s dependence on their parents and/or the state”, Tyykka (2005:4) in particular illustrates how global differences can problematize conceptualizing age.

More recent research theorizing and approaching youth as a social construct rather than a fixed biological or temporal category suggests more comprehensive and inclusive parameters have been established for studying “youth” cultures in global and regional contexts. This is evident in the work of Wallace and Kovatcheva’s study of the “construction” of youth in Eastern and Western Europe (1998), Wyn and White’s research into policy development in youth affairs (1997), Jeffrey’s comparative studies of youth agency and activism in different parts of the world (2011) and Gordon’s research into teenage activism at academic, community and national levels (2010). As a nearly-universal “socially constructed category of difference and inequality” (Gordon, 2010: 5),

\textsuperscript{21}Population Action International’s 2007 study \textit{The Shape of Things to Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World}, provides regional- and state-level data on “very young” countries such as Nigeria, where nearly 75% of the population is under 30. 
http://209.68.15.158/Publications/Reports/The_Shape_of_Things_to_Come/Summary.shtml
“youth” becomes a classification or marker for subordination, which Gordon observes, often transcends race, class and gender (2010: 6). This advancement in the literature has aided in the development of this study’s approach to conceptualizing youth; empirically, the data collected suggests such frameworks are essential to accurate interpretation and analysis of how youth as an identity has facilitated the formation of separate advocacy and activist networks for younger women. Many of the participants of this study made a point to emphasize their own fluid understanding of “youth”, for example, and were deliberate in articulating their feelings that many IGO, NGO and state-oriented classifications were limited, reflecting Northern and Western hegemony. More importantly, many of the young activists asserted that organizations within existing and established TFNs often adhere to these more rigid classifications of youth, creating “silos” that have detrimental effects. Many activists expressed concerns that “social adults” – young women who were married, for example, or mothers, or full-time workers supporting a family – might not be considered for membership in an established organization’s “youth” program, and yet still might be excluded from organizational leadership and decisions because they “appear young”. Concern over this “paradox” of being a “social adult” but also a “youth” in the context of an organizations’ “ageist” practices was in fact widespread among the young activists participating in this study, with members of a Lebanese young feminist organization in particular wondering where particular members “fit in” when they are not “young” but also not “old” enough to be considered “respectable and knowledgeable”.

According to a working paper on multigenerational feminism published by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL) and global development organization
CREA, many activists find themselves in “interstitial” positions along a multigenerational continuum. Being neither “old” nor “young” leaves them particularly vulnerable to marginalization: “women who are no longer in the youngest generation but not yet in the oldest generation often get ignored. They are no longer seen as rising young stars doing creative and visionary work, nor are they yet the grand dames acknowledged for their wisdom and experience” (CWGL and CREA, 2007).

Though a number of the young women’s TFNs participating in this study did establish an age range for who within an activist population would be considered “youth”, efforts to reflect the idea of cultural relativism and fluidity were universal. In joining to set up the FRIDA fund for young women-led initiatives, for example, young activists from several youth TFNs, including the Young Feminist Activism program at AWID, Nazra for Feminist Studies, and the Young Arab Feminist Network, struggled with their decision to identify “young” feminists as those aged 18-30. “We accept that the age range covered includes young people who in many contexts are already social adults”, the FRIDA statement on “Young Feminists” explains. “Married [women], mothers, household supporters and full time workers – these are all women who might be “young” in our category but are not “young” in other ways,” a young FRIDA advisor explains, “…we are committed to supporting groups that present themselves as young-women led”. As part of its mission, FRIDA seeks to circumvent the “inadvertent cultural and class bias in conceptions of what makes a ‘young’ activist”, much of which, several members assert, stems from “biased researchers and international organizations.” To challenge this, FRIDA members and advisors decided the fund “will not turn down an application solely on the basis of age”.
Engagement of “Youth” and Young Actors in Global Movements

As more research investigates how globalization impacts social movements and forms new cultures and mobilization tactics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Smith, 2001; Waterman, 2001; Smith and Johnson, 2002; Tarrow, 2005; Tarrow and della Porta, 2005; McDonald, 2006; Moghadam, 2009), a subset of this literature examines age and the aforementioned conceptualizations of “youth” as these relate to transnational activism and advocacy (Juris, 2006; Nilan and Feixa, 2006; Pollack, 2006; Juris and Pleyers, 2009; Jeffrey, 2011). Jeffrey’s examination of young people’s resistance to global economic restructuring identifies youth agency and particular forms of youth practice. While identifying young people as a marginalized and subaltern population, Jeffrey acknowledges the contemporary dynamics of globalization position most in a “baffling paradox”:

On the one hand, the dismantling of the welfare state in many countries, restructuring of families, and extension of free-market economic measures have constrained the agency of young people in different sites. On the other hand, young people are becoming centrally involved in a range of disparate, and sometimes complexly linked, forms of action (2011: 2).

While Jeffrey acknowledges that scholars such as Mannheim long ago identified “youth” as a transitional state in which each generation would experience ‘fresh contact’ with a natural and social environment and thus pursue ‘state-of-the-art’ cultural and social practices, he also asserts that contemporary realities are marked by the “intensity” of young people’s efforts,

“from fashioning new youth cultures, to novel types of economic activity and ‘hustle’, to innovative political mobilization of various hues” (2011: 3).
Most of the studies referenced in this review make similar assertions, with a good majority citing the mechanisms, products and consequences of contemporary globalization as “causes” for the “different” ways young people both experience and engage with political contention. For Loader, this involves the modern “construction of self-identify within a global information economy” and the particular ways young people respond; where “restricted” democratic practices of voting, traditional party allegiance and conventional organizing had once formed the “basic means of collective mobilization”, young people increasingly create “alternative” spaces for their politics and activism (2007:3). Loader and others (Clark and Themudo, 2006; Dahlgren and Olsson, 2007; Vromen, 2007; Coleman, 2008; Xenos and Foot, 2008; Juris and Pleyers, 2009) find these alternative spaces are constructed through new information and communications technologies. In studies such as Harris’, “alternative” spaces can take on a number of physical forms, from the private spaces of teen girls’ bedrooms to the “underground print media” young women construct. Bedrooms and other private spaces can become “micro-political” forums wherein young women “debate and construct new modes of youth citizenship” (Harris, 2001:133); close examination of young women’s self-published magazines reveals layers of consciously subversive political action and engagement. As Harris explains, the young women in her study remained determined to protect their small publications as “sites…for debating and refiguring young women’s place in a post-industrial world” through conscious efforts to keep them “marginal and private” (134). When mainstream media, commercial designers and advertisers became aware of these types of publications and subsequently contacted some of the authors, interested in using them as “a link to a generation of consumers they fear has passed them
by”, Harris observed a young women’s adamant statement to her peers: “we’re growing, we’re underground, and we’re denying their power by not talking to them” (2001: 134). A third, somewhat related classification of this “alternative” politics of young people is oriented around their roles as consumers. Micheletti and Stolle (2006) in particular have suggested that for many young people, the market functions as a space for activist practices that they envision will have transnational resonance as questions about the ethical, environmental and labor standards of “offshore production practices” have proliferated. While “an old phenomenon”, Micheletti and Stolle cite survey data suggesting political consumerism in terms of perceived effectiveness “ranked by far the highest for young people out of a range of political activities, including contacting a public official, writing a letter to a newspaper editor, and participating in protests and rallies”. The authors go on to argue that political consumerism, especially contextualized by the increasing global flow of goods, has for young people become one of the most prominent and important tools of political engagement. Finally, research addressing young people and “new” forms of transnational contention often attempt to highlight how likely young people – regardless of their region, class status and political context – are to conceptualize themselves as “post-national”. This draws from more general studies observing youth “cosmopolitanism”; Scheld’s 2008 study for example examines young people in Dakar, Senegal, where “despite the declining economy and for many, extreme poverty, youth dress up in stylish and provocative outfits [and] are increasingly entrepreneurial individuals who base the authenticity of their cosmopolitan identity on an ability to buy and sell (trade) in the urban/global informal economy” (2008: 232). It is thus young people who keep the city “hooked into the global economy” deliberately,
Scheld argues, a point echoed by Nilan and Feixa’s study of once-local gangs becoming
global: more interested in transnational networks than what they view as the “limitations”
of domestic contexts, young people construct “exclusive global identities” (2006: 206),
often through the use of global communications technologies, both “in high-tech home
networks but also in low-tech cybercafés and on rented cell phones” (2006: 209).

That “postnationalism” and cosmopolitanism is characteristic of many young
people’s activist identities is a point most substantially advanced by Juris and Pleyers
offer insight into the youthful age of activists in the mobilizations they observed:
“activists on the front lines of resistance were often young, ranging from their late teens
to early thirties” (2009:61). While there are “few age related surveys of social justice
movements”, even the limited data suggests young people are a significant majority of
many mobilizations: participants aged 14-34 comprised 70.8% of the World Social
Forum in 2005, and around 80% of the activists taking part in the 2001 G8 protests at
Genoa and 2002 European Social Forum protests in Florence were under 34 (Juris and
Pleyers, 2009: 61). Constructing “heuristic” categories of “youth activism” in the global
justice movement, the authors identify young actors subsumed under “youth sections” of
formal and traditional leftist parties and NGOs as well as those rejecting “all forms of
hierarchy” and institutions in favor of an “autonomous youth movement” (2009:62). The
most progressive of these categories in terms of an emerging praxis and cosmopolitan
identity, however, are identified as “young alter-activists”. Like their “autonomous youth
movement” counterparts, alter-activists are critical of traditional institutional hierarchies
and stress horizontal coordination. These activists, however, pursue “local-global
networking” and “organizing across diversity and difference” (2009: 63), dynamics which the authors argue mark a distinct political practice that characterized by their conscious efforts to construct common experiences: “Whether from San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Lima, or Milan, these young activists shared a common language and vision for how to confront power and bring about social change… there was also a familiarity and ease of interaction, as if everyone had known each other for years. Although the group had never worked together, everyone knew what to do, pointing to a common set of practices to go along with their shared discourses and assumptions” (2009: 58).

Assertions that young people pursue and thus embody more cosmopolitan identities conflict with established observations, studies and theories related to global advocacy and activism. Tarrow and della Porta (2005:7) have observed of transnational activism a “shift from state-centric movement to transnational coalition”, but Tarrow (2005: 7) has elsewhere pointed out that “repertoires of contention” are “lodged in local and national contexts” despite their transnational characteristics, which constrains the communication, collective identity, and trust necessary to sustain cross-border collaboration on an issue. These findings have been corroborated by numerous studies; around the phenomenon of women’s global organizing, for example, Sassen has argued that while “at least partly transnational identities” have emerged, these do not “neutralize attachments to a country or national causes” (2004: 662).

And yet among alter-activists, Juris and Pleyers have found contrary dynamics. First, alter-activists are “more committed to the movement and its values than any particular organization” (2009: 66). This is reflected in the alter-activist preference for
“temporary, ad hoc coalitions” over formal membership in an organization – a characteristic which may suggest many young activists are less and less concerned with local politics, choosing instead to connect “autonomously” and individually with global movements. Further, alter-activist propensity toward “the innovative use of ICTs” is presented as catalyzing the prioritizing of “networks beyond the local scale” (ibid.). The use of the Internet as a platform for protest (Cammaerts, 2007; Clark and Themudo, 2006), as a space for mobilization, tactical organization and “protest innovation” (Smith, 2002), and most significantly as a tool of globally diffuse, “horizontal collaboration” that allows activists to maintain interactions via peer-to-peer contacts (Juris, 2008) are all factors contributing to this conceptualization of a new, emergent praxis among young activists.

Moreover, where Tarrow cautions against easy acceptance of the functionality of local-transnational activist connections and relationships, researchers of young activists at both levels and the ways in which their collaboration unfolds presents some challenges to these perceptions. Tarrow identifies the disconnect among domestic and transnational contention:

The problem for local activists can be stated generally. International protests against global capitalism, opposing American aggression in Afghanistan or Iraq, and contesting the European Union’s neoliberalism have focused attention on the highly visible, international activities of transnational activists and advocates; but the tough, incremental and deeply embedded work of grassroots social movements has been sublimated under the facile slogan: “think globally; act locally!” Furthermore, focusing on the global target of neoliberalism has sidelined deep-seated problems like trafficking in drugs and human beings, the devastations of entire populations by HIV/AIDS, and the near-slave conditions of contract laborers (2005b: 53).

The research of Mica Pollack, however, suggests young local activists are in fact more able and more likely to engage transnational mechanisms in their work in a way that supports rather than marginalizes their immediate needs. That they do accomplish specified local and
political goals “through the use of transnational networks” suggests patterns of effective collaboration rather than sublimation; this includes young Ghanian activists “sketching out a “power map” of necessary traditional actors that includes World Bank officials, the CEOs of transnational corporations, NGOs in Washington, D.C., and local politicians” (2006a: 650) as they successfully mobilize around getting toilets in their local communities, as well as young Palestinian activists protesting the Israeli Defense Force’s bulldozing of homes in Gaza by harnessing their European and American activist counterparts’ privilege: “White bodies participating on the ground with Palestinians in demonstrations against the occupation [are] expected to stay the hands of Israeli soldiers in ways that Palestinian bodies have not” (2006b).

Tarrow (2005) firmly maintains that local opportunity structures and domestic politics continue to shape the ways in which transnational activists approach global protest, but does acknowledge they have some unique characteristics: the ability to “shift their activities among levels” – the transnational, regional, and national, for example – means these activists take advantage of “the expanded nodes of opportunity of a complex international society” (2005: 43). Interestingly, Tarrow makes the point that it is likely to be young people doing so: “younger citizens are more likely to feel attachments to the continental or global levels than their elders” (209), and are thus more likely to practice “global thinking” (68) in their activism. Harell’s (2006) analysis of “transnational identities” makes a similar point: “Young people [reacting to] the process of globalization embrace different transnational identities in a variety of ways that reflect their shared experiences with other young people in other countries. The development of such identities has important implications in terms of youth activism…as young people take on
new definitions, they are likely to modify old forms of activism and create new ones in an effort to express their interests in a rapidly changing world” (648). Pollack furthers this, pointing to evidence that young people are not just experiencing globalization, but theorizing it as well: “Youth are conceptualizing… and often creating… the very networks necessary for getting things done within a globalizing world system” (2006a: 650).

Literature on Diversity in “Global Civil Society”, Transnational Advocacy Networks, and Transnational Activism

Ethnographies of youth transnational protest such as that of the aforementioned alter-globalization movement reveal a largely youthful population of activists who are critical of hierarchical organizational forms they associate with the traditional left. In response, many young activists have been explicit about their commitment to “directly democratic ideals” of “horizontal, networked organization” (Juris and Pleyers, 2009: 67) and the establishing of “links… in diverse transcontinental settings” (Jeffrey, 2011: 4). Pollack has also observed that among young transnational activists, “political ideas about transnational responsibility for social problems” flow “multidirectionally to and from the West” (2006:652), often originating from outside the Global North and West.

Many of these studies thus observe that the determination of young people to construct more inclusive and representative “global” networks stems from a history of civil society organizing replicated on and reflecting the hegemony state systems and their unilateral methods for agenda-setting and decision-making. This section briefly investigates the literature on democratization and representation within global civil society organizations and activist and advocacy networks to contextualize the observation that young people
foreground diversity, “inclusion” and “horizontal”, deliberative processes in “youth” transnational organizing.

A substantial and cross-disciplinary body of literature on global civil society and the participation of non-state actors in global governance has proliferated for decades, reflecting the dramatic increases in the number of NGOs targeting both domestic and international politics. This increase includes a 3209% growth in the number of NGOs counted by the Union of International Associations database between 1909 and 1998, and empirical evidence of accelerated expansion in the number of NGOs targeting transnational issues such as environmental governance and human rights from the 1970s onward. These trends have challenged state-centric models of both regime theory and global politics, and prompted more scholarly investigations of the various tactics, types and processes of non-state actors.

The most influential of these has likely been Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) seminal work on transnational advocacy networks (TANs), or coalitions of non-state actors operating across boarders to share resources and information in an effort to target a particular cause. These coalitions, including both formal and informal networks of NGOs, social movements, epistemic communities, religious groups, academics and policy networks, have influenced a range of transnational issues, from environmental politics to human rights. Keck and Sikkink’s case studies not only demonstrate the capabilities of TANs to change the nature of international politics and shape policy outcomes, but also present a theoretical framework and model for the methods of advocacy networks.

Keck and Sikkink’s model operates under the assumption that the formal political arena is closed to non-state, “unofficial” actors who comprise TANs. With no direct

22 The Union of International Associations Database can be accessed through http://www.uia.be/login.
channels to or role in policy debate or construction, TANs pursue more peripheral methods of influence, dependent on processes of socialization, persuasion, and pressure. Specifically, Keck and Sikkink identify a typology: (1) information politics, or the ability to generate, mobilize and strategically disseminate information; (2) symbolic politics, or the use of symbols and stories that resonate even with audiences removed from the immediacy of an issue; (3) leverage politics, or calling upon more powerful actors to mobilize where weaker ones are constrained; and (4) accountability politics, or attempts to hold powerful actors to their commitments on an issue (Keck and Sikkink, 1998:17). In addition to this typology, Keck and Sikkink identify the “boomerang pattern” to explain how TANs circumvent “blocked” channels between a state and its domestic actors: “domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside” (p.12). International partners may “pry open space for new issues” (p.13) and, for less powerful third world actors especially, may “provide access, leverage, and information they could not expect to have on their own” (ibid.).

A focus on how actors within a TAN operationalize, however, can reveal that factors such as geography and power produce very different outcomes depending on the type and location of the participating organization. Arguing that most US and European groups in fact have or can get direct institutional access, for example, Tarrow (2005) finds that the boomerang pattern does not necessarily apply. Groups with more limited access to institutional channels, however, such as those in the global south, might prefer or have no alternative but to network with other civil society actors to strengthen their momentum. This example of different methods being directly related to geography and
power is validated by the observations of other researchers; Bendana and Friedman, Hochstetler, and Clark have found through their research into the World Social Forum (Bendana, 2006) and civil society participation at the UN World Conferences of the 1990s (Friedman, Hochstetler and Clark, 2005) that “global civil society” remains a site of struggle, including organizations with vast differences in political approach, philosophy, experience and goals that “fall roughly along geographical lines” (Friedman, Hochstetler, and Clark, 2005: 306) and “coincide with geographical distinctions between the North and South” (Bendana, 2006: 2).

Tarrow (2005) and Smith and Wiest (2005) observe that transnational activism generally is “geographically unbalanced”, with a “net advantage for the richer, better-connected citizens of the North, who have greater financial and organizational resources and who live close to the sites of major international institutions” (Tarrow, 2005: 44). It is interesting to note that in much of the aforementioned literature (Pollack, 2006; Juris and Pleyers, 2009, Pleyers, 2011), young actors make a concerted effort to both “geographically balance” the actors in their networks and movements, and also to decentralize the sites of transnational activism (Clark and Themudo, 2006; Bennett, 2003; Langman, 2005) to the extent that “more individualized forms of activism such as computer hacking, culture jamming, brand boycotts and recycling” emerge as “new protest cultures” (Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010: 13).

In addition, data from studies examining the geography of global civil society may further problematize the notion of “sites” in transnational activism. Taylor’s (2006) model of NGO connectivity examining “global cities” rather than states as sites of international activity, for example, suggests a “world city network” relatively biased
toward the South. Moving beyond “simply counting up the number of NGOs located in a city” (268), and instead measuring the “connectivity” of a city through its NGO offices and the “activity value” of those offices’ daily operations, Taylor finds Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America emerging as leading regions of NGO connectivity and activity, with Nairobi being presented as “the most connected city in the world with respect to NGO activities” (266). Other Globally Southern cities ranking within the top 10 include Bangkok, New Delhi, Manila, and Harare.

Taylor’s findings related to connectivity and “concentration” or “value” of activity provide a challenge to the aforementioned emphasis on Northern dominance in much of the literature on global civil society. They also suggest activists in the Global South may be “closer” to the sites of major international activity than presupposed. Important to note, however, is Bendaña’s (2006) emphasis on the importance of conceptual separations between facets of “global civil society” such as NGOs and social movements. These have “political differences” in their approach to existing power structures and working within (or rejecting) state-centric frames. And while NGOs and social movements may superficially engage in activism around a “belief in the need to change the existing global political and economic order”, underlying concerns that “powerful governments turn to, or even create” NGOs “in order to further the interests of the state” (Bendaña, 2006: 2), and that these proliferate most in Globally Southern regions, mean “civil society” activity there can be more repressive than productive of contentious politics.

This is a suggestion presented in Hearne’s 2007 study of power and southern NGOs. Conceptualizing “power” as it has been defined by Lukes (194), in which
authority in the decision making process and ability to control agendas might become observable when one group’s policy preferences subsume another’s or one group can persuade another to do something they wouldn’t otherwise do, Hearne suggests the role of African NGOs in particular must be “theorized within the wider context of the global political economy of the continent” (2007: 1095). Hearne’s surveys found a lack of autonomy and a “very close” relationship to Northern governments undermining legitimate decision-making or agenda-setting capability within African NGOs despite their explosive “growth” in number and size. This data, along with other studies critically examining the increasing number of Southern NGOs (Wallace, 2003; Sat, 2005), suggests numerous cases can be cited to counter claims of diversity and representation within TANs and other global civil society configurations.

These findings – and disagreements – in the literature on global civil society make claims such as Juris and Pleyers’ (2009) even more provocative. If, through “decentralization”, dedication to “direct democracy” and rejection of “old” hierarchical organizing practices, younger generation social justice activists exemplify a conscious construction of networks more globally diverse and inclusive, their methods, tactics and preferences are all the more necessary to study. Complicating this somewhat ironically, however, is the lack of diversity represented in studies of these actors. Most existing studies of youth in transnational activist and advocacy movements reflect the work of actors who are male (Osava, 2010), “urban and middle class” (Juris and Pleyers, 2009), and “primarily from Europe and North America (Pollock, 2006a). Though this is a class of actors disproportionately more likely to be seen (Pollock, 2006b) because of “spectacular anti-globalization protests” (Pollock, 2006a; Cammaerts, 2007), they “are
only one form of today's transnational youth activism: some young people write emails or post to blogs to act transnationally, while others raise money and still others share artistic performance” (Pollock, 2006a). To discount what Harris, Wyn and Younes term the “everyday activities” of young people’s “informal” political and social action (2010: 22) is to preclude an important set of actors and practices in transnational activism; moreover, arguments that young people are not to be considered “transnational” if they work in more immediate local contexts, despite their indefinite and deliberate connections to global counterparts in a movement or organization, is not only limiting but can create and re-create global hegemonic divides. Young activists from the global north and west are typically endowed with resources that enable them access to international travel, high-speed communication technologies and the time to dedicate to participate in transnational protest; this should not overshadow young activists elsewhere who act through writing letters, raising money or marching (Pollack, 2006b) in relation to global social movements, as Pollack’s research into young Palestinian (2006a) and Ghanaian (2006b) activists suggests. Excluding these actors and their methods creates a restricted pool of data that does not accurately describe the depth or complexity of young people’s construction of transnationalism. More relevant to this study, such exclusions in the aforementioned literature have rendered many young women who participate in transnational activism and advocacy work invisible. Though the day-to-day operations of the global, youth-led feminist organizing fund FRIDA are certainly not “spectacular”, for example, and may in fact be considered rather mundane, their methods of “participatory” grant-making and multigenerational organizing suggest the sort of innovation in transnational networking that demands attention. As this study represents a broader cross-
section of not only “transnational activists” but also women who work more locally but consider themselves transnational activists by constructing, creating and re-creating the term to reflect their own movement, it seeks to redress this omission and diversify not just the actors within studies of transnational youth activism but the ways in which researchers classify “transnational” activists as well.

Literature on Global Feminism and Transnational Women’s Organizing

Broadly, as transnational movements with paradoxical histories of both contentious division and efforts to create collaboration and unity, “global feminisms” and “global women’s movements” have been studied extensively in literatures emerging from feminist theory, social movement studies and theories of global development.

Historically, one of the most contentious issues in transnational feminist organizing has been the hegemonic effect of what Hawkesworth has referred to as “one-voice feminism” (2006: 132). As an operational and political tactic, this “convergence model” feminism (ibid.) held powerful appeal for activists seeking to penetrate the agendas of both state and international organizations on behalf of women’s advancement. Feminists working within the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and other official, professionalized women’s organizations built upon Beauvoirian theoretical foundations to argue that a common oppression united women despite differences of race, class and nation. This platform legitimated several advancements, chief among them the securing and codification of global policy on women’s rights, including international legal instruments such as the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
Conceptualizations of a unified feminist “internationalist” voice also produced one of the first intergovernmental conferences on women’s human rights: the International Women’s Year (IWY) in 1975. Concurrent with this conference and the proliferation of feminist narratives of solidarity was the rise of the “Women in Development” movement. As Newland has argued, both Ester Boserup’s landmark *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (1970) and the failure of development projects in the 1950s and 1960s (1991:123) sparked dialogue about women’s roles in production. USAID established a “Women in Development” office, the United Nations added an Institute for Training and Research for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and women’s development fund (UNIFEM), and “virtually all of the major foundations that were active in international development, from giants like Ford and Rockefeller to much smaller institutions, had active women’s programmes by the end of the 1970s” (Newland, 1991: 124).

And yet as Goetz and others point out, these physical manifestations of a burgeoning global women’s movement in fact “[threw] feminist politics into crisis” (1991:152), the likes of which had been brewing for decades. As the “shadow stories” of the IWY conference and its predecessors reveal, feminist organizations – even those solely comprised of civil society – replicated “geopolitical power dynamics” (Hawkesworth, 2006: 63) and hierarchies built on racial and class bias. As Bolt’s (2004) and Rupp’s (1997) histories have shown, this has its roots in early 20th century women’s “internationalist” organizing, wherein predominantly white American and British feminists were “influenced by the well established organizational and social separation between non-whites and whites” which, despite post-WWI efforts to “reformulate”,...
proved “impossible to break” (Bolt, 2004: 76). Moreover, the “chasm that yawned between the bourgeois and socialist women’s movements” in this era (Rupp, 1997:34) as well as “feminist orientalism” mobilizing “assumptions about backward, repressive ‘Eastern ways’” in order to “threaten Western men with seeming ‘oriental’ if they refused to accept the emancipation of women” (Rupp, 1997: 75) continued to highlight the fragmentation of various women’s organizations within an international or transnational network rather than the potential for unity.

Sen and Grown (1988), Mohanty (1991), Lorde (1984) and others have argued that the priorities for “global sisterhood” ultimately constructed in the United States, Canada and Western Europe by women of class and race privilege from the early 20th century on may not be embraced by or even relevant to “poor women from racially or nationally oppressed groups” (Sen and Grown, 1988: 24). With an emphasis on inequality between men and women, liberal feminists from economically and politically powerful countries often marginalized what Molyneux has termed the “practical gender interests” (1985: 233) of women in the developing world: “food, housing, jobs, services and the struggle against racism” (Sen and Grown, 1987: 25). While women “organized spontaneously” and in sustained movements in many third world countries, as Jayawardena’s (1986), Badran’s (1999) histories have shown, these did not necessarily challenge fundamental gender divisions and hierarchy (Peterson and Runyan, 1999: 177). Movement around the tensions created by these fundamentally different frames are highlighted by construction of the TFN Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). By the early 1980s, founding members of DAWN criticized the WID approach for, among other things, neglecting important regional variances of class and
culture, treating “Third World Women” as a monolithic category in development policy and failing to point out the negative impacts of structural adjustment policies (Sen and Benería, 1981; Sen and Grown 1987; Mohanty, 2003; Jacquette and Staudt, 2006). Coalescing around these criticisms of Northern approaches to women’s rights in development, DAWN established itself as a South-South coalition in 1984 in Bangalore, and targeted the 1985 UN Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi to push for significant changes to the global development agenda. Arguing for the consideration of the New International Economic Order and for a shift in focus from “women” to “gender”, as the latter involves a greater understanding of social and historical contexts, DAWN founders persuaded a number of Northern development practitioners, including members of the World Bank and Canadian International Development Agency, to accept and advocate a Gender and Development (GAD) agenda (Jacquette and Staudt, 2006:31). The 1985 Forward Looking Strategies Report, Nairobi’s conference outcomes document, clearly reflects the DAWN agenda: “The efforts for the integration of women in the development process should be strengthened and should take into account the objectives of a new international economic order” (UN DAW, 1985). Evidence of DAWN’s influence can also be seen in the 1995 UN Forth World Conference on Women’s final Declaration, as it consistently emphasizes diversity – rather than homogeneity – among women and locates the causes of poverty in both “national and international domains” (UN DAW, 1995). More contemporary examinations of global women’s activism, such as Ferree’s and Tripp’s edited volume (2006), suggest “practical and strategic” interests need not be mutually exclusive, furthering this discourse. Bagic’s investigation of

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23 A 1970s-era proposal made by developing countries through UNCTAD to replace the Bretton Woods system with one more favorable to the Third World.
women’s organizing in Post-Yugoslav countries, for example, shows a progressive
evolution among women’s groups: associations that were once organized as logistical
responses to war with little attention to gender politics or women’s power are now rights-
based NGOs (2006: 141).

Despite these contemporary studies and these histories documenting such
negotiations and collaboration, (Rupp, 1997; Bolt, 2004; Moghadam, 2005;
Hawkesworth, 2006;), concern over divides within global feminist organizing and in
particularly theorizing continue to be a contentious issue within the literature on global
feminisms and transnational women’s movements. When Chandra Mohanty observed in
1988 that homogenous, monolithic sketches of a “third world woman” emerged out of
reductive Western feminist writing on development, she articulated the sentiments of
numerous Southern women’s movements and organizations. In a “ventriloquist’s fantasy”
(John, 1996: 22), feminist scholars from the global North projected a singular “voice and
view” onto a “silenced, subaltern subject” (Hawkesworth, 2006: 124), erasing the
heterogeneity and differentiated history of Southern women’s movements in their studies.
Organizations such as DAWN, and scholars such as Mohanty (1989; 2003), Spivak
(1988) and Minh-ha (1989) emphasized that Northern scholarship often failed to
incorporate the concerns of racially or nationally oppressed groups of women. A focus in
the scholarship informed by Northern and Western liberal feminism thus reflected and re-
created the same divides and tensions present in global feminist organizing.

Seemingly in response, many studies turned to examining the discursive and
communicative elements within transnational feminist organizing and networking
(Hedge, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1999; Moghadam, 2005; Desai, 2007; Dare, 2008), with
many of these focused in particular on the ways in which “difference” (Hedge, 2007, Dare, 2008) is negotiated and “collaboration” or “coalitions” are built (Desai, 2007). Both Alexa Dare (2008) and Nikita Desai (2007), for example, have conducted case studies on AWID’s international forums with the intent of scrutinizing how conference spaces are crucial to such processes. Dare concluded in her study of the 2005 AWID forum in Bangkok, Thailand that participants use communication strategically as “connectedness”, not just “uncertainty reduction”, and ultimately “disavow divisions and instead highlight points of connection”. In this way, “transcultural solidarity” is discursive, “not-identity based”, and “fundamentally collective” (2008: iii).

Desai (2007) makes similar observations in examining AWID forums in Bangkok (2005) and Guadalajara (2002). Describing forums as “international feminist space” where activists gather to “strategize, energize, network, nurture and engage in coalitions” (2007: 56), Desai argues the seeming contradictions within AWID’s mission – emphasizing commonalities among women while remaining sensitive to their differences – are ameliorated through the work that unfolds during proceedings. This includes the construction of “common visions” and “common threats”, as well as the production of “safe spaces” where “dissent can be expressed without negative consequences” (2008: 5). It is under this sort of exchange that feminists situated “across divisions of race, class, nationality, ethnicity, religion, age and sexuality” can and in fact do “build coalitions” (2008: 38).

The work of Moghadam (2005), Desai (2009), and Basu (2010) further demonstrate the convergence of feminist communities around common agendas that included global conventions such as the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for
Action (Moghadam, 2005: 9). On a more regional scale, Moghadam’s investigation of
the TFN The Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region (AWMR) also gives
credence to the importance of forums, conferences, and other physical meeting spaces to
forge collaborative agendas and form coalitions. Moghadam documents several
nation ally- and politically-based tensions “disrupting transnational solidarity and
cooperation” within the various incarnations of AWMR meetings since the network’s
inaugural conference in 1992. These have included “lingering political tensions between
Moroccans and Algerians over the disputed Western Sahara territory”, the “limited
participation by [Palestinian] AMWR members” unable to travel at times because of
Israeli military incursions and closures, and banners and photos being displayed at some
meetings which “included images and words endorsing suicide bombings and hailing
such action by Palestinian women” (2005: 188). And yet despite these and numerous
organizational and funding difficulties, Moghadam finds AMWR producing unanimous
agreement on resolutions; this in part has to do with its structure as “a very loose network
[prioritizing] local and national action,” and its mission to provide “international
solidarity” and “political direction” for local and national struggles. (2005: 188). But it is
also related to the interaction, discussion and debate of members, even informally “during
breaks and lunches” (2005: 188) at meetings. The determination of members themselves
to pursue collaboration and coalition building despite nationalist or political tensions is
also key; in her last observation of the AMWR case, Moghadam relates such an
example: “In light of the organizational, financial and political crises facing the AWMR,
the invasion of Iraq by U.S. and British forces in March 2003 could have led to its
collapse. Instead, the Italian branch energetically began preparations for an annual
meeting to focus on peace, justice and demilitarization in the Mediterranean region (2005:190).

**Age, Identity and Globalization in Transnational Feminist Organizing**

The notion that conferences, forums, and other platforms for debate and exchange are central to a more inclusive and “global” feminist praxis is nearly universal in this literature. Interestingly, however, few scholars cite *age* or generation as an “identity” or “division” that needs to be traversed in order for members to collaborate or coalesce. Nikita Desai (2007) does include “age” among a list of factors that have proven divisive in TFNs in the introduction to her study, but slights the subject elsewhere, as do most scholars of transnational feminist activism and advocacy. Moreover, in arguing that forums such as AWID’s triennial conferences “provide safe spaces” for dissent and disagreement to unfold, Desai also overlooks the boundaries age can present to meaningful participation and engagement in such “spaces”. All of the young participants in this study have attended a TFN meeting, forum or conference, and many of these have been present at an AWID regional or international forum. While most have acknowledged in interviews that the network has certainly provided spaces for them to communicate “without consequences”, even going so far as to provide young women with their own forum, these were not the productive “spaces” Desai and others have suggested they can be. Age seems to often preclude legitimacy or “value”; Kathambi from Kenya, for example, explains that at the AWID 2008 Forum, turn out of older-generation activists at the Young Women’s Caucus events was poor, even though older women seemed at the start of the Forum to support the younger women’s efforts to

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24 The Young Women’s Caucus and “Intergenerational Forum” began at the 2008 AWID International Forum in Cape Town, South Africa
organize. Other young activists present for this Forum called the lack of older women attending multigenerational efforts a “shame”, with one exclaiming “we were celebrated for our devotion to the cause on paper, and then ignored when we had someplace to voice our concerns”.

As Rupp’s histories of internationalist women’s movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have shown, age-related fragmentation and division are not new.

“Right from the beginning of international organizing, a generational boundary divided those who belonged and those who did not. Women of relatively advanced age predominated and had little success appealing to young women to join their ranks. In contrast to class, religious, and ethnic differences, the age gap had little to do with deliberate or structural exclusion…older members often lamented the absence of young women and longed for fresh blood. But they never succeeded in attracting the younger generation” (1997: 60-61).

Where some younger women did join early International Women’s Organizations Rupp notes among the personal writings of some a feeling of “otherness”. When Alice Salomon joined the International Council of Women at 26, the next youngest member was over 60. Rosika Schwimmer and Rosa Manus, at 27, were both the youngest members of the International Alliance of Women, and were often referred to as “my dear little friend” (1997: 61). Predictable tensions permeated the relationships between a predominantly ageing population of international activists and their younger generation counterparts; US suffragist Anna Howard Shaw complained

it is everywhere the same question – the young people come into the work with the greatest lack of respect for the older people; they think we have made great blunders all these years and have kept the work back; that now they are going ahead in their sweet and beautiful way.

25 For example, the International Council of Women (1888); International Alliance of Women (1904); Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
Though many of the participants in this study acknowledge age-related tensions are an anticipated part of multigenerational organizing, nearly all offered unsolicited statements asserting that young women “today” and “in this era” experience a dramatically different set of circumstances than their predecessors, and that this makes multigenerational organizing challenging in more unique ways. This is consistent with the literature that investigates “identity”, feminism, and feminist organizing in the context of globalization.

As Moghadam (1994) and others (Mohanty, 2003; Parpart, 2002) have argued, “identities” are fluid and intersectional, shaped by discursive and historical processes, reflecting “the symbiosis of the economic, the cultural, and the political” (Moghadam, 1994: 9). Studies of “identity” and individuals must therefore also analyze context on multiple levels (the “national” and “international”, for example) as well as the structures and narratives of power that shape them. As post-9/11 globalization continues to foster not just the “spatial reorganization of production, interpenetration of industries across borders…[and] massive transfers of population within the South as well as from the South and the East to the West” (Marchand and Runyan, 2000: 9) but a “remilitarization” (Marchand and Runyan, 2010: 3) of society as well, both women’s lives and “feminism as an identity” (Pritchett, 2006:11) are consistently undermined and disrupted. As Marchand and Runyan have recently argued, the “fraternal twin towers” of neoliberal globalization and militarism encourage both the re-emergence of “hegemonic masculinities hitherto associated with the Cold War” and, potentially, “a new type of hegemonic masculinity…[preoccupied] with high-tech warfare and xenophobia, especially toward the non-Western, non-Christian ‘other’” (2010: 3). In this climate, the
“dualistic mentalities” that had been reinforced by the rhetoric of the George W. Bush administration (“us” versus “the evil doers”) created monocultures that Prichett finds fragmented and polarized “feminism as a chosen identity”:

The mentality of questioning and suspicion, rather than celebrating the ‘other’, splits bonded groups of women apart and slowly wears away at the progress of the transnational feminist movement. One is left to ask: for whose benefit are these binary oppositions, fuelled by the fires of war and militarization, being constructed? It is probably sufficient to say, not for the benefit of women (2006: 12).

While a number of the aforementioned studies raise this issue of feminist identities-in-flux, preliminary findings within this study challenge such results. Most of the young feminists interviewed for the second phase of the study directly acknowledged an awareness of “identity politics” and “tensions” in transnational movements past and present27, but articulated that they actively seek to sidestep the “fragmenting” processes Prichett argues are in fact heightened by contemporary geopolitics. Several interview questions28 inadvertently prompted conversations about “Western” state decisions, ranging from the Global Gag Rule29 to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the hegemony of “Northern” organizations such as transnational corporations to non-governmental organizations. Do these shape the dialogue among activists in any way, I often asked as a follow-up question, or impact relationships between activists from different global regions? Most participants expressed personal or group frustration over such politics and hegemony, but did not see how this related to their communication with

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27 Statements were made in particular to question 3.6 in the second-phase series: “How do members of the network from different countries communicate?”
28 Such questions included those from section 2 in the second-phase series: 1) What issues does the network address? 2) What is the geographical scope of the network? 3) What sort of institutions are targeted by the network? , as well as some from section 3 in the second-phase series: 7) Do members of the network outside of HQ contribute to or collaborate on the network’s activities?
29 According to the Change Center for Health and Gender Equity, The Global Gag Rule “stipulates that NGOs receiving U.S. assistance cannot use separately obtained non-U.S. funds to inform the public or educate their government on the need to make safe abortion available, provide legal abortion services, or provide advice on where to get an abortion”.

other young activists. This suggests an attitude consistent with Bennett’s (2008) cross-cultural research on young people, citizenship and civic identity: many young people feel disconnected, misrepresented and distanced from and by conventional politics and government, in some cases turning to “peer networks and online communities” to find a sense of “civic engagement” (3). The young activists participating in this study, many of whom live or recently lived developing countries and conflict zones outside of the Global North and West, expressed that they did care about national politics, and felt a “very strong” sense of national allegiance: in almost all cases, activists being interviewed about their work expressed how unique they felt their nation’s, culture’s and even community’s issues were. Also in most cases, however, the same activists expressed so much frustration with their government and “older generation” representatives from non-governmental organizations that they felt the “best use” of their time was to work collaboratively with other young activists, both locally and internationally. These results suggest suspicion and mistrust fostered by the global rhetoric of “security” and militarization and the tensions created by neoliberal economic policies may inform these activists’ identities. But it also highlights the ways in which young activists, conscious of these issues, are more likely to work toward ways of dialoguing about them. “Of course there was tension”, one activist from Poland explained of her recent participation at a “young women’s” regional conference on resource mobilization and movement building in Tbilisi, Georgia, referencing “some bad feelings between people” from different countries in the region. However, she goes on to explain “government decisions – wars, economic policies – this does not really have anything to do with us…it has nothing to do with us as women. We are not the ones who make these decisions, as young people
especially...we just have to watch it happen, to face the consequences...which we can do better together.”

Global Feminism, Discursive Power and the Public Sphere

The ongoing emphasis on “dialogue”, conversation and meeting as proactive political action within this literature – and within this study’s interview data – suggests a theoretical connection to Habermasian notions of the public sphere, discourse ethics and deliberative democracy. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Habermas identifies the creation of a public-political body in the 18th and early 19th centuries facilitated by the demise of feudalism and expansion of transnational merchantilism. The subsequent increase in print culture meant to facilitate and advertise shifting modes of production and distribution in the 18th century expanded literacy and the existence of the “literary” sphere within Western Europe. All these sites of production – the literary, the material, the networked and communal – made for fundamental changes in where power was located: property, money, and “public” communication were no longer restricted to or monopolized by the monarchy or state, and an emergent public aggregated to symbolize a new collective form and location of power.

This series of negotiations, creating the public sphere and emerging out of the traffic in news, is precisely what led to the *conceptual* public sphere that is a central idea in Habermas’ project. “Rational critical debate”, necessary for a politically oriented public capable of questioning absolutism and resisting oppressive exploitative state practices, began to form thanks to the literary public sphere and the practices of a bourgeois reading class. Though the space in question is more conceptual than actual, Habermas does point to public spaces, “coffee houses in their golden age between 1680
and 1730 and the *salons* in the period between regency and revolution” (1962: 32), as playing important roles in solidifying this reading public as a formidable group. Within salons or coffeehouses, “critical debate ignited by works of literature and art…soon extended to include economic and political disputes” (1962: 33). These physical conversations contributed to the construction of a critical discourse in this period that transformed into critiques of state. It is the supposed diversity of actors in this public sphere that becomes critical to Habermas’ claims; “a wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shopkeepers” both wealthy and poor “visited the coffee house several times a day” in England, while in France, *salons* may have been more exclusive but still offered a place for “the nobility and the *grande bourgeoisie* of finance and administration” to meet “with the ‘intellectuals’ on equal footing…sons of princes and counts associated with sons of watchmakers and shopkeepers” (1989:33). Habermas links these “diverse” actors and the nature of their conversations, where “opposition rhetoric” solidified, to the emergence of liberal and humanist discourses and the eventual push for democratic reform within the state.

This is often precisely where feminist critiques have been made of Habermas’ vision, however, with some of the most prominent coming from Nancy Fraser (1992), Iris Young (1987), and Seyla Benhabib (1987). Despite nuanced disagreements, feminist critiques of Habermas’ public sphere model largely converge around several points. First, Habermas’ recounting of the “bracketing” of status and other hierarchies in the interest of creating “open access” to debate is both an idealization and omission. Fraser (1992) in particular has suggested a revisionist historiography of the “public sphere” in fact reveals an exclusionary “bourgeois masculinist” production, with “women of all classes and
ethnicities” as well as “plebian men” excluded “on the basis of gender status” or “property qualifications” (118). Fig points out also that Habermas’ “public” is one “narrowly defined, with a certain set of preconditions: those engaging in civil society spheres and rational-critical debate, whether actual or metaphoric, were to have a relative degree of literacy, exposure to arts, and capital to participate” (2008), while Felski has described “the bourgeois public sphere” as having “a blindness to the actual and unequal material conditions which render its own existence possible [holding] fast to the illusion that humanity is adequately represented by the male property-owning public” (1989:165).

Moreover, the idealization of “open access” is compromised by the ways in which status is replicated by “discursive interaction” (Fraser, 1992: 119), a point echoed in the critiques of both Young (1987) and Benhabib (1987), and made more generally by feminist investigations into deliberation by Okin (1989) and Mansbridge (1981). Fraser cites research, for example, revealing that within mixed-sex deliberative bodies, “men tend to interrupt women more than women interrupt men, men tend to speak more than women, taking more turns and longer turns, and women’s interventions are more often ignored or not responded to than men’s” (1992: 119). Quoting Mansbridge, Fraser also points out that “the transformation of ‘I’ into ‘we’ in brought about by political deliberation can easily mask subtle forms of control…subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard. [They] are silenced, encouraged to keep their wants inchoate, and heard to say ‘yes’ when what they have said is ‘no’” (119).

Iris Young similarly questioned the nature of communication in the public sphere and its implications for gender and other social stratifications: even when marginalized or
subaltern groups are included in deliberative processes, they may be “internally excluded” when “others ignore or dismiss or patronize their statements and expressions” (2000:55). Young identifies narrative as a form of communication often used to express and politicize identity “as it exists in relation to social position” (2000:73), and yet such communication was viewed as subordinate to, and in fact hampering, the “rational arguments” central to Habermas’ construction. Political discourse must “promote conditions for the expression of the concrete needs of all individuals in their particularity” (Young, 1990: 125), therefore making accommodations for these other communicative forms.

Close examination of “appropriate subject matter” for debate within the public sphere, and what in fact qualifies as public and private, has also been widely enacted in feminist critiques of Habermas’ historiography. Fraser questions Habermas’ categorical division “between system and lifeworld institutions” (1989: 137), for example; as McLaughlin explains, “feminists are concerned with what Habermas defines as ‘off-limits’ for discussion in his notion of the public sphere. Issues traditionally considered private and female, but made public through the activities of the contemporary women’s movement, include women’s differences from men and their experiences in the private sphere of home and family, where power relations are treated by gender-blind theory as though they do not exist” (1993:607). Benhabib has cited such divisions as generating “normative dualisms” which remain largely “unexamined” (1992: 119). Benhabib elsewhere argues Habermas’ insistence on universality and public, “common concerns” ignores the necessity of distinct and particular (“private”) experiences. Such “substitutionalist universalism” identifies “the experiences of a specific group of subjects
as the paradigmatic case of the human as such” (1987:81) and is therefore falsely
“representative”; a reconstituted “interactive universalism” (1987:82) would instead, as Coture has explained,

(1) recognize the plurality of ways of being human without endorsing all of them; and (2) regard difference as the point of departure for reflection and action, yet also hold that there are rational standards for argument and that some procedure of universalizability is a necessary condition for this moral standpoint” (1995: 266).

The universalism/particularism observations have continued to prove contentious in the feminist pursuit of “an emancipatory project based on Habermas’s discourse model” (McLaughlin, 1993: 607). While Fraser’s discussion of concurrent “counter-publics”, or “nonliberal, nonbourgeois, competing public spheres” (1992:115) is echoed in the work of other “reconceptualizing” efforts, such as that of Young’s and Benhabib’s, the degree to which Fraser finds oppositional identity cohering a counter-public undermines emphasis on particularity of experiences (Benhabib, 1992). Nevertheless, it maintains that the collective activity of marginalized actors (“counter-publics”) can be viewed as “access routes” (Fraser, 1992: 115) to political life and exchange – a point which is widely ignored in Habermas’ historiography of the public sphere. Such omissions are glaring for Fraser and other feminist critics. As “members of subordinated social groups, women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute… subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas”, the likes of which can “invent and circulate counterdiscourses [and] formulate oppositional interpretations of identities, interests and needs” (1992:123).

Thus this creation of “multiple publics”, Fraser challenges, is not, as Habermas argued, “a step away from greater democracy” but rather “a step toward it” (1992:117).
The conceptual framework of *multiple* and even *competing* public spheres has significantly aided this study’s theorizing. Given the articulation of “global public spheres” and “global forums” within interview data, and in addition the expression of age-based *separate* and *segmented* “forums” and discursive spaces among younger transnational feminists in particular, it is arguable that “counterdiscourses” – discussions, debate and constructions emerging out of marginalized feminist activists’ communities – have altered both the trajectory and organizational forms of “global feminism”. This is already observable in the aforementioned mid- and late-20th Century debates over “hegemonic” feminism and the emergent southern feminist coalitions such as DAWN; I argue here that the movement of young women mobilizing around their *identities* as *youth*, conceptualizing their organizations as “counter-publics” and constructing oppositional interpretations of identities, preferences and needs in the interest of moving toward a more democratic transnational feminist praxis can be considered another example of such alteration. While “not always virtuous”, subaltern counterpublics “help expand discursive space” by facilitating, “in principle”, the public discussion of “assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation” (Fraser, 1992:127). This is precisely what many young feminist activists asserted they were “doing” in constructing their own transnational networks; in part, the very deliberate and conscientious action of seceding, one young activist from Egypt explained, “helps to highlight what the problem [with ageist exclusion] is in the first place”.

The notion of a counter-public or *subaltern public* in feminist theorizing continues to surface in contemporary critical investigations of women’s movements and activism. Yadav (2010), for example, has investigated “spatially private but politically
public” (2010:2) work conducted by Yemini women activists living in gender-segmented publics. Though many of the women “work in the service of goals that we may not recognize as “advancing” them as women, dismissing their efforts as “privateness, tradition, or false consciousness” (2010:4) ignores the significant impact their actions have in “reconfiguring” the public sphere and public political debate. The cases Yadav recounts of Islamist women advancing “conservative social messages” and thus securing “the votes of centrists” as well as key roles in political decision-making bodies (2010:24) validate her assertion that women’s collective work in “private” spaces had dramatic “public” effects on their political and activist opportunities within the state. Similar cases made by Yang’s edited volume on women’s public spheres in China (1999), Lind’s discussion of women’s neighborhood organizations in Ecuador (2000), and more recently, Ytre-Arne’s study of the ways in which retheorizing “domestic” women’s magazines in Norway reveals “their political relevance” (2011: 247) also demonstrate the extent to which “counter-public” frameworks have been applied in contemporary research.

Less prominent in this literature are examinations of the ways in which notions of the public sphere have intersected transnational feminist organizing and theorizing. This is, in part, because the application of public sphere theory to transnationalism has been controversial. Research by scholars such as Olesen (2005) and Bowen (2004) have made a case for the kinds of global media and forums which might constitute a global public sphere, but as Fraser has argued, ideas essential to the very notion of a public sphere, such as normative legitimacy and political efficacy of public opinion, are “not easily

30 Yadav’s discussion, for example, draws on women advancing Islamist movements within Yemen.
associated with the discursive arenas that we today call ‘transnational public spheres’” (2007: 7). It is difficult, Fraser continues, to “associate the notion of legitimate public opinion with communicative arenas in which the interlocutors are not fellow members of a political community, with equal rights to participate in political life,” just as it is “hard to associate the notion of efficacious communicative power with discursive spaces that do not correlate with sovereign states” (2007: 8). Nevertheless, all of the young women participating in this study consistently emphasize that they *are* a community and foreground a communal sense of cohesive identity despite national and cultural difference. During interview sessions, many young activists were quite insistent that I understand their efforts to construct collective identities, interests and priorities. Founders of the Young Arab Feminist Network have been consistent in emphasizing the network’s common goals and methods despite religious difference. Within the pan-African young feminist network, young activists similarly underscored that members’ socio-economic differences are “irrelevant” to the network’s organization and goals and is not divisive. While most of these young women are urban and of means, to the degree that class status among them differs, they insist that this “does not alter” their “common goal of gender equality”.

The young women activists in all five transnational networks informing this study are far from homogenous; while some might have “regional” contexts in common, their different life experiences, religious affiliations, sexualities, economic realities and political practices do certainly make them a differentiated population. This is typical of a “transnational community”, and the reason Fraser finds empirical, conceptual and
political difficulties with the “transnational public sphere”:

“If the interlocutors do not constitute a *demos*, how can their collective opinion be translated into binding laws and administrative policies? If, moreover, they are not fellow citizens, putatively equal in participation rights, status and voice, then how can the opinion they generate be considered legitimate? How, in sum, can the critical criteria of *efficacy* and *legitimacy* be meaningfully applied to transnational public opinion in a post-Westphalian world?” (2007: 16)

Interestingly, this interview data reveals that these young women are conscious of such debate, not necessarily from an awareness or understanding of Fraser’s point here, but more broadly of questions about whether or not transnational communities “have enough in common” or can “cohere” to constitute a *legitimate* oppositional body generating “collective opinion”. This seems reactionary, stemming from the well-known and often-cited debates and divisions within global feminist and women’s organizing in generations past. Consciously intent on “not going back” to “old problems”\(^{31}\), young women’s TFNs have worked to devise methods of constructing forums for debate and the formation of collective opinion. Aware that this might only have significance in the “immediate context” of a global forum – the AWID international conference, for example, or United Nations global meetings on Youth\(^{32}\) – the young activists nevertheless assert that their work is “legitimate”, both in the context of representation and in normative democratic practice. That a key to this emphasis among younger feminists is a belief in the power of global civil society and the changing nature of global politics in a post-Westphalian state is obvious; this distinguishing approach within young women’s TFNs will be further elaborated upon and explored in the following chapters.

\(^{31}\) From an interview with a YFA activist
\(^{32}\) These two “global conferences” were cited repeatedly in interview data as “spaces” activists were intent on “altering” through their own work in youth TFNs
Conclusion

All four areas of the literature reviewed above (youth in global contexts, youth transnational organizing, democracy in global civil society and transnational feminist organizing and public sphere theory in feminist and transnational contexts) have informed, in combination with phase one of the research process, the organization and analysis of collected data. In addition, categories and themes emerging from these literatures are reflected in the interview questions facilitating the data collection. For example, the first phase of this project generated data based on age-related differences in mobilization tactics, organizational preferences, and goals among transnational feminist activists of varying ages. A simple code was devised to flag instances of these categories emerging from interview data (i.e. “tactics”; “organizing”), but in tandem with the literature indicating global hegemonies and divisiveness plaguing a variety of transnational activist movements and global civil society institutions, this code became more complex (i.e. “organizing-hierarchy”; “organizing-horizontal network”; “organizing-deliberative decisions”, etc.).

Phase two of this project included more in-depth and semi-structured interviews with young women in the five youth TFNs indicated above (AWID’s Young Feminist Activism Program; The Young Arab Feminist Network; The pan-African young feminist network; the ASTRA Youth Coalition; and the FRIDA fund network), with the central research question driving the purpose of this project – why do young women form separate youth transnational feminist networks – guiding the interview sessions. Here, too, a code developed from the literature, my own experiences in the global feminist community and phase one data enabled a framework to evolve and findings to emerge
more clearly. This code was also drawn from basic categories, for example representing
in field notes or transcripts an interview participant’s expression of the need for
autonomous learning spaces as “learning”, or flagging an expression of different
generational political practices as “difference”. Though there are three major categories
emerging as responses to this study’s main research question positioning young women’s
TFNs as learning spaces, counter-publics and alternate tactical spaces, descriptors and
subsequently codes changed to some degree, with some added (i.e., “globalization”) or
collapsed (i.e. “building activist identities” and “political socialization” simply became
“learning”) to reflect the complexity of the data.

The chapters that follow further develop on the findings related to the question of
why young women from a variety of national, cultural and political contexts find
coalescing around youth as an identity to be an effective practice for their feminist
activism. Needs, interests, preferences and priorities of individual activists are
subsequently described as they converge in the aforementioned three main categories.
The concluding chapter provides more discussion of findings as well as several
recommendations related for further research and theorizing into both “youth” and
feminist activism in global contexts.
Chapter 4
Young Feminists in Transnational Networks: Becoming the “Counter-public” and Constructing Public Spheres

This chapter identifies the ways in which young feminists organize transnationally as a “counter-public”, foregrounding youth as an identity that traverses their differences. It also offers some investigation into the emphasis placed by these young feminists on the importance of a “public sphere” in global activism and women’s movements especially, and provides illustrations of how public spheres are constructed and envisioned within young women’s TFNs. Study participants across generations were quite assertive about the need for more democratic practices within the organizations and networks comprising “transnational feminism”; many of the younger feminists cited forums for debate, negotiation and collaborative leadership determined through discourse to be a preferred method to secure these more democratic practices. Unsurprisingly, most of these young women in founding youth networks thus prioritized the construction of “forum” and discussion spaces, often struggling determinedly to both theorize and enact their ideas for “universal accessibility”. In some cases, the “accessible” space conceptualized is concrete and physical, such as that of regional meetings and conferences. In others, it is a discursive space, with access facilitated through information and communications technologies and the collaborative potentials of Web 2.0 applications. The struggle many young feminists find themselves in when constructing such spaces, however, echoes that of older-generation and established networks: “how can we include women who do not have regular Internet access?” asks Aynur, 23, of Azerbaijan. “I know [members of her SRHR youth network] with excellent ideas and solutions…but [we] only talk to them and see them maybe a few times per year, and they can never rely on steady Internet
connection”. Even accessibility to the physical spaces of debate such as the regional and international dialogues held by the YFA continues to prove difficult for many.

“Resources…travel money…these are hard to find,” explains Kazakh SRHR activist Marya, 27. “We do not always get to the [regional and global meetings] to participate”.

Interestingly, a third conceptualization offered by many participants is a more imagined, metaphorical “space”, suggested at times as compensatory vis-à-vis the challenges of physical or virtual access: members “just knowing” that a network is “determined to take everyone seriously, with equal importance,” explains a YAFN founder, is “enough to change the reality” of hierarchical feminist organizing and “begin working toward more diverse” interpretations feminism and strategies for feminist activism.

Data drawn from interviews, personal and group blogs and participant observation has informed each of the following sections. The first section contextualizes young women’s “public sphere construction” by highlighting stories of their being obstructed from participating in the forums, debates and decisions of established and older-generation networks. Such a sense of marginalization often precipitates the founding of a young women’s TFN, with its members determined not to replicate the same hierarchical, exclusionary conditions. Therefore, while the second section provides illustrative cases of the tools and mechanisms used to construct public sphere participation, the third and final section also exemplifies the ways in which young women struggle to enable “equal access” to these constructs, whether they are ICT-facilitated forums for debate or physical, face-to-face meeting spaces.
Questions of Democracy and Global Divides in Transnational Feminism

Historically, one of the most contentious issues in transnational feminist organizing has been the hegemonic effect of what Hawkesworth has referred to as “one-voice feminism” (2006: 132). As an operational and political tactic, this “convergence model” feminism (ibid.) held powerful appeal for activists seeking to penetrate the agendas of both state and international organizations on behalf of women’s advancement. Feminists working within the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and other official, professionalized women’s organizations built upon Beauvoirian theoretical foundations to argue that a common oppression united women despite differences of race, class and nation. This platform legitimated several advancements, chief among them the securing and codification of global policy on women’s rights, including international legal instruments such as the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Conceptualizations of a unified feminist “internationalist” voice also produced the first intergovernmental conference on women’s rights: the International Women’s Year (IWY) in 1975. Concurrent with this conference and the proliferation of feminist narratives of solidarity was the rise of the “Women in Development” movement. As Newland has argued, both Ester Boserup’s landmark *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (1970) and “the fact that the development projects and plans of the 1950s and 1960s had failed” (1991:123) sparked dialogue about women’s roles in production. USAID established a “Women in Development” office, the United Nations added an Institute for Training and Research for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and
women’s development fund (UNIFEM), and “virtually all of the major foundations that were active in international development, from giants like Ford and Rokefeller to much smaller institutions, had active women’s programmes by the end of the 1970s” (ibid.: 124).

And yet as Goetz and others point out, these physical manifestations of a burgeoning global women’s movement in fact “[threw] feminist politics into crisis” (1991:152). As the “shadow stories” of the IWY conference and its predecessors reveal, feminist organizations – even those solely comprised of civil society – replicated “geopolitical power dynamics” (Hawkesworth, 2006: 63), around the subject of development in particular. In a “ventriloquist’s fantasy” (John, 1996: 22), feminist organizations from the global North projected a singular “voice and view” onto a “silenced, subaltern subject” (Hawkesworth, 2006: 124), erasing the heterogeneity and differentiated history of Southern women’s movements and development priorities. Organizations such as Development Alternatives with Women for New Era (DAWN) emphasized the importance of engaging post-colonial critiques of both development and feminist programs from Globally Northern entities, as doing so might help to recover the concerns of “racially or nationally oppressed groups” of women prioritizing “food, housing, jobs, services and the struggle against racism” over liberal notions of gender equality (Sen and Grown, 1987: 24). These and other tensions associated with national, political, economic, religious and cultural difference created significant divisions within global feminist movements, and threatened the future of collaboration between women’s and feminist groups from different regions.
The work of Moghadam (2005) finds some convergence among more contemporary global feminist communities, and she and others (Desai, 2009; Basu, 2010) have pointed to the common agendas of global conventions such as the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Moghadam, 2005: 9) as an example. Moghadam notes that as TFNs proliferated and became both more “professionalized” and enmeshed with other types of global organizations, many managed to nevertheless sidestep hierarchy and bureaucracy (2005: 95). Practicing “feminist process”, large TFNs emphasized “participatory, democratic, [and] inclusive” leadership, “with emphasis placed on standpoint and personal experience as well as on knowledge and credentials” (2005: 95). Yuval-Davis has also asserted that the “transversal politics” of many transnational women’s organizations and feminist networks has enabled progress toward a more collaborative and participatory feminist praxis: as an organizational approach, transversal politics operate around several ideas: 1) “standpoint epistemology, which recognises that from each positioning the world is seen differently”; 2) “encompassment of difference by equality, [or the] recognition on the one hand that differences are important…but that notions of difference should encompass, rather than replace, notions of equality” and 3) “conceptual and political differentiation between positioning, identity and values [so that] people who identify themselves as belonging to the same collectivity or category can be positioned very differently in relation to a whole range of social divisions (e.g. class, gender, ability…)” (1999: 94-95). Yuval-Davis identifies evidence of transversal politics permeating global feminist discourses, from “UN NGO forums…[featuring] transversal dialogue and cooperation” to “the dialogues and co-
operation that have been taking place among women's and peace organisations from opposing sides of ethnic and national conflicts” (1999: 97).

But, argue many young feminists, the tendency to default to a “one-voice feminism” (Hawkesworth, 2006: 132) that does not represent such a process persists. The result is little “convergence” of ideas across generations and “older women speaking for younger ones”. A significant percentage of study participants – both older and younger – report that younger women are not perceived to be “equal” participants within their transnational feminist networks; 27 out of 33 activists from both older and younger generation cohorts identified young women’s lack of opportunities to participate in a network’s or organization’s leadership as a “problem”. Explains 23 year old Ore, from Nigeria, of a West African regional women’s network she joined at 19: “It’s as if [because] of my age I am ‘in training’ with no end coming soon….I have good ideas, and I want to help to make decisions. But if I approach the [leadership], I always learn the decisions have already been made, without my input”.

Young Women and Marginalization in Transnational Feminist Networks

If TFNs as transnational entities have been specifically committed to opening up collaborative spaces within global organizing, the sentiments expressed by Ore and many other young study participants suggests that beyond nation and class, age creates a particular obstacle to engaging equally in the forums and discursive spaces of transnational feminist activism. Given that both older and younger feminists participating in this study cited such forums as locations where major decisions about a network’s or
organization’s direction are made\(^\text{33}\), this puts younger women at a significant disadvantage in terms of participating as “full” members.

Conversations about “movement building” among older feminist activists in TFNs often foreground “how to attract more young women into the movement,” writes Peggy Antrobus, but “strategies aimed at achieving this objective”, while “proposed and implemented”, frequently “fall short of the goal” (2005: xii). While interview data suggests a surprising number of young women activists do feel strong ties to global feminist movements of “the past”\(^\text{34}\), many feel alienated from women’s and feminist movements “dominated by an older generation that appears to many young women patronizing, arrogant, or misdirected” (Antrobus, 2005: xiii). The Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), in developing a young feminist leadership program in 2007, was among the first TFNs\(^\text{35}\) to recognize the need for multigenerational dialogue between and among women’s organizations in their network. The “critical role that young feminists play in defending women’s rights” and “unique perspectives and strategies for organizing” that young feminists bring to the movement has been cited by AWID as central to successful collaboration among women’s organizations globally (AWID, 2010). In addition, as the network has cited that younger women experience patriarchy and rights violations differently, it has also emphasized the importance of ongoing “dialogues” between “multi-generational” groups of activists.

\(^{33}\) Many participants cited funding decisions, the construction and contents of organizational statements, reports and shadow reports, and decisions regarding issue priorities as agenda items determined through discussion and debate.

\(^{34}\) 17 out of 20 “young” activists responded positively during phase 2 interviews to this question, identifying “strong connections” and “emotional ties” to “past” feminist movements.

The creation of a Young Feminist Activism Forum and Young Women’s Caucus at the 2008 AWID International Forum in Cape Town, South Africa reflected much progress to Kathambi, a YFA member from Kenya. As she remarks, however, “the dismal showing of older women” at the final session of the Young Women’s Caucus\(^{36}\), which was reserved for “multigenerational dialogue”, was not only “disappointing” but also indicative of a larger issues with ageism in the network. Explains Caucus participant Ann, also from Kenya, “We worked hard to publicize the event…it was painful to see that [the older generation] celebrate us for our work and dedication to [women’s rights] and then ignored us when we set up a stage to voice young women’s concerns.” 28 year old American Tanya had been at the 2008 Young Women’s Caucus, and expressed similar feelings toward the conference outcomes: “We were so excited because we thought this was finally a more legitimate place for our participation – like we were given our own space for a few days to talk to each other, and then given an opportunity to join with the rest of the [forum] to get more involved. But it just did not happen that way…there was such little interaction between older women and younger women….despite all the hype about ‘young women at the forum’. So many of us left frustrated.” Tanya concludes that her perceptions of the young women’s caucus at the forum – and the realization that other young feminists shared in her feeling that “it just did not work, it was not what we needed” – motivated her to “get serious about finding alternatives” and “really explain [to AWID leadership] that having a young women’s program is all well and good but does not mean there is any real engagement or inclusion going on.”

\(^{36}\) The final session of the Young Women’s Caucus at the 2008 AWID Forum was reserved for “an intergenerational conversation about movement building” (AWID, 2008). The Caucus Program can be retrieved from [http://staging.awid.org/Forum-08-in-Review/Forum-08/Young-Feminists-the-Forum](http://staging.awid.org/Forum-08-in-Review/Forum-08/Young-Feminists-the-Forum).
“Without real engagement, no matter how messy or uncomfortable it becomes, we are just tokens,” explains 24 year old Jessica, a Canadian activist focusing on global gender-based-violence issues, who is also a member of AWID. “And I think that engagement cannot be real unless young women define for themselves what it means to participate in a global network or an event, as opposed to ways of participating being pre-determined by the older activists”. The idea of “predetermined” ideas about young people’s needs, priorities and visions for the future struck Latin American activist Maria when she traveled to a “high level youth meeting” at the United Nations. First, she points out, despite the large presence of young people and young women especially, there were few “official” opportunities for them to interact or have a “specific meeting place”. Second, as the meeting’s events unfolded, Maria noted “there were no speeches from governments considering [young people] as individuals with rights…there was just talk of young people as a group. It is as if they are objects to be fixed, not people who can and obviously do alter their lives themselves.” Maria was left “wondering whether the [panel speakers] and representatives had even talked to young people before [writing] their speeches and reports”. Based on what she had gathered “in the corridors and informal meetings” of young people, other youth delegates and conference attendees had similar questions. “But we lacked the space to discuss, debate, and propose any alternative thinking,” she continues; “imagine what would have been possible if we had some ability to incubate and talk over our different perspectives, and then present them to those representatives who we felt did not reflect our [perspective]”.

For some young women, exclusion comes from “an overly academic and professional focus” in transnational feminist networks. Tanya explains that many young
women work as unpaid activists, volunteering time whenever they can. “This means we are perceived to be lacking the professional credentials and academic background to participate on the same footing as older, staffed [activists]”. The divide created “by those who have long feminist NGO résumés and those who do not”, Tanya asserts, “logically goes along with age, but also determines who gets to make all the decisions. If you are young, and you volunteer, you are out of the picture”. 22 year old Amanda also explains that in her experience, “many regional and transnational women’s conferences are more academic than they are based on the community”, a model that “by nature excludes young people”. She describes a 2011 conference that was presented to her North American youth reproductive rights organization as a global activist networking and strategizing event for feminists. “We’re part of AWID and other networks, and when the invitation came to participate in panel discussions about indigenous rights and reproductive politics in Canada we were excited”. Amanda explains that “on paper”, the conference prioritized “the importance of having young women’s opinions and ideas for feminism represented as part of a global feminist congress”. But she and her colleagues experienced a very different reality, both as panel participants and conference attendees. First, the organizational structure was set up in such a way that it “diminished and ignored us…mostly because the [academic] tone of [the] discussions [were] way over our heads…” In Plenary sessions, the “presence and importance of young women” – a notion emphasized in the conference’s print material – was “not even acknowledged”, and “there were no keynote speakers, moderators, or emcees who were even under 50 years old”. Programming “that could have featured or celebrated young women’s voices” was “non-existent”. In panels, older-generation participants “made it clear that we lacked age
and experience”. The “weight given to academia versus community experience” was “clear throughout the conference”, and left Amanda and her colleagues “wondering why were even invited in the first place, if not to be tokens”.

This exclusion does not have to be just academic, explains Fatima, who is associated with the Young Arab Feminist Network. Fatima recalls a conversation that happened “over and over again” in “all three of the women’s organizations” she worked with after graduating from a university in Egypt with a degree in human development. Any sort of input she offered would be “politely acknowledged” but then “left behind”. Fatima insists that her life experiences and university studies certainly qualify her to offer advice and make informed decisions about the network’s direction or methods but, reiterating the statements of other YAFN members, Fatima explains she was often told she was “not there” when the movement “began” and so “did not fully understand how things are done”. This recurrent conversation convinced Fatima that “nothing would change” unless she was proactive. Seeking out other young women from the MENA region who also “[feel] the generation divide”, Fatima moved to “organize strategies and new ideas…to organize our own [youth] space to be heard among each other and then start dialogues with older generations, [even] with people outside of feminist politics.”

Many activists participating in this study describe similar experiences, and explain their concern that ageist marginalization exists on multiple levels. “It is not just in our home country,” explains Maria. “My experience at the UN [high level meeting on youth] showed me how much this divide is part of the culture [of] global organizing.” Maria continues that while her youth organization’s primary concern was combating this feeling of “youth isolation” and thus had a main priority of “initiating dialogue” between
Envisioning and Constructing the Young Feminist Public Sphere

Maria’s statement is representative of a more widespread articulation in the interview data of two specific needs young feminists identify. First, many articulate the need for a collective space where, as young people, they are no longer dispersed among older activists who marginalize their concerns and voices. This is “so important to do on a global level,” explains Fatima, “because we so often meet young women and no matter how different their lives are, they tell the same story of feeling isolated and like they are not taken seriously.” Fatima explains that while much of her energy as an activist is devoted to local issues such as street harassment in Cairo and regional issues such as Arab women’s rights, she nevertheless wanted a way “to reach out, to network with young feminists from all over the world, to share our story and let [them] know that if they were feeling shamed or ignored because of age that there is something they can do about this…to let them know that they are not alone in the world.” The desire to be part of the building of a “global young feminist community” is why Fatima first joined with youth networks, but this is something she feels goes “far beyond a networking opportunity” and speaks directly to construction of spaces for debate and other discursive interaction. The “divides of the past between women, because of religious misunderstandings, because of war and different cultural practices…our work here [in youth organizations] to build dialogue between very different members from very different parts of the world can help to connect across those divides.” Identifying “safe
spaces” such as youth-only network YFA, which depends on “parent” organization AWID for some funding and advisement but nevertheless is young-women created, led, and maintained, Fatima suggests that “here, we can debate without grave consequences…we can try to understand each other’s differences by interacting, even arguing. It is what we need to do [as feminists], but what we cannot do [in established] feminist spaces because of our age.”

Jessica continues this idea in suggesting that “older generation feminists are not just hesitant to ‘debate’ with us [younger women]”, but “do not want to debate with each other either.” Finding that in “international conferences and meetings…even email exchanges or on Internet forums,” the “rule” is that “we are supposed to talk about our connections and ‘celebrate’ our differences”. Jessica explains her observation that “if things get tense, they get dropped. It’s kind of like a taboo thing to talk about tension or identify tension because of how much [fighting] there was between feminists in the past”. The effect, “[covering] up real debate and tension people are feeling,” leads to “no one…really engaging with anyone else in a way that is real.” Looking for “real” experience and exchange, Jessica felt she would find it among a group of younger feminists, and as she explains, she did: “joining the [YFA] connected me to other younger women from cultures I do not know and really understand, cultures whose ‘feminism’ I do not understand. I felt like I could actually ask questions and yes, I chose my words carefully, but because it was a place where that whole taboo about conflict was not really emphasized, I also felt I could be honest in saying I did not understand some things.” When pushed further, Jessica explains the “confusion” she felt was about “women who would wear headscarves but participate in feminist activism”: 
The one time I was brave enough to actually bring it up I was immediately shut down. It was at a day-long event in New York attached to a United Nations [conference], and part of the discussion was about Sharia and international law. I was explaining at a breakout session about my confusion, and was told that it was ‘inappropriate’ and ‘ignorant’ to ask questions about head scarves. I mean, I know it was ignorant – I was ignorant about it, which is why I was even asking. How am I supposed to ‘get over’ my ignorance if I cannot ask questions, even if they are not meant to be offensive?

Becoming an active member of the YFA’s “Young Feminist Wire”, an online portal and place for YFA members to connect, Jessica was introduced to young activists from Muslimah Media Watch, a forum “where Muslim women can critique how their images appear in the media and popular culture”\(^\text{37}\), as well as with individual bloggers participating in the Kolena Laila Project, an initiative “to devote a day, annually, to blog about the problems facing oppressed women in the Arab region”\(^\text{38}\).

“We had interacted during an e-Learning session\(^\text{39}\),” Jessica explains, “and I made some contacts. I felt like we had things enough in common, especially when we were all focusing on youth issues and activism…and I guess that made me more comfortable to ask questions [and get…] a better understanding of how different women see religion and feminism connecting. Were they offended? Maybe…but no one said so, and I feel like at least we could have some exchange about it. Not one of [the three YFA members] I talked to shut me down. ”

While 57 year old Saba, a women’s human rights professional originating from Palestine, does not necessarily agree that young women “cannot ask questions or bring up points of debate” among older generation activists or in events led by established networks and organizations, she “can understand the need to feel comfortable” that so


\(^{39}\) The YFA’s E-Learning Sessions, held on its Internet portal the Young Feminist Wire, are described in detail in chapter 6.
often leads young women to create their own, youth-only forums for debate. “I have seen young women being very hesistant to come to the microphone or the center of the room, yes,” she explains of international forums and meetings, “and even though I perceived this to be fear, perhaps they do not feel comfortable...perhaps [we] do not make them feel comfortable or welcome.” Saba continues that youth-only discursive spaces where young feminists from different backgrounds can interact is “probably a great learning experience for them,” and “will perhaps create a better future” for global feminism. “If feeling safe enough to argue with each other will foster better understanding, then I [hope] these young women grow up together keeping those feelings of connection and leading this movement in the future.”

A second, related need that many young women articulate is oriented around multigenerational exchange. Each of the YFA activists interviewed for this study recounted deliberate and strategic efforts to increase young activists’ access to established forums for feminist debate, explaining their belief that a subsequent increase in integrated participation would secure a more democratic global feminism. “Some of us felt the only way that would happen was if we organized as a group first,” explains Ann, “and [leadership within AWID] had been starting to give us some space.” But the creation of youth leadership programs in 2001 left some young women feeling “patronized”, Ann recalls, and many others, explains Tanya, “concerned that [youth programs meant] we were becoming segregated, like a separate but not equal pattern when it came to inclusion in any AWID activities”. Recalling that defining a “youth space” within AWID was a “very contentious issue” among younger activists, Tanya
explains that it was nevertheless “unanimous” that “the key to improving our position was to be working with older members, not away from older members”. She continues:

What happened at the 2008 Forum, that very few older women took up [the young women’s caucus] invitations for multigenerational dialogue, just reconfirmed how badly we needed a change in the direction of “youth” programs within AWID…how this exclusion was not going to be solved just because we now had a mini-network forming within AWID that connected young women to each other. It was just not going to be enough.

Tanya relates that the “caucus and dialogue” plan she and other Young Women’s Caucus members proposed to initiate at the forum was strategic, based on observations of other multigenerational feminist dialogues such as the 2007 “Listening to Each Other” forum sponsored by several global feminist networks and convened at the Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL) in New Brunswick, NJ. Tanya did not attend the meeting, but her organizational colleagues who did “witnessed the possibilities that can come out of directly addressing this issue of generation and difference through debate”.

The meeting’s format was “mostly organized around larger meetings that left [participants] with no choice but to interact. There were a few [age-segregated] events, but the main point of the gathering was to have the exchange about the problem [of] younger women being excluded from the movement.” Tanya cites several outcomes from the 2007 dialogue report as evidence that “there was real exchange, real listening going on”, and specifically directs me to a finding that “young women who are no longer in the youngest generation but not yet in the oldest generation often get ignored. They are no

40 “The Power of Movements”, AWID’s 2008 International Forum, included opportunities for participants to created caucuses, which were “self-organized by forum delegates on a wide range of issues and interests,” and “held during lunches at the forum” (AWID, 2008).
41 The dialogue, entitled “Listening to Each Other”, was held 30 September – 3 October, 2007, and was sponsored by CREA, a women’s human rights and development organization headquartered in New York City and New Delhi, the US-based Center for Women’s Global Leadership, and the Youth Coalition, an international organization of young people (15-29 years old) headquartered in Ottawa who advocate for young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights.
longer seen as young rising stars doing creative and visionary work, nor are they *grand dames* acknowledged for wisdom and experience” (CWGL and CREA, 2007). Tanya asserts that such a conclusion “is not just some cliché about youth”, and “must have come from intense conversation. It shows the complexity of the event…it shows that *someone heard young women feeling this way*, and agreed to the point that it made a ‘consensus’ for the final report. That is the kind of interaction we were after in 2008 [at the AWID International Forum], and it was just so frustrating that it did not happen”.

It was this sense of frustration that motivated Tanya and others to pursue new directions for the YFA that more explicitly included “movement building objectives”. Program coordinator Ghadeer explains that the YFA’s focus since 2009 has remained on the development and support of young women-led activism, but has simultaneously built programs to engage with older generation members. While this includes covering logistical needs via seeking consultation with and advice from older activists within AWID, it also includes collaborating on the development of ongoing exchange and negotiation. This means partnering with older activists “as equal team members” for projects such as the designing of the YFA’s e-Learning initiatives and the creation of the young feminist activist fund FRIDA. It also includes a “complete overhaul” of the plans for AWID’s April 2012 forum, explains Tanya: “the fact that young women are to be included as featured speakers in the main forum’s activities during plenaries and on panels is already one better step toward equality.”

In sum, the data discussed above identifies two needs articulated by young feminists: first, the construction of “new”, youth-only public forum space, and second, improved access to existing, “multigenerational” public form space. Though these are
presented as distinct needs, it is important to note that some participants view these as conceptually linked, and even sequential. As YFA member Ann explains it, the two needs “build off one another in an ongoing way”; she envisions young women meeting and debating regularly through the platforms offered by the YFA, and through this experience “becoming a stronger, more recognized force” that will subsequently “have to have a secure place in regular events like the Forum and other international conferences”.

Position statements and self-descriptions from other young women’s TFNs such as the Young Arab Feminist Network (YAFN) have articulated similar ideas, emphasizing that an “end goal” of more regular participation of young women in global feminist discourse and agendas will only be met if younger members themselves organize as a unit, finding “safe space” (YAFN, 2011) to “develop as leaders” (W30, 2011) before engaging more regularly with the older generation. Still, some other interview participants from the same networks did not necessarily find these two needs – separate space and integrated space – to be sequential or even necessarily linked. Raina explains that she sought out the discursive forums offered by YAFN member projects such as Sawt al Niswa, an online forum and “feminist webspace” for young Arab women originating in Lebanon, because she liked the idea of “constructing and questioning the direction of Arab feminism with this generation”. For Raina, “this has nothing to do with whether or not I will later or at the same time interact with older activists…I like that this [is] just younger people, and that they are talking.”

The following sections provide examples of young women making efforts to construct a public sphere through online and face to face forums for debate, as well as young women describing the ways in which they attempt to build multigenerational
exchange. The examples illustrate the complexities represented by Raina’s statement above. While some participants described in interviews ongoing or “eventual” collaboration with older-generation activists, and thus saw their efforts as supplemental, others saw their work in young women’s TFNs as serving the purpose of supplanting existing feminist public spheres. First, the ways in which young women utilize their TFNs as “counter-publics” will be described through the exemplary cases of the YFA Regional Dialogues and the online forum Sawt al Niswa (affiliated with the YAFN). Second, the ways in which young women use their collectivity and collaboration to seek out and engage with older activists in forging “multigenerational” projects will be illustrated, through the examples of several YFA programs and initiatives. The final section highlights some of the difficulties young women have experienced when attempting to construct a public sphere which is accessible and democratic.

**Building a Young Women’s Counter-Public: Youth Regional Dialogues**

While many of this study’s participants such as Mexican SRHR Activist Maria maintain “there has always been a youth presence at global gender justice conferences…even if that meant meeting after the events, in a hotel room”, constructing a more official and concrete place for exchange and debate has remained a priority for many young women’s TFNs. The YFA’s strategy to this end has been to lobby for space adjacent and supplementary to existing AWID events. In 2008 and 2010, this manifested in a series of “Young Women’s Dialogues” taking place prior to official AWID conferences on topics such as Resource Mobilization and Building Feminist Movements and Organizations. The strategy behind securing these spaces was three-fold. First, it gathers young women from vastly different regions under a common identity of “youth”. Consistent in their
articulation that “youth” as a concept is subject to change based on regional and cultural norms or political and even personal preferences, the YFA members responsible for organizing the Dialogues nevertheless find it important to construct a space for those who identify as “young” to gather and investigate the commonalities of their experiences. As those “common experiences” so often include feeling marginalized from participating in the “public forums” of transnational feminism – global and regional conferences and meetings, day-to-day operations within local organizations or regional networks, the mechanisms of decision-making and agenda-setting in any of the above – they arrange themselves as a “counter-public” based on age. Young women simultaneously and “officially” gathering to conference also serves the purpose of building a more public mass and presence; that the YFA encouraged participants to blog about their experiences also makes their exchanges and debates, and subsequently the issues and ideas determined through their conferencing, more publicly visible. Finally, the combination of this more physical, mass presence and the articulation of voices from within it can alter the official or “main” conference itself, in terms of creating a more multigenerational public forum, with a stronger and more “legitimate” youth presence. As the Dialogue participant testimony and interview data included below demonstrates, this was in fact how most young feminists perceived the Dialogues to function, and why so many stressed the “success” of the model.

2008 MENA Dialogue

As a blog post by YFA member Bessma explained of the 2008 Young Women’s Dialogue taking place in Marrakech, Morocco, prior to AWID’s Meeting on Resource
Mobilization and Movement Building in the MENA, the one day event provided a space for young women participants to share experiences and strategize, but also to “challenge each other”, which they did by “playing ‘devils advocate’ in small working groups”.

This was “the most important part of having a day reserved for young women,” explains conference participant Suha, from Lebanon. “I have [radical] ideas, and I had prepared to keep quiet about them when I heard [a Lebanese sexuality rights organization] could sponsor my attendance at the conference. This is a conservative region, and I am young – I basically expected very little opportunity to have my say. But the [young women’s dialogue] created an opportunity for that… invited opportunity for that. It was surprising”. Study participants attending the 2008 dialogue echoed Suha’s feeling that the Dialogue was a “surprise” – it was one of the first times the YFA attempted to use parallel or adjacent space for a youth-only meeting, and the team responsible for strategizing and planning the event was not only “extremely conscious of how differently people conceive of ‘youth’ depending on their culture’s history”, explains current YFA coordinator Ghadeer, but also unsure of how attendees would respond to open sessions that might garner tense discussion. But as Suha’s statements clarify, the group bonded around their perception of a common, age-related subjugation and were very interested in honest – even heated – exchange. “There was no ice to break”, writes Nadeen, another conference attendee, in a blog for the Young Feminist Wire and Global Fund for Women; Dialogue participants “bonded immediately” in talking about their common experiences of being marginalized from established movements and struggling to find funding because of their age. Suha also finds that this was an important part of why later in the conference attendees were comfortable enough to speak openly:
“sessions about fundraising and organizational planning showed us that we are ‘on the same side’, working toward the same goal [of] advancing women’s rights and youth rights. [That] feeling of connection made it easier to be honest later, discussing my views on sexuality activism. Activists who were more religiously conservative did not agree with me, but this is good tension that comes from an honest place and is productive. Because [the Dialogue] let us know each other first, the level of the conversation was intense but not negative.”

Nadeen also offers a clarification of the ways in which these spaces reserved for young feminists’ exchange and debate become “productive”, connecting the outcomes of the Dialogue to the broader context of a youth voice in transnational feminism. Nadeen writes:

Having this youth-only day had its visible effects on the rest of the conference (in which I am sitting now). Young women felt empowered, they found their voices and each other, they formed an alliance that stood strong on many issues raised in the workshops by the older generations of women’s activists. And yes, we raised sexual and bodily rights at the bigger conference!

Like Nadeen, other study participants discussing this Dialogue in interviews stress how “productive” the process was, pointing not just to the immediate outcomes of a stronger, more formidable presence at the AWID conference on Resource Mobilization, but to the conceptualization of longer-term projects: the scaffolding of both FRIDA, the young feminist fund, and the Young Arab Feminist Network (YAFN) emerged out of this 2008 Dialogue. First, FRIDA coordinator Amina explains that in the 2008 Dialogue, participants unanimously agreed that there were funding shortfalls for young women’s feminist initiatives in global social justice movements, but disagreed about the core reasons for such shortfalls. While data from AWID’s “Where is the Money for Women’s
Rights surveys helped to provide the group with some baseline for consensus, disagreements stemmed from “some [members] attributing this shortfall to donors not being interested in funding young women’s issues, while others felt more strongly that the money is there, but [we] don’t know which donors to approach for funding young women’s work.” This “debate” and exchange, Amina continues, is what helped FRIDA develop into the “collaborative, participatory and democratic” project it is currently.

“[We] realized that a fund would have to address multiple angles of resources – money, but also management and organizational choices – to address these different concerns that were being voiced during the dialogue”. In addition, “the conversations showed us how important ongoing input is” to a feminist organization that “everyone feels represented by”; this is also something that contributed to FRIDA’s choice to draw on models of participatory philanthropy in which “young women – the activists themselves – are the ones deciding which projects get funded”.

The 2008 Dialogue in Marrakesh also demonstrated to many young feminists from the MENA region how much a “new Arab feminist discourse” was needed. Sessions discussing “national politics” and “theology” in the context of women’s rights revealed something surprising to most participants: it is not these issues per se that participants found problematic or divisive; rather, it is the established networks’ and organizations’ compulsion to focus myopically on these issues, to “let them define Arab feminism”, as one participant put it, that needs to change. As discussions for how to make the discourse of Arab feminism more inclusive of youth voices gave way to the first conceptualizations

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42 An AWID research initiative producing data from surveys and conferences of global women’s organizations, with some attention to young women’s movements: http://www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Where-is-the-Money-for-Women-s-Rights
43 FRIDA’s model of participatory philanthropy is described in more detail in chapter 5.
of a network for young feminists from the MENA region, it too functioned productively: as YAFN member Fatma explains in a video blog, discussion enabled (and continues to enable) the network to conceptualize “the title of Arab woman” more broadly and “inclusively”, so that, “as a Nubian,” she “does exist” within the discourse, or does find her own identity fitting into that of her network’s discussions. She continues to explain how through discussion, members negotiated the idea that “Arab woman” can be thought of as a regional identity” and “not as an ideology or political cause” that can be exclusionary. Clarifying that her hope is to also include in Arab feminist discourses the voices Sudanese and “Egyptian Nubian” women, Fatma closes the blog by explaining that despite her “different ethnicity”, this kind of discussion and exchange have helped her to find a place among “Arab women’s rights” movements.

2010 CEE Dialogue

The structure of the 2008 Dialogue, wherein prior to the official proceedings, participants were provided informal spaces which encouraged the discovery of shared experiences, replicated but also enhanced in the 2010 Young Women’s Dialogue in Tbilisi, Georgia. As in 2008, the 2010 event took place one day prior to an AWID regional meeting on resource mobilization. It included 36 young women from 18 countries active in a range of feminist issues, from LGBT and disability rights to young women’s representation in regional development. In 2010, however, the YFA decided to offer more informal spaces for connection in the form of pre-Dialogue social events. As Dialogue participant

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44 Participants were women under 30 from a range of non-governmental organizations, including local or regional women’s and feminist organizations as well as larger transnational women’s and feminist organizations including the Global Fund for Women and WIDE. Participants’ countries of origin included Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine.
Elizabeth writes for the Young Feminist Wire’s blog, it was the pre-Dialogue event that enabled feelings of connection and trust to grow between participants despite language, cultural, religious, political and ethnic differences:

I was uncertain about how we would establish common ground and communication within the Dialogue. I [counted] at least 15 different native languages…not to mention the fact that we have participants working [on] everything from gender-based violence to LGBT rights to women’s political participation […] Well, last night we found common language in a tradition that is indeed shared and strong through the region: poetry. Over 15 participants signed up to read during the open-mic session, sharing both their own poetry and the writing of women who have inspired their activism. We heard poetry in English, Russian, Bulgarian, and Serbian…as a poet [myself] and someone who learned Russian language through traditional poetry recitation, I left the session feeling inspired by both the creative work and incredibly supportive environment.

As Elizabeth’s post continues, she explains that the informal, pre-Dialogue event set a particular tone for the Dialogue that was to follow the next day: a potentially contentious agenda full of questions about gender and sexuality rights, regional politics, and activism across cultural difference was off-set by the sense of “fun” and “freedom of expression” the participants experienced during the open-mic event. Linking this “freedom” and the “supportive environment” she found during the event to “the real work” of the conference, Elizabeth finishes by explaining that she felt “excited”, rather than hesitant, to fully engage with the other young women in the Dialogue.

For Slovak feminist Johanka, the pre-Dialogue event helped to clarify the ways in which the participants could form some solidarity despite vast differences. As she writes for the Young Feminist Wire’s blog, Johanka found the range of feminisms represented at the Dialogue disconcerting. While some suggested feminism is “about fun and passion”, others were “angry”, likening feminism to “swimming up the stream”. To Johanka, such conversations highlighted the “different contexts and countries” and “very different

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45 Representing the Global Fund for Women
realities” participants faced, and also signaled the serious challenges the group would have to face in working together to address advocacy work on regional and transnational levels. As she explains, however, the nearly universal experience of “ageism toward young women, lack of solidarity from women in established feminist organizations, lack of money and awareness/understanding of feminisms” among Dialogue participants “showed us [our] experiences were so similar…no matter where we’re from”. This provided a much needed “sense of solidarity” and even “comfort and motivation” Johanka explains she needs in order to “work as much as I can [to disrupt]” inequalities.

Georgian feminist Medea also explains that such solidarity stems from the ways in which age creates common experiences despite very different social and political circumstances or religious beliefs and cultural practices in another post for the Young Feminist Wire. However, Medea stresses the importance of debate within the Dialogue, clarifying that “solidarity” need not be synonymous with consensus. “I see a grain of truth in every speech made”, she writes, commenting on discussions related to SRHR issues, “although I do acknowledge that some ideas are too radical for me. But so what? The power is in the diversity and I truly believe that with diversity comes new knowledge and new truths. The key message for me is that we listen…[we are] appreciated and tolerated.” Medea continues that because of the “solidarity” and “support” established within the Dialogue prior to these more contentious conversations, her normally reserved demeanor “could not stop [her] from challenging and arguing with those who [she] disagreed with”. This is the key to a productive, more “real” feminist discourse for the region, she finishes: “we might not have reached consensus, but I still believe that a group of people with the similar belief, ideas, goals and vision [of equality.] no matter
how different our approach is, makes for a powerful force. It is unwise not to take into account the diversity of perspective especially when the room is full of youngster energy”.

“*Young Feminist Webspace*” and Discursive Counter-Publics

As illustrated above, many of the participants in the 2008 and 2010 Young Women’s Dialogues encouraged each other to use YFA webspace to blog about their reactions to the event’s proceedings – including points of contention and disagreement. In some ways, the YFA supposed this would serve the purpose of a more inclusive conversation; “we are aware that our movements consist of many young women,” writes the Young Feminist Wire team of the 2010 dialogue, “those present at the meeting and those who aren’t. And so we will do our best to bring all the information and knowledge generated at the meeting to our wider audience”. While the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to create a more inclusive public forum is problematic, as will be discussed further in the next section, many of this study’s participants nevertheless stress the importance and usefulness of the Internet as a space that can both supplement and supplant the public forums within established networks that young women feel excluded from.

All of the young women’s TFNs discussed in this study utilize some form of ICT-enabled discussion forum. Rose’s efforts to build a Pan-African young women’s network are currently represented only through her work on the group’s website, wherein members keep a collaborative blog and communicate with each other through posts and comments. Astra Youth’s website does not maintain a community blog but utilizes
Facebook\textsuperscript{46} to connect both members and organizations in a communicative forum, as does the FRIDA fund\textsuperscript{47}.

For the YFA, the well-established Young Feminist Wire provides its 450-member community with opportunities to post responses to any information on the site, as well as opportunities to participate in a collaborative blog. Since its launch in 2010, examples of topics covered – and debated – on the Wire’s blog include female genital cutting in Egypt, the effects of decisions made at the 2012 World Economic Forum on young women, and the youth-advocacy campaigns of multinational corporations and intergovernmental organizations. Promotional materials from “The Girl Effect” campaign\textsuperscript{48} for example, addressing poverty and young women in developing countries, inspired YFA member Sarah to post a critical blog: “All the “investing in girls” campaigns and videos… propagate the idea of the “helpless Third World woman”. They talk about women in developing contexts as if they have no choices except those provided by beneficent donors.” YFA and Wire community members responded in various ways; in her own blog, Rabia writes “it is a classic case of gender stereotyping by claiming/assuming that all girls will use their profits to “help her family”. This wasn’t circumstantial: the FAQs section on their website elaborates that the problem they aim to solve is poverty (so girls are a means to an end).” Submitting a video blog in response, Akhila argues that while she acknowledges she also finds the campaign’s stereotypical images problematic, she feels it might also “help to raise awareness” about the unique difficulties poverty creates for young women in developing countries.

\textsuperscript{46} \url{http://www.facebook.com/pages/Astra-Youth/163861566966676}
\textsuperscript{47} \url{http://www.facebook.com/pages/Astra-Youth/163861566966676#!/FRIDAFund}
\textsuperscript{48} Sponsored by the Nike Foundation, the NoVo Foundation, the United Nations Foundation and the Coalition for Adolescent Girls, “The Girl Effect” is a “movement to get powerful people to talk” about the impact of global poverty on adolescent girls.
This discussion exemplifies how members are able to not only share their perspectives but engage each other in conversation through digital writing. That this kind of exchange has the potential to “build a new feminist discourse” is precisely what the web project Sawt Al Niswa (Women’s Voice) is counting on. A “feminist webspace” designed to create a “a pool of knowledge” and “[diversify] the construction of Arab feminist discourse”, Sawt Al Niswa was created by Lebanese members of the YAFN as a separate but tangential project. As the YAFN has asserted both collectively, through their own website and organizational statements, and individually, in personal blogs and interviews for this study, young feminists in the MENA region are dissatisfied with the existing discourse of “Arab feminism”. They argue it does not include the perspectives or voices of younger women, and has remained narrowly focused on particular ideas, methods and tactics. Some articulate this as being “stuck” on questions related to “Islamic feminism and secular activists”; others point to the more established women’s movements and organizations being reluctant to consider targets beyond or outside of the state, or hesitance to engage in “alternative” political tactics. The young feminists behind Sawt Al Niswa point out that young women are consistently constructing their own political, activist and theoretical discourses “outside” of more official, institutional or established feminist forums. However, the site’s founders also assert that, like the older generation of activists, young women may not recognize their expressions as valuable contributions to a “legitimate feminist discourse”. A page entitled “The Return of the
Warriors” speaks to this directly:

“Examine again your Facebook statuses, your tweets and the SMSes you’ve sent during critical moments, be they personal statements, sentimental phrases or those of your sheer wit. [This] writing is one of the essential tools in critical times, and you know as much as we do that we are living in critical times, even if its direct implications haven’t altered our day to day lives yet. They are bound to happen. Change is inevitable…”

Continuing on to emphasize to young activists that even short and “alternative” forms of expression can be considered “feminist writing”, the Sawt Al Niswa founders are also adamant that such forms of expression have a legitimate place among existing feminist discourses. In calling for contributions to and participation on the site, the editors express that

Arab feminists are well rooted in the Arab region and diaspora….their discourse doesn’t stem from a void, and they are not a project of western concerns and practices. Sawtalniswa…is working to highlight the need for…writings that question and reflect on the roots of Arab feminism, and how that affects its discourse. Where do we come from as Arab women, and what happened to us exactly? When we look at our pasts, what pasts are we looking for or writing about?

Seeking to build an online community of “the marginalized, the outcasts, the “weird” ones, and [activists] who make people move away from them because they defy the status quo of any community”, Sawt Al Niswa hosts “videos, photo essays, articles and essays, and artwork…perceived through a feminist lens”. The idea is to “function as a pool” of the voices of young women “in the process of questioning the kind of feminist discourse they want to speak and express themselves through”. The “Niswa” hope the “the voice(s) within the website” enable the construction of an Arab feminist discourse reflecting “a spectrum of Arab realities”.

For Sawt Al Niswa community member Marwa, the collaborative blogs and discussion forum offer one of the few places contentious debates about Arab feminism

50 http://www.sawtalniswa.com/banat-tariq/
can unfold. She offers the example of Sawt Al Niswa editor Sara blogging about 19 year old Egyptian art student Aliaa Magda Elmahdy’s well-publicized decision to post nude self-portraits on her personal blog. An “act of personal expression and protest” motivated by her intolerance for the “censoring of [Egyptians’] knowledge, expression and sexuality”, Elmahdy says she produced and published the photos to challenge the “growing conservatism since the 1970s” and “its potential to worsen” if, in Egypt’s undetermined future, fundamentalist groups gain political ground. “[The established feminist organization] I work with dismissed Alia’s actions immediately as childish and too dramatic,” Marwa explains. “I wish they were not so fast to dismiss her decision. Why did she do that? What does it mean? Maybe there is some lesson that can be learned, even if we find [her actions] distasteful.” Acknowledging that some of the older-generation members cheered Elmahdy’s “daring to break social boundaries”, they still did not focus much attention on the demonstration, despite younger members’ interest in the action. Marwa turned to Sawt Al Niswa to propose a short essay on the subject, but found one had already been posted. “I did not really agree with [the writer’s] vision for the story, but it did not matter. I offered some comments about it and began to talk to others on the site…it became the conversation I wanted to have but could not.”

Open forums such as Sawt Al Niswa are subject to “vandalism”, as many feminist blogs and forums are. Though not in reference to Sawt Al Niswa, Erika Smith of the Association for Progressive Communications’ Women’s Networking Support Program (APC WNSP) explained in a February 2011 interview for the Young Feminist Wire that “women bloggers – and especially feminists – face not only critical comments about content but sexualized violent threats. Given the information we inadvertently reveal

51 Statement from Elmahdy’s blog: http://arebelsdiary.blogspot.com/
about ourselves online (especially over time!), attacks become personalized and can be quite intimidating. The backlash against feminists online is intense and is an attempt to silence and censor.”

While Sawt Al Niswa editors do not report such issues specifically, the comments feature inviting readers to respond to blogs enable a degree of anonymity; Marwa points to this specifically in explaining that “some of the discussion in response to [the blog about Elmahdy] got racist. That is going to happen when people can hide behind a screen name”. Nevertheless, that she and others who contribute regularly to Sawt Al Niswa were able to discuss “the Elmahdy scandal” in the context of Arab feminisms specifically was inspiring to Marwa. A representative exchange she indicates can be found early in the forum, wherein Sawt Al Niswa editor Sara – who also authored the post – defends her support of Elmahdy’s decision.

In response to Sara’s post, Sawt Al Niswa community member Mariam contends that Elmahdy made a poor choice “in the context” of “the Arab world”. “Nudity is a right,” she offers, but might have been a more effective choice in the “less conservative West”. She continues: “[Nudity] is not the rule to freedom…I think as feminists, it is our duty to come up with our own path of feminism…as a group.” To this, Sara points out that female nudity is “very much” part of “Arab women’s history”:

Female temples for goddess al Lat\textsuperscript{53} for example were nude houses. thats how much nudity for us as arab women was part of our identity and history. Also, examine women’s spaces and hamam’s and see how nudity is a common practice.

Mariam responds positively to this but maintains her original point, reiterating “I think Arab culture is complicated anyway and the faces of the region vary which even more so


\textsuperscript{53} A reference to pre-Islamic Arabian goddess Allât
require that we come up with our own theories anyway. Nudity was part of many cultures historically anyway and was a lot more accepted than now.”

Having a consistently accessible space for such debate is an essential part of “forging a new discourse” of Arab feminism; to the young activists comprising the Young Arab Feminist Network, of which Sawt Al Niswa is a part, this is one of the central motivations behind forming “safe, youth-only spaces” for feminist exchange. Marwa’s case – wanting to discuss these issues more openly and consistently, but failing to find access to existing feminist forums in which to do so – is representative of a problem consistently raised by other participants of this study. It was especially important to members of the YAFN that this dialogue be conducted among a diverse, global group of activists, for example reflecting the perspectives of young women within the Arab diaspora as well as those living within the region. For founding member Fatma, this was a way to diversify and more importantly democratize the existing Arab feminist movement, to avoid the separations of “ethnicity, class, background, ideological affiliation, [and] sexual orientation” the younger women argue have been pervasive.

But as members of the YAFN, YFA, and other young women’s TFN's work toward building a more inclusive, participatory and democratic global feminism, they also confront the realities of members who are unable to participate fully or regularly in the conversations – both physical and virtual – that comprise their “counter-public” forum. The following section addresses how members of young women’s TFNs attempt to confront the difficult realities of uneven access.

The Difficulties of Accessibility
As interview data from participants from all regions suggests, young feminists are concerned that financial resources are a consistent and ongoing determinant of who can have access to the means of public sphere engagement. Activists from economically poorer countries in the CEE and Common Wealth of Independent States pointed out how difficult it is to find funding for members to attend regional dialogues, especially for those without staff positions. “This is always the younger members,” explains Aynur, from Azerbaijan, “with the little money [the organization does] have for travel, it is reserved for staff or for the president, and not for volunteers”. The limited exposure younger volunteers and even staff have to larger regional and global meetings is also a concern for Tanya, whose SRHR organization is headquartered in Toronto: “A lot of our activists are from poor neighborhoods, and cannot afford to fund one dime of travel themselves. Even if we have a youth-only dialogue or meeting, how would we get [these] members there?”

In order to address the constrained resources often keeping young feminists from attending global conferences or regional meetings, young women’s TFNs such as the YFA have attempted to highlight the ways in which ageism can play a role in whether organizations receive funding. Making the case that youth are capable and professional despite their perceived lack of experience, young feminists have lobbied for increased funding to young women’s initiatives, appealing to both the international donor community and established transnational feminist networks for support. This has become a primary focus for much of the YFA’s activities, as the subsequent development of FRIDA, the young feminist fund, illustrates. FRIDA coordinator Amina points out that much of the focus within the community of young women activists organizing FRIDA
has been on generating funding. In many ways, she explains, the idea of generating a
more even distribution of funding is a prominent way of conceptualizing and working
toward network members having “improved access” and “equal participation”.

Still, many young activists feel the most successful solutions emanate from
technology, and have focused their attention to building websites and online platforms for
debate and exchange quite strategically. This can include conscientious choices at the
programming level, such as operating with open-source software systems and choosing to
upload documents with programs that are universally compatible, with some even
offering free downloads of document readers within their websites. It can also include
consideration of ways to overcome language as a barrier to participation; as they work
toward building a pan-African young women’s network, interview participants from
Kenya, Nigeria and Cameroon reported considering a partnership with networks such as
the African Network For Localization (AnLoc), which sponsors numerous projects
related to translating “web content, information on keyboards, fonts, etc.”\(^54\) into over 100
African languages.

Nevertheless, the same activists stress how “small” these steps are. While the
“global digital divide” is well documented by both scholars and intergovernmental
organizations measuring cyberinfrastructure development and access\(^55\), study participants
also highlighted aspects of digital divides that stem from social stratifications related to
factors such as gender and age. Young women who may have unfettered access to

\(^54\) The African Network for Localization: [http://www.africanlocalisation.net/anloc-project](http://www.africanlocalisation.net/anloc-project)

\(^55\) The ITU’s teledensity measurements show the “developing world” in aggregate lags far behind the world
globally in Internet and mobile technology users per 100 inhabitants. Despite a dramatic increase in the
number of users from economically developing countries, 2012 figures still reveal only 9.6 Internet users
per 100 inhabitants in Africa and 21.9 users per 100 inhabitants in the Asia/Pacific region, compared to 65
and 55 users per 100 inhabitants in Europe and the United States, respectively (ITU, 2010).
communications platforms might still be adverse to technology because of cultural norms. Participants from Nigeria and Cameroon in particular point out that many West African communities view technology as “inherently male”, which discourages women from becoming competent with tools such as the computer and Internet. This follows with findings such as Karelse and Syse-Sylla’s (2000), whose research in the region revealed both men and women asserting technology has very little to do with women’s “practical needs”; it also supports Huyer’s conclusions that both men and women in the region are likely to identify technology as “too strenuous for women” and “unsuitable for the female personality” (2006: 98).

Younger women often confront such stereotypes uniquely, explains Kenyan feminist Ann. “In school, there is sometimes a more progressive idea or program that permits girls to have access to technology lessons. So we are there, but often we just must watch and not participate in the lessons much. It is as if we are there, but not there…” Ann’s experience follows with global studies which have shown teachers of math, science and technology tend to focus more on boys’ engagement than girls’ (Margolis and Fisher, 2002; Huyer, 2006; AAUW, 2010). Studies at the local level have also identified how inequitably computer access can be divided: a 2010 World Bank summary of the WorldLinks Program, which provides schools in developing countries with computer labs and programs56, found girls were not using computers because “sociocultural norms” constrained their access. In Uganda, for example, “girls did not get equal access to the limited number of computers installed in schools because of the sociocultural norm that “girls do not run”. Boys ran and got to the computers first and

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56 http://www.world-links.org/
refused to give them to the girls.” In one Nigerian boarding school, “earlier curfew hours for girls further [limited] their access” (World Bank, 2010).

A further obstacle to engaging young women activists in online forums is the perception that the Internet is dangerous, especially because of its association with the “online sex industry” (Hamm, 2001). As Kazakh activist Marya explains, “[there] is a serious problem with young girls being trafficked from this [Eastern European and Balkan] region, and it usually happens from some online interaction…some person in a chat room or on an Internet forum that tricks the girl and sets her up. It is not a shock that many parents do not want their daughters working on the Internet.” In addition, public sites of ICT access, including Internet connections and mobile telephony, are frequently construed as male-only places and dangerous for women. Many country-level studies on rural telecenters, for example, reveal that women feel the facilities are unsafe, particularly if they house closed- or cabin-style terminals for computers (SATC, 2006). Research on community telecenter use suggests a significant proportion of male patrons use the facilities to play violent videogames, view pornography, or engage in online gambling (Prozenza, 2001; Bailey, 2009). While these activities are generally viewed as culturally inappropriate for women in many regions, they may also make women feel unsafe (Phiphitkul and Sodarak, 2002).

Given these obstacles, a considerable amount of attention is also given to strategies that will improve ICT access on various grounds. As the YFA and other networks such as the YAFN and Astra Youth continue to demonstrate, another conceptualization of “inclusivity” and participation manifests in their efforts to make ICT
work for rather than against young women activists interested in participating in transnational activism.

First, as described earlier in reference to the 2008 and 2010 Young Women’s Dialogues, the YFA has a consistent focus on the fact that those who are able to participate in face-to-face dialogues may be an elite minority. Explains YFA coordinator Ghadeer, “There are more young women who are not attending [forums and dialogues] than young women who are”. In order to remain “inclusive”, the YFA encourages all members in attendance to “play the role of e-journalists” by writing blogs, creating videos, uploading pictures, tweeting, and using Facebook to “spread the knowledge and information…to hundreds of young women who are part of [our] community”.

Participants who are new to or unfamiliar with technology are encouraged to seek out fellow members for help, a process which Ghadeer explains has also assisted many YFA members in learning about the use of social media and ICT applications in general. As YFA member and Sawt Al Niswa contributor Paola explains, using such channels are not only an opportunity for conferencing young women to “tell their version of their stories at last” without worry of censor, “edit” or “dependency on others”, but in addition can provide an opportunity for online participation as virtual exchange, discussion and response takes place in “real time”.

Conscious of the “very real” problems women confront online, from harassment, hacking and censorship to more grave threats such as violence, Paola points to the benefits that can be gained from the increasing presence of campaigns “aimed at empowering young women to reclaim their space online”. Take Back the Tech\textsuperscript{57}, one

\textsuperscript{57} A “collaborative campaign” sponsored by the Association for Progressive Communications’ Women’s Networking Support Programme, “Take Back the Tech” is aimed at “creating safe digital spaces that
campaign she references, offers tools that help young women better understand the risks involved in organizing and campaigning online, and also encourage young women “to document and report abuse” through whatever channels possible. It is important to Paola also that “well balanced” campaigns aimed at helping young feminists make careful and strategic use of the Internet will

remind us that social media is nothing without the actual on the ground action where activists go and actually mobilize people and talk and listen to them…[ICTs] are a great tool in many ways, [but] let us not forget that they’re still tools owned by rather privileged people, conditioned by access to technology, internet speed, computer literacy and state censorship and that virtual worlds will never replace the actual exchange between two physical human beings.

The combination of these, Paola finishes, will ultimately improve access to and participation within transnational activist networks.

Interestingly, some study participants reported frustration over “blanket assumptions” that technology access remains problematic for all young women in developing countries. While acknowledging to some extent that they are a minority population, young feminists who are not only functional with technology but extremely innovative in their use of ICTs for activism report feeling “ignored” by a discourse that positions women “in the deepest end of the digital divide” (Ramillo, 2002). A representative experience comes from Ghanian activist Bolanle, who recounts having the experience of researchers being “surprised” she acted as an online mentor to young women in Europe through a global technology and feminism program. “Yes, I am African, and yes there is limited access for many parts of Ghana. That doesn’t mean I cannot offer something to women from Europe besides my ‘sad story’.” Bolanle

protect everyone’s right to participate freely, without harassment or threat to safety” and “realize women’s rights to shape, define, participate, use and share knowledge, information and ICT.”
continues to argue that the “many projects coming out of Africa that involve African women being technological leaders and using technology to promote gender equality” are not included regularly in the research of academics and development practitioners. She provides several examples of projects that “should be included in studies to show another story”, such as the 2006 Blogs for African Women initiative (BAWo)\(^58\) founded by Nigerian feminist bloggers and the more current Pepeta News Network\(^59\) aggregating blogs by young Southern African women who write about feminist activism in their respective countries.

Despite the range of perspectives reported above, young feminists are far from divided about the need to improve access to and participation in the feminist public forums they are constructing. Members of young women’s TFNs are concerned with diversity within their networks, working toward both physical and virtual inclusion of more activists’ input. No “simple” solutions to improving access were presented during interviews; rather, the obstacles and difficulties to building “universally accessible” public spheres were reiterated and emphasized. To this end, the blogs and websites affiliated with the young women’s TFNs profiled here are also forthcoming in highlighting that the channels of communication they offer will not always provide a practical solution to the problem of constrained access. Nevertheless, the sentiments of Bolanle and others framing ICT as a feasible – and currently utilized – method of

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\(^{58}\) Developed by a group of Nigerian feminist bloggers citing a “lack of African voices online” and a “gender disparity in blogging”, BAWo paired 23 mentors with 15 girls from ages 11-13 to facilitate technology education, and later worked to establish a more formal network of African women bloggers writing about social justice. More on this project can be found in founder Oreoluwa Somolu’s 2007 article “Telling Our Own Stories: African Women Blogging for Social Change”, published in *Gender and Development* 15 (3).

\(^{59}\) Pepeta News is maintained by the Zimbabwean young feminist organization Katswe Sisterhood. The editors of Pepeta encourage the submission of reflections and news on young feminist activism from women in Southern Africa. [http://www.pepeta.org/](http://www.pepeta.org/)
expanding the opportunities for young feminists to communicate transnationally should not be dismissed. To these young women, continuing to work on the ways in which ICT can become a more practical and widely available tool for activists seeking to participate more fully in transnational activism is a worthwhile pursuit.

**Building a Multigenerational Public: Collaboration on Young Women’s Initiatives**

Several young feminists participating in interviews for this study expressed interest in pursuing autonomous and “youth-only” transnational women’s networks. In this way, they seek to supplant what they argue is an ineffective method of global organizing, problematized by bureaucratic tendencies and a lack of diversity in leadership and decision-making. They seek to create their own versions of TFNs and remain parallel actors in regional and global feminist organizing. However, the majority of interviewees explained that while their youth-only networks created a much-needed alternative to the ageist spaces and processes of transnational feminist organizing, they remain interested in working toward building “truly multigenerational partnerships” and making collaboration between older and younger activists a regular occurrence. FRIDA coordinator Amina, for example feels confident in the “many established [TFNs and women’s organizations] who have expressed commitment to multi-generational engagements”. Established organizations’ support of FRIDA “may be just one way” to move that commitment from “rhetoric to reality”.

Amina points out that while young women lead, organize and manage FRIDA, the small staff of two and volunteer advisory committee of eight have received “technical support and assistance” from several established transnational feminist actors, including AWID, women’s rights consulting organization Akiiki Consulting, and the Fondo
Centroamericano de Mujeres/Central American Women’s Fund (FCAM)\textsuperscript{60}. Impressed in particular with the FCAM’s method of participatory funding and attention to the “power of young women’s activism”, FRIDA works “in partnership” with older generation activists and “could be a model” of how “democratic collaboration between generations is possible”.

This collaboration also produced much-needed data indicating whether and how young women’s organizations are funded by the global donor community. As Amina explains, young feminists working on the construction of FRIDA partnered with AWID’s “Where is the Money for Women’s Rights”\textsuperscript{61} (WITM) initiative to ensure young women’s organizing would be included in the construction of global surveys aimed at collecting data about funding for women’s and feminist organizations. This meant specific questions about women’s organizations supporting young feminist programs and initiatives in the WITM 2008 global survey, but also included a YFA-led and conducted global survey in 2010\textsuperscript{62} aimed exclusively at young women’s organizations. Because of this specific and strategic inclusion of youth perspectives on the subject of funding and resource mobilization, “young women-led initiatives became part of the conversation”.

The young women’s survey included questions asking “the level of involvement of people under the age of 30 in making decisions” within an organization, as well as the responding organization’s goals and priorities. This reflected an effort to include a diverse sampling of organizations and “count every voice”. In constructing questions for

\textsuperscript{60} Based in Nicaragua, FCAM is a “sub-regional women’s fund” that works to include grantees in funding decisions. More information can be retrieved from \url{http://www.fcmujeres.org/}

\textsuperscript{61} WITM investigates funding options for organizations within AWID’s network: \url{http://www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Where-is-the-Money-for-Women-s-Rights}

\textsuperscript{62} The YFA 2010 global survey “Young Women’s Rights Activism, Funding and Resource Mobilization” can be accessed through \url{http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/yff}
the more established organizations, Young activists suggested the survey ask not just whether multigenerational or youth programs were part of an organization’s or network’s agenda, but why specific efforts to include young women’s participation might be lacking. Through these efforts, Amina explains,

we learned that lack of access to funding in general was actually a significant challenge for organizations who otherwise would work with young women. Respondents noted that lack of funds limits their ability to design programs specifically related to young women’s needs and to hire, train and develop paid staff to run these programs sustainably over time…. [and] donors will reinforce those limitations. ‘Movement building with young women’, for example, was one activity that some respondents state they could not find funding for. ”

In addition, survey questions from this collaborative effort helped FRIDA to understand that young women respondents in particular “expressed concern that they are competing with organisations/initiatives that are working with young women, but are not young-women led”, something that led the group to understand the importance of their own stipulation that applicants seeking FRIDA funding be “young women-led”. Finally, the survey’s questions about young women yielded two more findings that informed the FRIDA team’s plans for their network and fund: first, “young women-led initiatives face capacity challenges”, such as “financial management skills, communications skills, and proposal writing and development skills”, and “do not know which funding organizations might offer resources for their type of work”. This generated “conversations about how to become not just a fund, but a resource”, offering applicants the opportunity to seek advisement from established and older-generation activists volunteering their time but also from other young women actively working within their own networks and organizations. This approach reflects the FRIDA’s mission to remain a holistic network and organization rather than “just” a source of funding. Second, the survey reinforced
that “resource mobilisation is limited by gender, age, and regional bias”. Young women respondents specifically cited “traditions, social norms and cultural attitudes towards young women” as a key resource mobilization challenge; this once again reinforced to FRIDA the importance of multigenerational and transnational organizing: “setting a new norm” of “respecting the voice of women despite regional variance” is one goal the members of FRIDA focus on. This also reinforced the need for an exclusive fund for young women, as it is youth that are “most likely to lose” in the “competition over money for women’s rights”.

The young women behind the initial push for increased funding at the global level for young feminists are comprised of three activists who attended the 2008 Young Women’s Dialogue in Morocco; their “lobbying” for the support of more established networks such as AWID and the FCM, especially once they were joined by 5 other young feminists from different regions, is largely cited in this study’s interview data as “the reason we were able to establish a global fund for young women’s work”. Nevertheless, Amina stresses that it is the cooperation between this initial team of 8 globally diverse young feminist activists and their older-generation counterparts that enabled FRIDA to “become what it is”. As she explains, activists from the more established networks “[were] willing to listen and so we constructed a truly multigenerational debate…and arrived at a strategy for how this project should unfold.” For Amina and other young women activists involved with FRIDA, their efforts could “serve as a model” for other global organizations for “how to engage younger and older women together in the same sphere”. It is possible, Amina explains, if organizations are willing.
YFA program coordinator Ghadeer also explains that part of the network’s mission is to construct multigenerational dialogue, so that young women’s voices can be “integrated into the existing spaces” of global feminist activism. “We are part of global feminism…we are part of AWID. We want young women to be integrated into other programs in a meaningful way.” An example Ghadeer offers is the way in which young women from the YFA have worked in collaboration with older activists on the “Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms” initiative.63 “Fundamentalist groups target youth and young women”, Ghadeer explains, adding that young women’s perspectives are therefore integral to a “complete” discussion of global feminist responses to religious fundamentalism. Aside from YFA members working in an advisory capacity for AWID’s initiative, members of the “Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms” team have also served as expert consultants for YFA E-Learning sessions on the subject. As part of a strategic information sharing and education program which will be discussed further in chapter 6, the YFA conduct periodic “E-Learning sessions”, or online instructional and discussion sessions using software such as Eluminate. The program allows for approximately 30 young participants to join in the session to both learn and discuss an issue, and the call for applications to participate is made globally. The most recent sessions on Religious Fundamentalisms, taking place over several weeks in late 2011, were lead by teams consisting of both YFA members and older-generation “Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms” researchers. In this way, the “expert knowledge” participants are “seeking out in these sessions” can be offered, but discussion, debate, dialogue and feedback can also remain central to the process. As the call for registrations explains, while both sessions were focused on “feminist counter strategies used to

confront religious fundamentals”, the presentation’s main focus was “an open
discussion where participants can share their own experience with religious
fundamentals, their own strategies or other interesting or innovative strategies that
they know of from their particular contexts and experiences”. Keeping this intact in any
“training” session was crucial, both for the production of a space for young feminists to
debate the issues involved but also to reify the credibility young feminists bring to a
discussion, even in the presence of “experts”. Data drawn from participant observation of
both E-Learning sessions reveals extensive debate and conversation flowing multi-
directionally; while the older-generation facilitators’ comments and discussion comprised
a 30-40 minute segment of each 2 hour session, and they periodically stepped in to ask
questions or respond to participants’ questions, the majority of the session was left for
young women to debate, offering strategies, perspectives, and challenges. Of the
participants in the first (November) 2011 session, for example, many steered the
conversation toward topics that interested them, including the ways in which poverty
intersects religious fundamentalism, whether and how older generations of women living
in religiously conservative women had experienced “more freedoms” than younger
women do today, and the ways in which war can facilitate youth involvement in religious
fundamentalism. While these were not subjects the older-generation facilitators focused
on or prompted, they comprised a majority of the session and so evidence the control
younger women held over the session.

Engaging with older generation activists who could provide expert knowledge but
“also listen” was “reaffirming”, explains Kaia, a participant from Liberia. The YFA’s
interest in encouraging participants to offer feedback through surveys and emails
following the first session – and in time to plan the second – further illustrates a collaborative effort; as the second session was also planned and facilitated jointly by the YFA and “Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms” initiative, this feedback became a crucial “third voice” of the young feminist community, and helped to shape some of the plans for future e-Learning sessions.

**Conclusion**

As preparation for the AWID 2012 Forum began, members of the YFA – but also AWID more centrally – have been determined to both confront and minimize the feelings of marginalization many young participants experienced at the last (2008) Forum. The YFA’s interest in “moving young women to the center” of forum activities and thus “strengthening their presence in the global feminist sphere” has been supported by AWID, Ghadeer explains, citing two particular instances. First, AWID has offered resources and logistical support for the planning of a Young Feminist Activism Day to be held one day prior to the conference’s start date of April 18, 2012. 11 YFA members “from diverse backgrounds” are working to develop an agenda including panels, “interactive group work” and “strategy sessions” to discuss young women in the context of the conference’s theme of economic power and women’s movements. The YFA team organizing the session explains that questions such as how economic power affects young women in unique and specific ways, and “what young women are doing to transform economic power” for women’s organizing will be asked in this event, which also encourages multigenerational discussion and invites older-generation women (“allies”) to participate. Second, for the duration of the conference, members of the YFA will be participating in plenaries and panels in numbers greater than past AWID Fora had seen,
allowing them to “integrate the conversations and ideas” from the pre-session events related to young women working within transnational feminism. To that end, a “young feminist corner” will also be convened – both metaphoric and “literal space”, the YFA explains – throughout the Forum. This is a “space for young women” and “allies”, where “morning de-briefs, round-table discussions, and networking and art activities” will be held with the aim of sustaining the themes and questions generated during the Young Feminist Activism Day. “We are hoping to create a collective force that will highlight young women’s voices at the Forum throughout the event”, Ghadeer explains, adding that “multigenerational cooperation” has enabled this more inclusive plan to unfold.

Whether or not young women participating at the 2012 Forum will experience the feelings of marginalization and frustration their 2008 counterparts did remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the ways in which young women were prohibited from participating more actively in the 2008 Forum and many other manifestations of a transnational feminist public sphere crystallized two very key concepts that can be offered here as conclusions: ageist marginalization within global feminist organizing, which these young women define as being removed from the center of a network’s or organization’s leadership, decisions, and agenda, enables young women to coalesce as a “counter public” around the identity of “youth”, despite differences of nation, class, sexuality, religion and culture. In addition, ageist marginalization clarifies to the young women the necessity of participation in some manifestation of a “public sphere”. All but 2 of the 26 young women participating in this study’s semi-structured interviews very overtly stated that they found “debate” and “discussion” to be important facets of both feminism and global organizing. Similarly, most of the young women describing their
own networks – or their desire for their own networks – explained that some “inclusive” and “participatory” forms of such exchange were a top priority. This chapter has therefore demonstrated not only the ways in which young women find connection through their marginalization, but also work very actively to construct “alternative” and “parallel” public spheres. These manifest in both face-to-face forums, as with the YFA’s regional dialogues, but more often virtually, through discursive mediums such as Sawt Al Niswa. While many struggle in recognizing the limitations of both manifestations of “the public sphere”, the participants in this study nevertheless argue that these constructs and practices they have built offer more democratic and accessible forms of participation within global feminist organizing.
Chapter 5

Generation and The Question of “Difference”

This chapter investigates the discourse of “difference” permeating young women’s transnational feminist networks, drawing several conclusions about its meaning, use and application as perceived by older and younger generation feminists involved in transnational advocacy and activism. In the first phase of this project, both older and younger participants responding to structured interview questions about multigenerational feminist organizing suggested young women have both “different needs” and “different visions” from and for their activism, with most also suggesting young women pursue and prefer “different” mobilization tactics than do older generation feminists. Roughly half of the interviews from this phase yielded responses suggesting younger women also perceive and define feminism differently, with older feminists in particular expressing this idea. This identified that naming “difference” is one way activists of various ages attempt to explain the phenomenon of “youth-only” or youth-specified transnational feminist networks, but since participants in this phase often struggled to fully explain how younger women were “different” from older women or why younger women had “different” preferences and needs – with many struggling even to identify the “different” tactical approaches of young women beyond citing broad categories like “use of ICT” – the second phase of this study, which involved participant observation and longer, more semi-structured interviews, was used to attempt clarification of how “difference” is defined and identified by activists to explain both the generation and processes of young women’s TFNs.
As both a word and concept, “difference” appeared frequently in the interviews to represent two separate but ontologically linked concepts. First, to articulate an oppositional group identity, many young activists involved in forming youth TFNs express that they collectively are “different” than established-older generation feminists in two ways: 1) they work toward their activist goals “differently”, at times implying that they work more effectively, and 2) they prefer “different” organizational forms, such as collaborative leadership and deliberative decision making, often suggesting these models contrast with “older” generation networks’ tendencies toward stratification and hierarchy. Second, many young activists present “difference” as a term meant to be synonymous with diversity, proudly pointing out that a network consisting of members with vastly different life experiences, racial and ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, economic conditions and sexual identities is able to function effectively as a collective. Embracing difference rather than “assuming it will make our work complicated”, suggests an Egyptian member of the Young Arab Feminist Network, enables members to draw from this difference to create “alternative” approaches to activism.

Both notions of “difference” will be examined in this chapter. In some cases, as with the YAFN, the term “difference” is presented almost as a stance, and an oppositional idea around which younger generation activists can minimize their own differences and disagreements as they present their methods, both organizational and tactical, to be an improvement of established and older generations’ methods. In other cases, as with the Astra Youth Network, there is an emphasis on ongoing collaboration between generations or the “youth” and “parent” network, and so the term “difference” is not suggested to be synonymous with “better”, and thus represents a belief in distinct but mutually effective
ways of working that require separate spaces. Finally, as all cases illustrate, but perhaps the FRIDA fund most explicitly, “difference” is often presented as a representation of diversity, with members pointing to the different ethnic, socio-economic, regional, religious, and sexual identities of their network. This is often something young members identify as extremely important and relevant to their work, inscribed in day-to-day advocacy and activist operations as well as in long-term goals and mission statements. While some young women’s TFNs suggest such commitment to diversity is part of a general philosophy of global feminist organizing and is thus also practiced by established TFNs, others indicate that established and older-generation TFNs “emphasize” diversity but do not embrace it fully in their leadership and governing operations.

**Discrepancies in data & established scholarly findings**

Interestingly, though a smaller number of interviews with older generation feminists were conducted during both phases of this project\(^\text{64}\), all but one of these participants articulated many of the same concerns, goals and visions for their established networks as the younger feminists did for their “new” networks. For example, Polish feminist Malgosia asserts “horizontal” collaboration and an emphasis on diversity and democratic decision-making are characteristic of most established organizations within the CEE women’s network she co-directs, underscoring that many are “multigenerational”. She also explains that while it is “partly true” young women “do prefer different methods of action, like Internet activities or creative street demonstrations and performances…there are often older members standing right along side them.” Saba, a Palestinian-based activist and attorney with 35 years of experience advocating transnationally for MENA

\(^{64}\) Appendix B provides information on participants’ ages.
women’s rights, also asserts that “these days”, the character of most women’s organizations in the region is diverse, with members acknowledging “past mistakes” of “silencing some voices”. Power and authority within regional networks of MENA women’s organizations especially, Saba insists, “are quite evenly shared, with directors being careful to consult with all national and local members before making a statement or decision”. These findings are consistent with the observations of scholars such as Moghadam, who offers that as TFNs proliferated and became more enmeshed with other types of global organizations and “professionalized”, they managed to sidestep hierarchy and bureaucracy (2005: 95). “Feminist process”, which Moghadam identifies as “participatory, democratic, inclusive, with emphasis placed on standpoint and personal experience as well as on knowledge and credentials”, has “been characteristic of many women’s organizations” (2005: 95) in recent global networking and activism.

Data from this study certainly suggests age contemporarily manifests as a “status” and identity marking a TFN member, whether individual or group, for isolation and marginalization. The resultant stratification counters the pervasiveness of this “feminist process”, and challenges some of the more dominant narratives about TFNs effectively transcending “divisions” to create a more democratized praxis. Such narratives also present a challenge to the ways in which the younger generation members believe that they are “different”, however. As Moghadam (2006) and Stienstra (1994) explain, many TFNs since the 1970s “have used less formal structures” of organizing and mobilizing (Stienstra, 1994: 146), with Moghadam pointing to DAWN’s creation of its seminal
“[The book] exemplifies ‘feminist process’…by adopting an open and flexible process – one that drew on varied experiences – [it was believed] the group would be better able to come to a common perspective and objective. As the book’s preamble states, ‘If we ourselves can evolve new working styles, new forms of co-operative organization and practices, this will contribute to the search for genuine alternatives. To build a social order that is just, equitable, and life-affirming for all people, our methods must correspondingly be open and respectful of differences, and must try to break down hierarchies, power, and distrust.’” (2006: 96)

Contained within this representative example are many of the values the younger women presented in interviews as essential to their networks but more importantly suggested are distinctive about their networks. In an effort to pursue the identification of “difference” as one explanation for the existence of young women’s TFNs, it was essential to ask study participants how the seeming contradictions are rectified. How, in other words, do younger generation members explain their feeling that the commitment to diversity or participatory leadership in their network is unique or “different” when the same commitments are arguably part of the established networks they left?

“That is simple,” offers Fatima, a young Egyptian feminist affiliated with several of the young women’s TFNs featured here: “those commitments are not actually carried out, and certainly do not include considerations of [a member’s] age”. While answers to this question varied, Fatima’s is most representative of the bulk of the explanations, with similar sentiments used to defend the claim that youth TFNs were “really committed” to diverse and inclusive leadership and the valuing of personal experiences. Other members of the Young Arab Feminist Network offered that the commitment to participatory and democratic leadership in established networks they had participated in (but did not want to name) “never included bringing younger women into leadership roles”, with one in
particular asking “how is excluding me just because I don’t have as much “life experience” democratic?” The young advisory members of the FRIDA fund asserted that while in “theory”, they had experienced inclusion in leadership roles and found “diverse voices” in decision-making, “in practice” things were often different.

Interestingly, Marta from ASTRA Youth explains that some young women “fail to see the different nature of the two organizations, say an informal youth network they have created or a very large, professionalized network that advises the UN and publishes books. Sure, the large and professional one will have centralized leadership or be a bit bureaucratic!” Still, Marta offers, “it is a fair analysis in my experience that younger women are very much excluded from any sort of decision-making about agendas or campaigns – even about issues that they feel are important but are not being addressed. It’s like the younger women will get the attention of the older ones…eventually. But that is such a slow process. It’s not like that when your network consists of only 100 people and you are all connected through [a social networking website]. So sure younger women feel a huge difference after they create their own spaces.” Consistent with Marta’s observation that a network’s size and structure might contribute to some young women’s “feelings of marginalization and invisibility” is 23 year old Aynur’s assertion that both her large Azerbaijani women’s NGO and the regional network ASTRA “do what they can to include everyone’s voices and concerns,” but “with hundreds of members, that is a difficult job”. Rather than being motivated by frustration with “hypocrisy” or inconsistencies in theory and practice, many of the ASTRA youth activists participating in this study cited their preferences to work in smaller, youth-only groups as more of a logistical choice. Within those youth-only, and thus smaller, more homogenous spaces
many young women feel they are unhindered in their efforts to create more innovative approaches to activism or include a wider range of activists’ voices. “Things like this are possible here, which is why the [youth] network exists,” Marta explains. “If this were a network consisting of hundreds of people, and we were dealing with activists from all over the world instead of just from this region, that would change and we also would have to become more bureaucratic”.

The variations among the respondents highlighted above serve as an important reminder: the character of transnational feminist networking is as much dependent on leadership and factors such as size and years active as it is on theoretical principles such as “feminist process”. This is a point many scholars of transnational feminist networking have made (Desai, 2009; Hawkesworth, 2006; Moghadam, 2005), and one that is reinforced by the findings of this research. As these young women attempted in interviews to articulate their reasons for constructing a youth-only transnational feminist network, some admitted that they often struggle themselves at times with understanding why they feel a separate network is necessary and important. At the same time, others were unwavering in their pointed explanations for their decisions, as well as how and why their “different” approaches merited the establishing of an entirely separate network, and one that prohibits older-generation membership. This could speak to both the different experiences the young women had with established TFNs (and TFN leadership) and transnational activist organizing, just as it might reflect personal differences, such as how much an interviewee is willing to disclose about her experiences and motivations, or how she verbalizes her goals for her participation in transnational feminist activism. These variations must not, however, negate scholarly efforts to understand the
proliferation, nature and practices of young women’s TFNs, nor dismiss the beliefs of many that what they are doing is categorically and qualitatively different than their predecessors.

The following sections of this chapter illustrate variations on the notion of “difference” and the ways in which as a concept it contributes to the construction of young women’s TFNs. Each section begins with some background on both the region and issue involved in the example, and includes data drawn from qualitative methods such as structured and semi-structured interview and participant observation.

**Generational Difference and Transnational Feminisms in the CEE: The Astra Youth Network**

The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights networks Astra and Astra Youth, operating primarily in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, illustrate the ways in which the legacy of rapid political and economic transformation create unique circumstances for contemporary transnational feminist organizing, particularly in multigenerational contexts. The majority of Astra activists interviewed, both older- and younger-generation, insist that relationships among generations are “good” and “respectful”, with “plenty of collaboration” occurring “when it needs to”. Activists from both generations pointed to the “character” and “tradition” of feminism and women’s organizing in the region as one explanation for the strong intergenerational relationships; while the “socialist past” and “how little [communist regimes] actually did for women’s emancipation” is “unimaginable to many young people who were not there to experience it,” explains 47 year old Hungarian feminist Anika, “this is a generation that was born into that post-revolution moment, and knows its history. There is respect for the ways that
binds us all together, regardless of nation or age.” This “post-revolution moment” has given way to another common experience within the region: states’ current, very recent or pending integration into the European Union, and the opportunities or consequences this has created for both domestic and transnational women’s organizing. This is another set of “shared experiences” cited heavily as creating identities around which activists organize and coalesce, facilitating bonds across both nation and age.

At the same time, many younger and older generation activists also insisted that since, as Anika continued, younger women “have not lived any other reality besides the more liberal, transnational one”, there are substantial differences between the generations distinguishing their notions of citizenship, their understanding of what constitutes “politics” and political participation, and their beliefs of what effective activism looks like. While the examples presented below illustrate such notions of difference, they also illustrate surprising similarities and perhaps continuities. Data from studies of post-revolution women’s organizing in the CEE, whether drawn from national contexts, such as Fábián’s 2009 study of Hungarian feminism, comparative contexts, such as Regulska and Graham’s 2006 study of Women’s NGOs in Poland and the Ukraine, or transnational contexts, such as Funk’s 2006 examination of “women’s NGO culture” in the region, suggests that in many instances what the young activists are expressing as “different” and “new” are in fact iterations of the old concerns, beliefs, and even hesitancies of feminists past. These observations, as well as suggestions that younger generations may have maintained but also “re-theorized” the concerns of their predecessors, adapting the same for more contemporary global contexts, are made at the conclusion of this section.

**Identifying the Need for “Youth Space”: Astra Youth’s Separate and Collaborative Spaces**
After a July, 2004 sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) workshop for young people sponsored by the Central and Eastern European & Balkan network Astra, several participants found they had similar visions about a need for a youth program within the network. Coordinators envisioned a whole network, an institution…something more than just a training-session or workshop at one of the main network’s annual meetings. Astra Youth founders articulated the need for space to share ideas and collaborate on campaigns. National, political, and cultural differences became “unimportant” in the formation of the new youth network. “In terms of general trends of [reproductive] rights and health, the countries in the region have – and had – extremely similar profiles,” offers Marta, Astra Youth’s current program coordinator. “One thing that is especially certain…is that young people in the region experience SRHR issues very differently than older people do. Our research tells us how uniformed young people are about reproductive rights [and] health services…compared to older citizens. So many [youth] have no idea what they are entitled to, how their bodies work, how disease works. There’s also little understanding of how politics works, rights are applied…This is of course worse in countries where economies are in transition, and there is little public funding for these things. But really, that is most of the countries in this region.”

Besides a common set of issues and concerns creating a shared identity, Marta and many other network members involved in both current and past campaigns identified similar tactical strategies among younger activists for how to approach SRHR issues. Many cited the globalization of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the proliferation of social media such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook as tactically
instrumental to both organization and mobilization. “These things simply didn’t exist in earlier times,” Marta adds, “and so they really are the tools of the younger generation.”

The benefit of this, offers 22 year old Katya from Kazakhstan, is “constant connection to activists in other countries.” Attending regional meetings are “preferred but not usually possible” she continues; “it’s been very difficult for us to join some of the last few regional meetings, and we can avoid feeling isolated by connecting to [the network] online.” Given some of the “limitations” of such media in countries such as Azerbaijan, however, where 27 year old Aygun works with Astra Youth and local activists to “target the regional crisis of poor sex education in government schools”, other creative and visual arts such as “street theater” are often preferred. “We can’t guarantee many of these young people have access to the Internet, so even if we really advertise our websites and videos, the poorest [population] who really need this information might not get it.” The physicality of such activism is therefore important, so beyond theater and other public mobilizations, “informal sexual health and reproductive rights counseling” through peer educators working in youth centers, clubs, and even “sporting events” where young people turn out becomes a method, as does “guerilla advertising tactics” – placing stickers, posters and fliers “wherever young people will see them.”

**Different but Alike: Older and Younger Activists Defining “The Political”**

In response to how this reflects “different” approaches to activism that distinguish Astra Youth members from their older generation counterparts, Aygun offers that “[Older generation activists] want to push for political and policy changes to be made so that sex education in government schools improves. [Younger] generation activists do too…that
is part of the mission of [Astra youth]. But to be honest about it, many of us feel perhaps like this [policy change] is not going to happen. We will not wait for it to happen…we will use what we have to address the problem now, using some of our resources to find other ways. It is not just a focus on the law…”

Interestingly, Marta sees a slightly different reality when it comes to “politics” and whether or not targets such as policy and legal changes differ among generations: “around issues of [sex] education, yes – this could be true that younger people will not even know the policy and instead will develop media campaigns about sex education…[they] will work on the issue that way. But something like abortion…what is at the heart of something like that is the law, is policy, so both young and [older] activists will address the same target – [and] that is the government decisions about it. What other possibilities are there?” However, Marta continues, “perhaps the problem is one of definition. Many of [our] young activists do not see the work they are doing as political, even when the issue is abortion and they are actively supporting more access. They [might] understand this more to be about health, or providing community service”.

My own interviews with other network members bears this out; for example, when I asked Katya whether or not she and other members of her women’s health NGO in Kazakhstan ever disagree about political candidates, policies or laws, she explained they “do not really talk about politics”. This was surprising, given that the organization was part of rights-based and advocacy transnational coalition Astra, and contributed to projects aimed at national, regional and EU-level policy, such as reports and statements to the European Parliament and United Nations in support of improved access to abortion and birth control.
Marta asserts that based on her experiences in regional dialogues, online interactions and the many collaborative projects she organizes as a youth coordinator, network activists – both younger and older generation – ultimately prioritize the same issues, and even targets; “they just might interpret or define the work they are doing in different terms”. Interestingly, this is consistent with earlier findings from studies conducted in the region: in a two-year project surveying Ukrainian and Polish women’s NGOs, Regulska and Graham (2006) found that the term “political”, and the ways in which women “construct political space” can differ to the point that women involved in rights-based advocacy and “public activity” do not identify their actions as politics. In some cases, women “negatively associated politics with political parties”, asserting the goals of their organizations as “solving social problems”, not “[participating] in male, political power struggles” (Regulska and Graham, 2006: 136-137). The study identified that women find “alternative spaces of participation” when public or conventional political channels are either unavailable or considered undesirable, but these are not often comprehended fully as “political spaces that matter” or as “political spaces that should be utilized” (141). While the different national and political cultures women work in are emphasized by the authors and must also be considered for this study, there was a consistent noting of younger activists’ tendencies to construct “alternative” methods and spaces across the regional network. Whether or not these are perceived as “political” acts and spaces are more likely to “depend on the individual activist” rather than the broader political culture, as Marta explains. However, most would define what they are doing “as activism”, and “work that matters very much”. Marta’s statement is consistent with those of other interview participants; while distinctions were at times made between politics
and activism, most young women were clear that they perceived and identified their work to be activist, and believe their work was making a difference in the broader “political” climate, even if indirectly. This suggests in relation to the earlier study that younger activists do emerge out of and absorb the approaches of their older-generation counterparts, but that they may be adapting these approaches in response to different circumstances. So while younger women may have inherited the tendency to make distinctions between advocacy and activist work in a women’s NGO and domestic or regional “politics”, many nevertheless assert their belief that the work they are doing will have some impact on the political framing of sexual and reproductive health and rights. “Even if [we are] just looking at the people directly, at changing the culture,” Katya offers, “perhaps this will eventually have some effect on who people select to run a [government].”

As an example of the ways younger activists perpetuate but adapt the approaches and beliefs of their predecessors, Astra Youth members offer the work of some younger activists in a Polish organization affiliated with the network. In response to the “serious lack of sufficient education on reproduction and sexual health” in Poland after a 2009 decision rendered compulsory sex education in schools unconstitutional, several members of the organization developed web-ready educational videos to supplement the face to face workshops taking place in classrooms and community centers. Astra Youth members see these videos as “activist”, but not “political”, suggesting that “this is about educating the public, since the [state] will not”. The reasoning is straightforward: “we started by [inviting] politicians to come and talk to us, to attend our meetings, to read findings from our research about the effects of poor education... but they never come. So, we felt we
must put politics aside to make education better, and that is by getting to the people directly.” There is a clear suggestion that “politics” is work that pertains specifically to direct interactions with politicians and policy, and so Astra Youth members do not necessarily envision the production of these videos and construction of this sex education curriculum as political. Nevertheless, several observations suggest this work has broader political impact. The videos’ web-dissemination on YouTube “got media attention”, which peaked interest outside of the organization’s home city of Warsaw: “[Activists] in Lublin wrote to us after seeing the videos to ask about starting similar programs for reproductive education there.” This, combined with inquiries to Astra Youth about the videos “from as far away as Pakistan”, reinforced “how meaningful the work is to people outside” the immediate community, and also “how similar [the problems] with SRHR are all over the place, not just in Poland or in CEE”. More significantly, the ability for Astra Youth organizational members to disseminate their curricula through the web videos might have “some political effect” that “would not have been possible in the past”. Able to receive specific and wide-ranging responses to their work encourages the activists to continue their efforts, but also contributes to their changing perceptions of their work. Many Astra Youth members specify that their “main target” continues to be the community, and “not the law”, but after the response some of their Internet campaigns garnered, acknowledge that their work “might be doing more than we realize” toward inspiring others to lobby for sexual and reproductive rights in the region.

This example highlights the belief in a “different” sort of tactical approach to SRHR activism in the network; most of the younger women participating in the study suggested that older activists certainly use technology in and for their work, but not to the
extent that the younger activists do. “They see new and different methods – videos on YouTube, a Facebook page, these kinds of things – they see these as important,” offers Aygun. “But they are also very interested in leaving this to [the younger generation], so that we can combine our efforts later around a particular issue or goal”. Aygun explains that she and the other younger members work best in small, youth only teams. “There is tension, sometimes,” she continues, “I think that this is natural between two generations anywhere, doing anything.” However, “our collaboration is very effective,” she concludes, “and this has much to do with the fact that we work separately but respect each other’s styles and preferences”.

Like Aygun, both older and younger members of the Astra network who participated in this study assert that the accomplishments of the network, from the growth and expansion of member organizations, the collaborative research and documentaries produced and used in parliamentary hearings and United Nations, and the seminars and workshops offered to various communities\textsuperscript{65}, are due in large part to the effective connections between the older and younger activists in the network, and between the network and its “youth” division. Other cases in this study, however, suggest that at times younger activists find their tactical or organizational “differences” virtually incompatible with those of an established network, and choose therefore to limit such collaboration. These young activists focus instead on constructing “youth-only” spaces, as the FRIDA fund does, or on the pursuit of their own “different” tactics and interpretations of an issue, as members of the Young Arab Feminist Network (YAFN) do with their project HarassMap.

\textsuperscript{65} Workshops and seminars through 2009 are listed at http://astra.org.pl/?astra-seminars-and-workshops.39
Creating Different Space to Act: The Young Arab Feminist Network (YAFN) & HarassMap

Gathering under the auspices of an AWID-sponsored Young Feminist regional dialogue that took place in Morocco for members in the MENA region in 2008, the founding members of the YAFN discovered common concerns; they were experiencing marginalization not just within their local and national civic contexts, but from within the established feminist networks they were members of. This feeling of marginalization occurred regardless of whether or not these activists were paid staff or volunteer, and whether or not an activist was relatively new to feminist organizing or had been active for several years. While predominantly, the YAFN is an organization focused on gender equality for Arab women and thus shares in the goals of many transnational women’s organizations in the region, it is also envisioned by its founders as a place for “new” ideas “to be taken seriously”.

Specifically, the YAFN is interested in pursuing a broader range of “feminist discourses”, which they feel will both transcend the divisiveness and bureaucracy “so common to most Arab women’s organizations”, and reflect “the differing ideas of young Arab women today that represent change and positive growth”. The 20 charter members of the network come from all over the region, and articulate several basic needs of young Arab feminists: space to “incubate ideas and activities”, space to “gain knowledge”, space “for linkages”, and space in which young women feel “included [and] safe” as they develop activist identities (YAFN, 2010).

Maintaining a “youth only” space is an important key in pursuing these goals, YAFN members assert; while they recognize that the effects of patriarchy and patriarchal
globalization are widespread and traverse age boundaries, “young women deal with specific issues and as a result have particular needs… We aim to provide the space for these issues to be untangled and have open conversations without worrying about navigating gender and age dynamics” (YAFN, 2010). Illustrating these founding principles and ideas is a project several members of the network are involved in: drawing on crowd-sourced reports of women being harassed on the street to create “real-time” digital maps indicating what areas of a city produce the highest volume of incidents. Though this has been perhaps developed the most by a group of young activists in Egypt calling the project HarassMap, other members of the YAFN working in Lebanon are also working to develop similar systems for cities in their areas. Sexual harassment and street harassment has been “one of the biggest concerns in women’s organizations for decades, since in many Arab countries there is no law prohibiting or even defining it,” explains Muna. “But until now, a system that could do all these things – advocacy, prevention, actually drawing out where this happens and how much it happens – it just was not available.” Founders of HarassMap had the will and capacity to create such a system, explains co-creator Rebecca, and so they “left behind” their work with established women’s organizations, both global and regional, to do so.

The Need for “Different” Tactics: HarassMap

While the YAFN address a range of feminist issues in the MENA region and foreground the integration of young women’s perspectives and leadership into Arab women’s networks, a nearly universal priority identified during research interviews regardless of an activist’s home country is street harassment. This is “exactly the kind of issue that
young women [are likely] to experience differently” than older generation women, explains young Lebanese feminist Marwa, “and so younger women might have a particular kind of [insight] for how to deal with it”. Participating in creative projects such as “The Adventures of Salwa”, an animated web series featuring cartoon character Salwa, “an ordinary Lebanese girl”, as she battles would-be harassers (including police officers) by swinging her red purse and calling on her friends for help, enables young activists to “do something positive, humorous, and dramatic” to confront the issue. “Sitting around, waiting for a government to possibly create or enforce a law…we do not see this [as] action. It is not working”. It is Marwa’s reference to another project by YAFN members called HarassMap, an online project combining geospatial satellite mapping and “crowd-sourced” data to collect, document and publish sites where street harassment is occurring that contributed to the inclusion of the project in this study.

Though HarassMap focuses in particular on Cairo, they connected to the YAFN for support in developing the project in 2009. The HarassMap founders share Sawt Al Niswa activists’ vision for a “more proactive” solution to harassment; offers Rasha, who works as part of HarassMap’s team, “we have little to do with the law…this is our solution to addressing harassment in our streets.” Deciding that the best course of action lied in circumventing the institutional channels established women’s organizations and TFNs were targeting, the HarassMap team worked with the YAFN to begin theorizing a “more direct” approach.

Interpreting Effective Responses to Street Harassment in Egypt

The on-the-ground situation of Egypt’s state government remains tumultuous and undetermined in the wake of the revolution that unseated Hosni Mubarak’s regime.
“Even in the best of future circumstances,” explains Rasha, “where government offices would be willing to listen to us, there are no previous harassment laws to build on”. As laws criminalizing or even “defining” sexual harassment have never existed in Egypt, policy became the focus of many women’s organizations, and all of HarassMap’s founders have worked on such campaigns in the past.

The Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights (EWCR) is perhaps one of the most prominent organizations attempting to investigate the extent, nature, and consequences of street harassment in Egyptian cities. Findings from the EWCR’s 2006 report “Clouds in Egypt’s Sky”, show that street harassment is experienced by 98% of foreign women and 83% of Egyptian women, and highlighted a “widespread absence of belief among Egyptian women that harassers are engaging in criminal behavior”, or that they “have some legal right to protection, the freedom to move and the right to feel safe” (Shoukry and Hassan, 2005: 15). While the EWCR and other women’s organizations focused on policy recommendations and pushed for the establishment of a legal framework, members of the HarassMap have found directly addressing the issue through technology, “crowd-sourcing” and community awareness campaigns to be a more reasonable solution.

YAFN and HarassMap members and staff who had worked on sexual harassment campaigns with other women’s organizations – both regional and local – recalled in interviews feeling frustrated with the lack of progress their efforts made. Several young activists for example recalled instances wherein the state’s “anti-terror” provisions had enabled police to, without warning, shut down meetings and events that had required months of planning. Under such provisions, writes EWCR director Nehad Abul Komsan,
“authorities are able to disrupt and shut down [meetings] without sufficient time warning, and with little room for compromise”. Interview participants recalled “spending money and resources” and “gathering hundreds of volunteers” for events that would be “shut down before they even began”. Explains young anti-harassment activist Muna, who had been working with a large regional women’s organization that had an event “cancelled” by police, “we never recovered that energy, or that money…and after two times of this happening, we did not want to try again. The [plan of the organization’s leadership] became to ask international NGOs to support us in pressuring the government [about] a law, or [the right] to hold events to raise awareness about the suffering harassment causes women and families”. In the meantime, Muna continues, “nothing was being done about the real problem, [because] our focus was on the authorities, and on policy – everywhere but on what real women were saying and experiencing”.

One of the most frustrating parts of this experience for Muna and several other young activists targeting sexual harassment was that the organization and network leadership behind existing campaigns would not consider “paying real attention to” or “taking seriously” other ways to address the issue – for example through an ICT-enabled approach such as HarassMap. Interview participants cited examples of organizations “completely focused on law”, referencing “other” campaigns which attempted to facilitate discussion of anti-harassment law by “gathering citizens’ signatures” and “writing letters to government offices with women’s testimonies”. This was recognized as “good work” by the interview participants, but also as a “process that takes too long” and “is uncertain, especially now”. The HarassMap creators stepped away from their work within established organizations to conceptualize, develop and run the platform; as
Rasha explains, “we had little relationship with [those organizations] after we left. They focus on the law; we focus on harassment as it is happening.”

Constructing and Running HarassMap

While the mechanisms behind the site are complex, the idea is straightforward: when street harassment is experienced or witnessed, it can be reported to the site through a number of ICT-enabled channels, from SMS/text message to the use of a hashtag on Twitter (#Harassmap). Sensitive to divides that distance some women from technology, the team has also worked toward a hotline number and voicemail system for reporting, with all services available in Arabic, English and French. The data gathered from the reports is mapped using a geographic information system (GIS), generating illustrative content to help visualize where the highest volume of reports occur:
Besides compiling and documenting data and providing women with both warnings and “a platform where they can speak up [and] share their thoughts and experiences,” says co-founder Engy, the team uses the data for community outreach, sending volunteers to neighborhoods where incidents are the highest. “If [we] talk to shop-owners, the community, people on the street, this is direct work with the community to find out why this is happening, how it is happening, what people’s attitudes are about it.” The ultimate hope for the team is that this information will one day be useful to police should laws criminalizing harassment be created; at the moment, however, Rasha explains with disdain: “the police are not interested in our information”.

Fig. 1: HarrassMap Data from 2 January, 2012
Using GIS applications to generate real-time, crowd-sourced information to empower citizens in the absence of an effective state provision is an idea borrowed from a similar system developed by young bloggers in Nairobi, Kenya – one of whom was a young woman – during the 2007 post-election violence crisis. The Ushahidi application pioneered the same type of crowdsource-driven geospatial data collection, mapping incidents of violence reported (via SMS or the Internet) by those witnessing and experiencing it in Nyanza and around the Rift Valley Province.

Fig.2: Ushahidi Data (Kenya) from Jan 2007-Dec 2009

As the software enabling these applications remains open-source, it has been put to use in eastern Congo, Mexico, Gaza, India, Haiti, and Chile in pursuit of numerous causes, from election-monitoring to tracking the eruptions of post-earthquake violence and looting. In a similar way, the HarassMap team is working on “a globalization package” for the platform they developed – Engy reveals a steady stream of requests for help in building
HarassMap systems from activists in Lebanon, Yemen, Brazil, India “and many other countries”. While the aforementioned platforms (such as Ushahidi) construct some categories for reporting incidents of sexual assault, HarassMap is the first of such applications to focus exclusively on sexual harassment. In cultures where “the thought that harassment is a ‘social problem’ might not occur to many people”, this is “one of the best ways” to raise awareness and create opportunities for dialogue about the issue to begin, project founders explain.

While clearly intent on distancing and distinguishing their tactics from those of established and “older-generation” women’s networks within Egypt and across the MENA region, members of the HarassMap team nevertheless offer that their innovation “would not be possible” without the groundwork previously established by networks and organizations led by older generation activists. The EWCR’s efforts, for example, to quantify and “give voice” to women’s experiences with sexual harassment commanded national and eventually global attention, explain interview participants; in addition, several stressed that they had “believed in the campaigns” and “worked well with” older activists to some extent. For these young activists, the decision to leave existing and established organizations to create and run HarassMap “was about focusing on technology”, but was also “about the community and the culture”, and what the group believed “could be possible” and “could be [an] effective” tactical approach to targeting sexual harassment. Interview participants’ consistent emphasis on working with the community and “listening to the community” also presents particular subtext about a more inclusive feminist praxis and organizational dynamic: “we are all volunteer”, explains Rasha, “and no one is in charge...we are listening to each other, to the
community. This is where solutions must come from…one has to listen to ideas wherever they come from.”

**FRIDA and “Different Methods” for Donor-Funding**

Rasha’s emphasis on the embracing of diverse voices as a distinguishing factor making both the YAFN and HarassMap “different” than established organizations is echoed in the interviews with members of the FRIDA fund. The case of FRIDA similarly demonstrates the use of “difference” as an indicator of members’ varying identities and backgrounds, but also is used to signify the perception that “new” methods and organizational strategies are being pursued. This “new” and “different” approach is a needed and welcomed innovation, FRIDA fund members and advisors explain, since the processes and “politics” of seeking non-profit funding are “unfair” and “broken”. FRIDA founders “have created something exciting,” an young advisor to the network explains, “because this [old] way of providing money for women’s rights, for social justice – it needs a serious overhaul. Our belief as young women in the power of different voices to create good ideas has led us to [FRIDA], and we are very proud of this work. We have built on and reinterpreted some good ideas to make this work for our needs…I believe it will change the way funding at the global level works!”

The idea for a young feminist fund originated during a young women’s regional dialogue in Morocco initiated by AWID’s YFA. The recognition for such a need predated this meeting, however, for young Mexican feminist Blanca. Attending various high-level meetings and events at the United Nations through her SRHR and youth advocacy, Blanca began to recognize an uncomfortable reality: “older generation ‘youth representatives’…whether government officials or citizen activists…did not consider
young people as individuals with rights”. This failure of “youth advocates” to recognize the agency and accomplishments of young activists led to a repetitive pattern: “the agencies and international organizations providing funding for ‘youth’ programs and ‘youth’ improvement make offers to large international organizations that have the infrastructure and [capability] to implement the money and [document] the path of their funding in ‘the standard’ way”, Blanca explains. The result is that “resources are almost always denied to smaller, youth-run organizations with a predominantly under [age] 30 membership even though,” she continues emphatically, “these organizations demonstrate repeatedly they are capable of running good programs and functioning very well”.

Whether or not those larger organizations actually consult young people when constructing youth programs is “a roll of the dice”, Blanca explains, but more often than not “they do not even know any young activists they can talk to for help and advice”. The result is a funding pool awarded to “youth programs that have little to do with the visions or work of young people”.

Blanca’s concerns reflect those articulated in other studies related to non-governmental organization (NGO) funding, donor-dependency and the autonomy of civil society organizations. Vincent’s 2006 study of the funding difficulties faced by NGOs who challenge neoliberal paradigms, for example, raises questions about how members’ ideological and political positions compromise funding regardless of effective organizational “performance” or service. Bendaña has likewise argued that smaller, globally southern organizations are often befuddled by a “politics of accountability and control” proliferating in the arena of global civil society. His conclusions echo Blanca’s point precisely: while many of these smaller organizations “refer to their own
constituents as the ultimate authorities” in determining their success or failure, this is not welcomed by the larger (and predominantly liberal, globally northern) international donor community, who instead expect a precise and specific “form of bookkeeping [and] rendering of accounts” smaller organizations are often incapable of producing (2006: 4).

In addition to the difficulties of being a “small” organization perhaps lacking the capacity or mechanisms to engage with conventional procedures of transparency and accountability, FRIDA coordinator Amina explains that “age and experience…are weighted against [young women]” seeking funding. “It is a bad combination,” Blanca explains, “we actually have many things working against us as young women, especially from [less developed] countries, which is why we decided there must be a fund specifically dedicated to young women-led programs.” Amina explains that the FRIDA team, convening again in 2009 and 2010 after the 2008 meeting that initiated the idea of youth-only funding for feminist organizations, worked effectively with older generation activists from AWID and the Fundo Centroamericcano de Mujeres (Central American Women’s Fund, or FCAM) in building FRIDA. “[AWID] had produced a [study] – it was actually a joint effort with the YFA – called ‘Where is the Money for Women’s Rights’.

We spent a lot of time with them unpacking the results and found through that feedback and our own experiences that it is so difficult for young feminist activists to even gain access to donors. Many do not know how – more do know but are hesitant because they have been turned down before.” Amina explains that for some, the difficulty becomes about the “intimidation”, or younger women “being afraid” they “cannot come through”

66 A description of the Where is the Money For Women’s Rights initiative, as well as several of its publications, can be accessed through http://www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Where-is-the-Money-for-Women-s-Rights.
with the “right kinds” of reporting or documentation about the allocation of funds within the organizations once the money is awarded.

With the need even more clear, Amina explains that the team “talked about building a culture of resource mobilization that recognized ‘resources’ as more than just money – and how the fund could act as a platform for building a more democratic culture of dealing with resources within our feminist movements.” This “more democratic culture” involved “wanting to transform power relations between ‘donors’ and ‘grantees’”, and ultimately led to what FRIDA present as their distinguishing feature as a funding organization: “a model of shared decision-making where grantees get to decide collectively what issues and groups should get funded”.

**FRIDA’s “Donor-Plus” Funding Model**

Amina and other FRIDA fund advisors support the “mainstream” donor community’s emphasis on transparency and accountability, but critique the “hierarchical” and “clinical” system this emphasis has tended to produce. Through their model of “donor-plus” funding, FRIDA “will work to be just one part of a community of activists rather than an institution that has some power over communities of activists”. The donor-plus model is envisioned in two main ways: first, in supplement to funding, FRIDA recognizes “the needs of young women-led initiatives that are beyond money – the things that money cannot help”. This includes “solidarity and teamwork…connections, friendship, trust, and most importantly, confidence”. Writing for the FRIDA blog, advisor Perla recalls an international feminist-funding meeting organized by Mama Cash⁶⁷ and the FCAM in which a young Zimbabwean feminist explained how little her organization

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⁶⁷ Mama Cash is the “oldest international women’s fund worldwide”, and is headquartered in Amsterdam. More information can be accessed through [http://www.mamacash.org/](http://www.mamacash.org/).
can produce in terms of data that could support or “make the case” for their successful community and regional work. “Unsurprisingly, the key issues [the activist stressed] were the need for research and effective data needed to advocate and “make the case” for the work that they do…[as well as the] need for core support through grants that support institutional sustainability.” Perla explains the young activists’ sentiment that “…donors want to fund projects”, but as “projects do not run themselves”, some form of support that also facilitates “capacity building” and management and central to a more successful, sustainable funding practice for young women’s work. The “plus” therefore comes in, FRIDA members explain, when “young women can work with FRIDA and our networks, our connections to other advisors [such as those from AWID and FCAM] to learn about managing money, where and how to save and what to spend on…this sort of thing. We do not want to give money and walk away…we do not want young women to feel isolated or alone.”

The second application for the “donor-plus” method is where it pertains to decision-making within the granting process. “We believe,” a FRIDA mission statement says, “that young feminists have the capacity to think critically about the issues affecting their lives and to have direct input into how funds are allocated to meet their needs”. Inspired by the FCAM’s similar method of “participatory grantmaking”, FRIDA grant applicants “are invited to collectively vote who among applicants gets funded” (FRIDA, 2011).
The FRIDA staff uses basic criteria to screen applications prior to presenting them to the community for voting. Applying organizations must focus on the promotion and advancement of women’s human rights and be *led* and *founded* by young women or transgender youth identifying as female. While “under 30” is a specification made constituting FRIDA’s understanding of “young”, a disclaimer on the fund’s applications page explains their underlying flexibility: “We accept that the age range covered includes young people who in many contexts are already social adults (mothers, married, income earners, voters, income earners etc) and that there is an inadvertent cultural and class bias in conceptions of what makes a “young” activist. However, FRIDA is committed to supporting groups that demonstrate a solid commitment to feminist activism and movement building doing our best not to reinforce an artificial concept of ‘youth’ as an identity. On that basis FRIDA will not turn down an application solely on the basis of age” (FRIDA, 2011). That this is a disclaimer many study participants emphasized and
pointed out during interviews reinforces how important it is to these activists to foreground “diversity” in all aspects of their organization.

A second selection criteria notes that priority is given to groups with limited to access to resources; as a guiding point for applicants on FRIDA’s website explains, “FRIDA is committed to funding organizations and initiatives that are unlikely to be funded by more traditional funding sources. This may mean that traditional funding sources are either not interested in the particular area of work or that it is too radical for most conventional funding sources”. This extends to “small, emerging grassroots groups” and “initiatives based in the Global South”, but also “groups or networks that are diverse in their membership and made up of and/or working with socially marginalized young women including but not limited to: refugees, ethnic, national and caste minorities, rural women, urban poor, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, women living with HIV/AIDS, sex workers, women with disabilities, women living in armed conflicts and post conflict zones” (FRIDA, 2011). Once screened and through the process of becoming potential grant recipients, organization are invited to rate other applications from within their own region. They review summaries and general descriptions identifying region and issue, but not specific names or countries; this effort to keep the process fair also extends to a policy prohibiting applicants participating in the selection process from voting for their own organization. Voters are asked to keep FRIDA’s mission in mind, but are also encouraged to proceed in selecting applications they determine are the most representative of issues and priorities that would advance the rights of young women within their region. FRIDA’s first call for proposals was launched in early December 2011, and collected applications through late January 2012. The fund plans to award two
grants of USD 5,000 each to a total of 10 organizations, or the 2 highest ranking organizations from the African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and the Caribbean and Central and Eastern European regions.

This “empowering process” where grantees have greater levels of participation and investment in determining “which issues are important and get funded”, also “leads to more accountability” on the part of the receiving organizations, explains FRIDA members. The group become a community; “we become partners…and partners talk, they help each other, they have an ongoing dialogue about the successes, but also the difficulties. No one has to hide things here…we respect the right of the receiving organization to decide for themselves what is the best way to assess and analyze their programs”. While the participatory-philanthropy model is not one FRIDA created originally, it is one the team of young activists facilitating the networks’ and funds’ creation felt was underused in transnational feminist organizing. “Mainstream” older-generation feminist activists stayed away from this model, young women explained in discussing FRIDA’s progress, even if they “agreed with its principles”. Offers one young feminist from Ghana about the older generations’ reluctance to abandon conventional models of funding: “it is hard to challenge the international donor norms and still keep a steady flow of resources....”

Alexandra Pittman and other researchers who have begun documenting FRIDA’s methods concur that the use of such models “challenge” and “move beyond” current grantmaking processes “by [honoring] young feminists’ prioritizations”, but also

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by developing for its own resource mobilization a multi-pronged strategy:

“the aim is to raise more money for young feminist activists and the gender equality sector overall, as well as to influence other donors’ practices. That means that FRIDA is most concerned with building up demand and support in donor communities to channel funds to youth programs that use a rights and empowerment perspective and that are led by the opinions and leadership of young people”⁶⁹. The young FRIDA fund advisors and staff maintain that this process is the best way to ensure a more democratic process and to “get a broader diversity of projects funded” – something they assert is key to the future of a more democratic global feminism.

**Conclusion**

This chapter offered further investigation into the ways in which notions of “difference” facilitate youth-only feminist organizing and permeate the discourses of multi-generational feminism. While “difference” has multiple meanings for those participating in this study, data from phase one of this project shows that both older- and younger-generation feminists use the term in similar ways to explain why and how young women distinguish themselves from an older generation. That young women experience globalization differently, or have different tactics and methods, or have different philosophical approaches to feminist organizing were all reasons presented by both older and younger generation participants in response to questions about the subject. Where phase two of this research process endeavored to identify more specific details about beliefs and sources of “difference”, data reveals separate but ontologically linked meanings given to the term by young activists. “Difference” is used to signify a collective

⁶⁹ ibid.
but oppositional group identity: “difference” for many of these young women becomes “how we are not like” older and established feminist activists, many of whom were presented as having a “bureaucratic”, “hierarchical” and “controlling” approach to global organizing. In “working differently”, many young women assert that they *work more democratically* and “truly” embrace diversity in both membership and leadership. Young women argue they are more likely to take “radical” measures to accomplish a goal, target an issue, or lobby for change, as the HarassMap team suggested of their technologically innovative method of addressing street harassment in Cairo, or the FRIDA fund suggested of their “alternative” and “participatory” approach to the global NGO-donor process. As the application of the term also appears to refer to difference among young activists (in addition to difference from older activists), the goal of building a young women’s TFN diverse in ethnic, religious, political, national, social and sexual identities is almost universally articulated in the participating organizations’ mission and objective statements.

Interestingly, while all of the young women participating in the more in-depth, second phase of this project strongly assert their “difference” as a distinction from older generations, each of the three organizations or programs featured here demonstrate that younger women also acknowledge that their work is built upon the efforts of feminists from a previous generation. Some young feminists are more reluctant than others to acknowledge the role “older generation” feminists have played in informing their current projects, and only after some time admit a connection between movements and organizations or suggest a multigenerational collaboration would be possible or desirable. Others by contrast are consistently engaged in multigenerational feminist activism, their
“youth” networks collaborating regularly with older-generation networks toward a collective goal with “as much mutual respect as can be possible”\textsuperscript{70}. Yet another set express that in their objectives to democratize global feminist organizing, they utilize philosophies and tactics emanating from but underused in established networks. While universally the participants in this study express in various ways that they build on the work of the past, they are also consistent in asserting their desire and ability to adapt global feminist activism for the future.

\textsuperscript{70} Statement taken from an interview with 23 year old Azerbaijani activist Aynur.
Chapter 6
Creating Space to Learn: Young Women’s TFNs and Collaborative Learning

As noted elsewhere in the previous chapters, inter-generational tension in transnational feminist organizing is not a recent phenomenon. In her history of women’s “internationalist” organizing in the 19th and early 20th century, Leila Rupp points to rhetoric emerging from both older and younger activists in networks such as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and International Women’s Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) to illustrate the seeming impossibility of bridging generational divides. Writing for the journal *Jus Suffragii*\(^{71}\) of her surprise that a meeting of the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance in Istanbul made no effort to engage with young women or address the deficit of young women present, a young feminist from Palestine argued “…every moment has to appeal to youth and educate it in its spirit…because having no young followers the movement has no future” (Rupp, 1997: 61). Older-generation members of the movement recognized this need to “recruit” younger women, Rupp explains, citing WILPF member Madeline Doty’s 1926 statement that “…we shall surely end in disaster if we depend only on those whom we have always had with us and who are now getting tired and a little worn out” (1997: 61). Just as contemporary TFNs have done, early women’s internationalist networks “did try to interest younger women throughout the years by forming special committees or planning events they thought would appeal to girls and young women” – but these often failed to

\(^{71}\) *Jus Suffragii* was the journal of the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance
fill in “the chasm between old and young [which] yawned increasingly wider over the years” (1997: 61).

Though Rupp does not elaborate on the nature of these “committees” and “events” created for younger women, she does note that many older generation activists would “welcome successors only if they took over the reins without changing the gait” (1997:62), and thus were interested in training young women to approach advocacy and activism in the ways that they did. “Youth” programs in fact came to be synonymous with “training” and seldom took into account the differentiated needs, interests, approaches and experiences younger women brought to the movement; instead they sought to “reconstruct” through training the existing agendas, tactics and philosophies of the older generation. Rupp offers the example of “WILPF-sponsored summer schools designed to appeal to young women” and member Carrie Chapman Catt, who “wanted carefully to choose and control” the young women participating in the program so that they “would follow” and “work harmoniously” with the existing leadership (1997:62).

Nearly 90 years later, 4 interview participants in this study attending a “summer institute” in 2009 designed by an established TFN to create “spaces for young women” express their frustration with what they perceive as an almost identical stance on the part of leadership. “They had no interest in what we had to contribute, what our ideas are for change, what experiences we actually had that make us who we are – activists who actually know things”, explains a young Polish activist; “they just wanted us to sit there, taking notes, learning how they do things so that when we take over, we do exactly as they do”. The parallels between Rupp’s findings and the contemporary approach to incorporating young women through “training programs” within established TFNs are
disconcerting. Though TFNs today have addressed young women’s presence in global activism perhaps more consistently and dynamically than the international suffragist networks did, there is much evidence in this chapter to suggest in some ways they confront the same failures to appeal to young women or to “take in” young women who might perceive feminism, activism, leadership and organizational dynamics differently than the leadership. Rather than shirking membership in a feminist network all together, however, young women interested in global feminism in fact construct their own networks “for young people”, and, in recognizing that they do need some “training” or “learning” as they develop their activist identities and grow to understand more about transnational advocacy, will work to some degree in isolation from older-generation activists to create such opportunities for education.

In *Defending Our Dreams*, an anthology of young feminists’ writing, Peggy Antrobus, a founding member of the TFN Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) explains that older activists often agree on the need for young women to “become involved in the Movement” but have failed to advance beyond “a conversation” (2005: xii) about that involvement. The evidence that young women “are already helping define social movements around the globe” is clear to Antrobus; she cites as an example the “significant constituency” of young women within “larger movements for global justice around the World Social Forum as well as the Ministerial meetings of the WTO, the joint annual IMF-World Bank meetings, and those of the leaders of the major industrialized countries” (2005: xiii). Attempting to harness this energy for the transnational feminist movement has been no easy task. As Antrobus and other young writers in the anthology consistently assert, this is because younger women both
experience and analyze “global issues” from a different vantage, at times conflicting over these differences with older generations of activists who fail to see the young women as autonomous individuals with their own independent experiences and perceptions. “They see us as their children”, a young Mexican activist explains of her interactions with older generation activists at international conferences, “as clay they are going to shape into them”.

As Antrobus sees it, young women have new, different ways of experiencing both activism and their “own multiple identities” vis-à-vis globalization; specifically, she explains that she has observed young women “combine ‘consciousness-raising’ and conscientization (relating personal experience to a structural analysis)...transforming the personal into action that reaches beyond personal concerns”. They speak “from their own experience” and link this “to an analysis of the large issues facing us today in a way that the earlier experiences of consciousness-raising failed to do” (2005: xv). The fact that for earlier generations this “was a choice, a trade-off, between self-reflective, analytical work and engagement in struggle”, and that “this combination is no longer unusual” among younger generations (2005: xv) makes for clear to Antrobus one type of entrenched difference that contributes not just to a generational divide within transnational feminist organizing, but to the misperceptions older generation activists may have when constructing educational programs for young women rather than with young women.

For younger women, like Shamillah Wilson and Anasuya Sengupta, one-time members of the YFA who also write for the anthology Defending Our Dreams, young women differ from their older generation counterparts because of an entrenched skepticism about large global movements and the institutions associated with them. They
write that for many young women in “this new global order”, feminism does “[provide] a critical framework, a political lens, through which to analyse and develop visions and strategies for a just world”, and networks do “provide a particular vehicle with which to make real those visions” (2005: 6). However, they continue, many young women complain of a gap “between discourse and practice” which “fuels skepticism about the relevance of feminist networks” (2005: 7). For one young Canadian study participant, this manifested in the “irony of being treated badly by older [activists] just because of the way I appear to them…because they stereotyped me based on their assumptions about a woman my age”; other study participants also expressed concern they would become “absorbed” by and “erased” within a global feminist movement that “can sometimes be bureaucratic” or “fail to truly embrace participation and diversity in leadership”. Wilson and Sengupta similarly express that, like many feminists their age interested in global activism, they fear that acceptance of and participation in existing networks’ methods – and training programs – means becoming “part of the problem”, or “part of a well-oiled institutionalized development apparatus” (2005: 6).

The impetus for young women to create their own networks specifically because they do not want to approach transnational advocacy in the same ways as the older generation is clear from both Wilson and Sengupta’s writing and from the interviews conducted for this study, as evidenced throughout these chapters. More specifically, however, many young feminists expressed they felt a need for learning and training programs that took into account the ways in which they perceived feminism differently or had different approaches to or ideas for what constituted activism, and so were motivated by this deficit to create their own networks. Some interviewees expressed interest in
constructing learning programs for young women that are “sourced from the participants themselves”, because, as one young African feminist states, she was “sick of joining with training programs that assumed because I am 23, I have never even had any experiences [and] know nothing about how the world works”.

The generational differences expressed by Wilson, Sengupta, Antrobus and indeed many of the participants in this study are at the center of young women’s frustration with the ways in which established TFNs construct “youth programs”. Since in many cases, these spaces are conceptualized as development programs and place heavy emphasis on training and teaching, the subtext younger activists receive is that older activists presume they “by nature” lack experience and knowledge. Young study participants widely acknowledged the importance of learning and of their need to draw on the experience of older generations of activists, but also almost universally expressed that the type of education occurring in the spaces provided for them by established TFNs was deeply flawed.

This chapter investigates the notion of “education” within transnational feminist organizing, as it emerged in interviews as one of the reasons young women felt the need to establish their own transnational feminist networks. Some young study participants explained that they turned to – or constructed – their own TFNs directly in response to “bad” or “frustrating” experiences with a “young feminist” learning or training institute whose facilitators did not acknowledge the different ways in which young women experienced feminism, globalization or activism, and rather treated them, as one activist from Azerbaijan explained, “like trainees to be molded into a very narrow feminism that is outdated”. Others did not express they had such experiences but nevertheless explained
they wanted a more direct role in shaping the ways in which their own “education” and learning, as well as that of other young activists, was developing.

The first section of this chapter provides a brief overview of the critiques young women made in interviews of their experiences with “youth training programs” within established TFNs, INGOs and women’s divisions of IGOs. Of the 20 women under 30 participating in the second (semi-structured interview) phase of this research, 15 had participated in such a program; of these 15, 13 reported feeling frustrated during some or all of their time within the program. No specific names or other identifying information of activists, organizations or programs will be included in this section for two reasons. First, while some young activists did name specific programs, networks and organizations, they asked that these statements not be linked in any way to their identities, or asked that their statements only contribute to a group result or general discussion. They expressed concern that a criticism of a training program offered by an organization that sponsored – and in some cases, continues to sponsor – their activism and work could make them appear ungrateful, and, as several emphasized, they very much appreciate and acknowledge the worth of the opportunities they had been given. They also expressed fear that any criticism emerging from their young women’s TFN or name specifically could jeopardize existing or future relationships with donors, current or future employment, and current and future “friendships”. Second, some young interview participants had agreed to speak to this issue only upon the condition that they not specify the organization, program or network they had experiences with, citing the aforementioned concerns. In the context of this study’s guiding research questions, the most important part of this data remains the young women’s perceptions of their
experiences and the reasons these experiences motivated them to construct their own TFNs. For this reason, the specific names of the organization are not relevant and this data has thus been included for illustrative purposes.

The second section of this chapter provides two examples of young women’s TFNs constructing “education” programs they feel are more democratic, inclusive, and participant-centered. The first example details a pan-African young feminist network founded by Cameroonian and Kenyan activists who were later joined by activists from Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Uganda. The co-founders explain that their main motivation was to “gather young women concerned with gender equity but scattered in different places” together, so that “we could learn from each other”. Having participated in “many” NGO and TFN training and “young women’s leadership” programs in the last five years, members of the Pan-African Young Women’s network remain “thankful for the experience” but frustrated that “they were so short lived” and “did not provide enough youth experiences or voices” as “examples that learning does not have to come only from the old to the young”. In part, this is the reason a member from Kenya and a member from Cameroon co-founded the network: “[young women] have much to learn, and we can do this…it is possible to do this from one another”. The second example provides an overview of the E-Learning programs facilitated by the YFA, and gives specific details taken from participant observation of a session designed to inform participants about the global rise in religious fundamentalisms. Participants in these E-Learning sessions are members of YFA’s online community the “Young Feminist Wire” and, as the example shows, participate significantly in the direction and sequencing of each session. These E-Learning sessions evidence not only young women collaborating to construct learning
opportunities but “multigenerational” collaboration as well, since the YFA partnered with AWID to draw on the expertise of their research staff to construct the lesson. In this way, the YFA’s E-Learning also serves as an illustration of a successful model of learning that draws on the experience of older generations of feminists but also actively incorporates the voices, concerns, “different” experiences and “different” needs of younger participants, both in the planning and facilitation of the sessions.

“‘Training’ is not ‘Learning’: Young Feminists Respond to TFN ‘Youth Programs’

Interestingly, both older and younger generation activists participating in this study make the case that TFNs have to some degree recognized the need to take formal steps to incorporate younger feminist’s concerns and perspectives, with members of both samples pointing to the various young women’s programs and young women’s training institutes emerging within established networks as an example. But where the older generation activists tended to identify these as evidence of “successful” incorporation of young women, many of the younger activists in fact felt that these programs, which one identified as “training, not learning”, only signified minimal progress toward a more democratic, multigenerational model of global feminism. In general, there were three recurring critiques of existing programs, which included for interview participants a large intergovernmental organization’s young-women’s leadership program, research and training institutes within well-established transnational feminist networks, and young women’s divisions and training programs within regional NGOs and feminist networks.

First, many young women point out that “well-meaning” TFNs and women’s organizations believe providing financial assistance to young women so that they may attend training sessions or learning institutes is “enough” to include them in the
movement. This, one young activist from the Caucus region explains, means that the sponsoring organizations will “not do much more” to make other efforts to connect or collaborate with young women. When she and two of her young colleagues approached an organization’s leadership about wanting to be included more in making decisions about the agenda and activities of a 3-day training program, she was “reminded nicely” that the organization “was allowing me to be there” by sponsoring her travel costs, and therefore had “already included” her in its proceedings. “It stops at costs,” she continues, “and many young women are afraid to push for more, in case [the] cost [coverage] will then disappear too.” Interestingly, funding has been identified by both older and younger generations of activists as a significant obstacle to young women’s participation in global feminist movements and is therefore clearly important; this is why, explains a young West African feminist, it is so central to the ways in which older generation activists see financial sponsorship as synonymous with support.

The financial constraint of young women – particularly when compared to their older counterparts – is long-standing explanation of the “aging” population within global feminist activism; as Rupp’s work shows “the financial demands of participation” in international suffrage movements were “an important structural barrier” that precluded youth from participating in the movement: “older established women were more likely to have the personal means or stature that would make travel possible” (1997: 62). This same conclusion – that young women do not participate because of financial constraint – led established TFNs to create young women’s institutes, programs and academies that offered sponsorship as a way to remedy the problem of young women’s marginalization within the movement. “But it is not just about having little money”, explains the young
West African feminist, “having the money in your hands does not mean that anyone will hear your voice once you arrive, or will ask you to do anything [during a training program] besides just listen and agree with everything.” While she and other interview participants acknowledge that lack of resources for young women are an important issue, it is “just one of many” and should not overshadow the other barriers to participation young women face – like the “lack of consideration of what we actually want to learn during these things”, a young Canadian activist offers.

One-time Global Fund for Women advisor and YFA member Annie Wilkinson notes in her blog that young women comprised 20% of the total attendees at the 2008 AWID International Forum in South Africa – an impressive percentage that set a new precedent for “multigenerational” attendance. Still, she explains, she and her young colleagues were left wondering how much larger the younger population would have been if not for financial constraint:

For many of us, getting to the forum presented [a] challenge. Many young women lack the financial resources to travel to feminist gatherings. Or their organizations do not see their participation as a priority. This lack of resources reflects a greater trend – young women’s organizations have a hard time getting their work funded (2009).

Wilkinson and other young feminists – including interview participants for this study – identified and “spoke up about” the issue of insufficient funding and “inequitable distribution of resources for women’s rights based on age” through the 2008 Forum and many other meetings, both “youth-only” and multigenerational. This observation and subsequent effort to address it was the genesis of the FRIDA network and fund for young women activists. But, Wilkinson continues, the other concerns of the young women meeting at the 2008 Forum were equally as important: young women “described not being able to set the agenda in the women’s movement at the local or international level,
and felt those under 30 were “sparse among women in positions of leadership inside and outside the movement, and hard to spot at the decision-making table”. Wilkinson also writes that she and the others were concerned with the fact that younger women are often “left with unpaid activism as their only option for participation” in an increasingly “professionalized” global feminist movement, explaining this professionalization “has created a structure that concretizes some divisions – including that of age – and makes it difficult for many young feminists to “break in” or gain visibility for their work in the movement” (2009).

The fact that many young women are actively working within the movement – regardless of their “professional” status or participation in formal training sessions sponsored by TFNs – is also something Wilkinson emphasizes in reflecting on her participation with the YFA and other young women’s organizations: “while some young women are new to feminist activism, and have entered the movement following in the steps of their mothers and grandmothers, many are already longtime activists, having stepped into the role as young teens, alongside or even before their mothers and grandmothers” (2009). This observation of a diverse set of experiences among young women was consistently referred to in interviews for this study, and formed the basis of the second common critique of established networks’ youth-education programs: many young women were confronted with presumptions that their young age meant they had little to no experience with activism, little to no knowledge of advocacy work or the processes of globalization, and are “the future” of the movement rather than, as one Canadian activist put it, “part of the movement right now”. Young interview participants expressed concern that training sessions and lessons did not draw on their already-
acquired experiences with global advocacy and activism, or their “potentially different versions” of feminism and feminist activism. One young American participant explained that she felt “having only older women doing the training sends a message that you can’t be part of an activist community possessing knowledge unless you have been working in the field for 20 years”. Writing of her experience at a United Nations High Level Meeting on Youth during 2011, FRIDA member and blogger Perla – along with other young activists she met during the meeting – “determined…that initiatives led by young activists in justice, security, health [and] indigenous, LGBT, sexual rights and others have generated a lot more progress than the strategies and actions of governments” (2011). Young people as both individuals and collectively, Vazquez continues, not only “survive with the lowest level of resources” provided by the international donor community, but manage despite such a lack of infrastructure to provide community services, create transnational social justice campaigns and mobilize mass numbers to address the goals of their respective campaigns.

It is this kind of effort young interview participants in this study argued should be included as examples in educational programs offered by established networks and organizations. “It is possible to learn from what young women have done”, explains a young activist from West Africa, who began an online, pan-African network for young feminists precisely because she believes in “the power of peer mentoring”. For a young activist from Egypt, a narrative of younger activists’ and networks’ successes are “voices and examples that are missing” from the conversations and training programs she has participated in. “Not one time,” she explains, “was anyone leading our sessions under 50 years old”.


Ultimately, recognizing and addressing “diversity” when constructing educational programs means treating more than the national, socio-economic, and cultural locations of younger women attending; it “must include”, as the young Egyptian activist continued, thinking about the different levels of experience young women have and have had. “Some women under 25 that we know very well have been so creative [with their activism] that they have been interviewed by newspapers from all over the world…they obviously know how to get [journalists] to pay attention to an issue they are fighting for. Why can’t we learn from them directly? Why can’t it be recognized and understood that they obviously have a lot they can teach all activists – even older generations?”

Finally, participants criticized the lack of opportunities to work collaboratively with older-generation activists in constructing young women’s educational programs – or even within program events and activities as they unfolded. In one way, this was explained as frustration that young women were not “consulted” about what their interests or experiences were prior to the agenda and objectives of an educational program being planned; in another, this was expressed as frustration that institutes and sessions had few older women present outside of those responsible for facilitating the training. “Do older women have nothing to learn?”, asked one young Canadian activist; “why are we thinking only younger women should attend these kinds of events?” Even younger activists who were not overtly critical of a “training approach” to younger women’s inclusion into the movement nevertheless expressed that they wished there were more opportunities to interact with older generation women so they were not, as one young activist from the YFA put it, “silod” and kept at a distance from the “more official proceedings of the movement”. Giving the example of a TFN that did begin
consulting with young feminists after their initial attempt at an “educational” youth program had been poorly received, she underscores the importance of a collaborative approach to such endeavors. “Recognizing the need for younger women in a movement is only the beginning”, she explains; “without actually hearing their voices and getting their input on what they need and want to learn, a program will not work”.

The following sections provide perhaps the best illustration of the ways in which young women’s TFNs attempt to construct learning opportunities they feel are more collaborative and participatory. In the first example, a group of young women from five African countries present such learning opportunities as the sole reason for their efforts to construct a youth-only TFN. They explain that their network exists almost exclusively to facilitate “peer mentoring” opportunities for young African feminists, which they believe that, unlike “training” programs, will “build the knowledge and self-esteem of young women, so they can stand face to face with their elders” in the movement. The second example of the YFA’s E-Learning program is different to some degree, in that it represents one of several reasons the network exists; while YFA members participating in this study explain that a significant motivation for the formation of the network was the need for more effective learning opportunities for young feminists, it was not the only reason the network emerged. In addition, while the young women comprising the African network have an eventual goal of older and younger generation activists working more effectively together, they do not currently engage with older activists to facilitate learning among their network. The YFA, however, prioritizes multigenerational collaboration and incorporates the expertise of older generation activists in constructing their educational programs.
Finally, both of these examples reify that young women’s TFNs draw heavily on the use of ICTs to enact and facilitate their work, and that they perceive this environment to be one that lends itself to more democratic and participatory processes. In the ways that this pertains to “education” in young women’s TFNs, interview participants made two points specifically: first, that ICT enabled them to offer learning programs to a wider base of activists interested in learning, and second, that the online format allowed for different and more varied forms of communication and participation, unlike face-to-face learning environments. Both sets of participants – those from the YFA and those from the pan-African young feminist network – suggested their programs are “more open” and can accommodate more participants than face to face meetings often can. Two interviewees specifically referenced the example of activists unable to travel to regional or global youth-training events because of costs, who were nevertheless able to “attend” their program; a third recounted the frustration of young women she knew who “had never been selected for any training” but “really wanted to learn” about topics such as resource management and community mobilization, and thus could do so by connecting online.

While the pan-African young feminist network has an ongoing, somewhat informal approach to learning that evolves through networking, the YFA’s recurring E-Learning events happen in “real time” for a specific duration. As will be described in more detail below, these sessions enable participants to actively shape the pace and direction by communicating in real time through the use of software. “Facilitating discussion” rather than “teaching”, the YFA (and AWID) members running the sessions draw on the conversations, questions, and comments of the participants to determine how to proceed; in this online environment, participants are unable to remain passive and
Instead are consistently engaged. In addition, the breaking of each E-Learning “institute” into two sessions, scheduled a few weeks apart, enables time for feedback from participants regarding issues such as the lesson’s pacing, the nature of the subjects covered within the theme of the institute, and the experiences each have to offer; as the YFA follows each session with an evaluation questionnaire sent via email, this data becomes immediately available for consideration prior to the next session. These various forms of “online participation” were presented as examples of the different, and perhaps more favorable, opportunities ICT provide.

At the same time, however, the same participants acknowledged the limitations of ICT, and in fact seemed uncomfortable to some degree in confronting such ideas. Basic Internet access, a specific speed of access, and whether or not a participant’s systems can support and sustain software programs that provide sound, visuals, and “real-time” participation were all examples of “what some young women do not have”, but “would need” to participate. In particular, this remains a consistent issue for the young women working together to form the pan-African young feminist network, as they express their members (and potential members) in particular are most likely to confront access difficulties. They remain optimistic, however, as all participants did, that access is becoming “less of a problem” for young activists. At the very least, “email and SMS, these are things people have more access to [these days]…this does become a way that at the most basic [level] we can communicate”.
Networking and Peer-Mentoring Young African Feminists

23 year old Cameroonian activist Rose explains that her motivation for starting a young women’s transnational network comes in part from her desire to learn not only more about global activism, feminism, and the logistics of NGO and advocacy work, but also about “the experiences other young women were having in their own communities” and finding this information hard to find. Rose works regularly with both community and feminist organizations in Cameroon and “the region”, but has had mixed experiences with “being listened to” and “respected” by some of the established activists.

Rose turned to “mainstream” online social networking sites looking to learn from and connect with other activists, but was dissatisfied by her experiences there as well. These sites are useful, she explains, but “so large” that youth, “especially women”, can become overwhelmed. Even within the “friendlier places” online, she continues, young women “do not stand out or speak up enough”. Rose began to envision a website that could function as an “online community space for young African women committed to promoting gender equality” after noting, along with several of her colleagues, that “young women [appear] only passively present” online communities. This was strange to Rose and her colleagues, since in fact young African feminists at the local, regional and global level “are doing good work, sacrificing and volunteering in their communities to raise money for women’s groups, to teach language and maths to young girls, to organize email campaigns…these sorts of [things] that require real effort but little time for self-promotion or carving a place in globalized campaigns.”

Ann, a young Kenyan activist who works with Rose on the idea of building a pan-African community webspace for young feminists, agrees that “the problem is that

72 The network’s name and online identity have been omitted at the request of the study participants.
[young women] are not communicating about their [activist] experiences regularly” online, and so “do not have a very loud voice” or presence there. Ann asserts this same “pattern” happens within regional and global women’s movements, as well. This was a concern to Rose and Ann respectively, when they met each other at “an African conference on women’s issues [sponsored by] African and European NGOs and [intergovernmental organizations]”. The women also found though engaging with other younger activists informally outside of the conference’s proceedings that many shared their frustrations: despite their hard work within their respective communities, age precluded them from participating fully in the established regional and global networks they were also members of. Ann asserts that “any decision related to how to spend money, what kinds of approach [the network] took toward an issue like women and violence in the community – our thoughts on these things were not asked for”.

Ann continues that the discovery of these common experiences underscored the need for young activists to organize within their respective communities and states but also transnationally, to “use the connections [older generations of] feminists created” for “strengthening our own voices”. Rose, Ann and three others began to experiment with ways to stay connected beyond the conference by utilizing the Internet and other ICTs. The online activist communities and discussion forums they considered included general social networking sites like Facebook and social-justice oriented sites such as TakingITGlobal73. But as Rose explains, “these did not feel like our own safe [and] controlled space”. Some of the activists Rose and Ann were interested in connecting with were concerned about the “somewhat public” nature of many social networking sites; others found within social justice-oriented sites a disconcerting rhetoric about African

73 http://www.tigweb.org/
women activists: “the conversations [on discussion boards]”, Rose explains, “if they are
about women at all, [are] usually about African women’s absence in [global] women’s
feminist movements.” Finding this to be reflective of “stereotypes about poor African
women who cannot help themselves”, Rose and the others agreed that constructing their
own, “safer” and “more controlled” online space was necessary.

As Rose and Ann’s plans for an online network grew, they assembled ten African
women under 30 years old who were active in “women’s movements” and “gender
justice campaigns”. This group of women from Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya,
Uganda and Ethiopia include both professional and volunteer activists with a range of
experiences working in women’s human rights. Calling their website a “webspace solely
for young women”, Rose and Ann explain that the site at first was envisioned to be a
collaborative blogging and discussion forum “where [members] can share… stories and
needs, even anger”. In late 2011, however, the group began to recognize the need for
members’ learning and education. “So many questions we received were about how to
start an NGO – how does one find money? Time? Does the government have to be
involved”? Ann explains that this was “not surprising” for two reasons. First, she
explains, young African women are “not the usual people” attending TFN, NGO or IGO
sessions on things like donor-funding and resource management. Such sessions, she
explains, are “typically” attended by older men and women within a network or
organization – “the more trusted and experienced members”. If “youth are there”, she
continues, they are likely to be male. Second, the few programs designated specifically
for young women can be “limited” – both Rose and Ann cite several instances in which
they felt the “training” session did not answer their questions, include their participation, or invite their feedback and perspectives on the nature of the material covered.

In response to all of this, the young women participating in the network decided to devise a peer-mentoring program to enhance learning opportunities. They developed a system of matching new members who express interest online with “mentors” who are close in age but different in “levels of experience”. Some of the “mentors” are the activists who “were there at the beginning” and so “founded” and “contributed to the vision” of a pan-African young feminist network; others are recent additions to the online community who bring with them a degree of experience in women’s human rights and social justice organizing.

As an educational program of sorts, the project’s peer-to-peer mentoring is meant to counter the “top-down” training programs offered to young women activists by established local, regional and global feminist networks. The idea, Rose explains, is two-fold: while the less experienced young activist women gain more knowledge from their peer mentors, and hopefully “more experience to speak up and to speak out”, the network’s policy of pairing members from different nationalities and backgrounds whenever possible means “the mentors learn too” – by learning about their mentees’ communities and concerns.

Because the network is small at the moment, with current membership hovering around 20 and representing the West, East, and Central African regions, the co-founders make many of the matches themselves, “introducing” members who volunteer as mentors to new members seeking out information and experiences. This includes a range of issues, from the history of “global feminism” and “neoliberal development” to the
processes involved with starting a website or raising funds for a community organization. The hope among the project’s founders is that as their organization grows, they can work toward developing software that would profile interested members and automatically suggest mentor-matches based on a set of criteria they refine over time. The members “watch how these initial mentorships go”, discussing what members of the partnership learn and gain from their relationship, and how this compares to their more collaborative or group experiences, such as the ongoing and sporadic blog postings or discussion forum activities. While “not certain about the strength” of the structure they have thus far used in constructing both more intimate partnerships and collaborative online spaces for the discussion and “education” components of the networks objectives, the project’s founders feel it is “most useful in terms of keeping an even access”; members of the network who “know less” or “have less” – whether this relates to “NGO experience, knowledge about globalization, money, schooling, language…” – are “not in a place where they feel left out”. Given their collective experiences with marginalization in other activist networks, whether those are global “youth” networks emerging out of institutionalized social justice NGOs and IGOs or more local and regional African women’s organizations, the members are pointedly dedicated to “everyone feeling they participate in our decisions and the direction we go in”. For this reason specifically, the algorithmic, computer-facilitated “matches” the group is working toward are “important” and will be “helpful as the network grows”, but “still must be recognized for what they are, which is impersonal.” Explains Ann: “we are working on a way to keep that person element [intact]. We never want [potential] members to leave because they feel they are not actually interacting with humans! This is
not very woman-to-woman, but maybe it’s a way to work with the technology as women, if we can blend these two somehow.”

Through their already-existing programs and intentions for the future design and the growth of their network, these activists foreground the importance of a young women’s TFN as a “safe” space to learn collaboratively and, as Ann says “with respect for the experiences one already has”. Interestingly, by fusing their educational goals with their innovative use of technology, these young women also re-conceptualize the mechanisms of ICT-enabled activism to fit feminist goals. One way their doing this is by making social networking more localized and “personal”. Interestingly, network members also perceive themselves to be re-organizing feminist activism to reflect a more democratic process; through the strategic matching of mentors and mentees, and more importantly the dedication to the idea that mentors learn “just as much” from their mentees, power is distributed more evenly, leaving “everyone with a feeling of control and importance” in the network’s “learning” agenda. The hope, essentially, is using these tools and personal connections between young activists to “build up the potential of young women, to feel more powerful in their own communities and in the world”.

**E-Learning on YFA’s “Young Feminist Wire”**

While the YFA emphasizes the importance of face-to-face interaction through its Young Women’s Dialogues and activities within AWID’s International Forums, program coordinator Ghadeer explains a central focus and “meeting point” for members is the Young Feminist Wire. More than just YFA’s website, “the Wire” includes collaborative dynamics: members submit blogs, post comments and videos, and link their work on the site to their work on other social media applications. Since its beginning in May 2010, the
Wire community has grown to over 1,000 members, many of whom “regularly” contribute material to the site. Members are also often active on other social media websites – some “activist”, and some not – but, just as Rose and Ann make the point that many young feminists interested in transnational networking and activism will often seek out “their own spaces” online, the YFA team also suggests young women remain in need of “a platform that reflects their voices, opinions and perspectives”. The “discussions happening in [other] online spaces in response to social unrest all over the world” do not necessarily reflect “feminist conversations”, explains Ghadeer, and so one of the main aims of the YFA team at its inception was to extend those conversations but also formalize them into learning opportunities. The online, E-Learning series was thus conceptualized as a way to “provide more space for young women to reflect on their own organizing practices”, but also to learn about issues that “mattered most” to them, as they manifested on the Wire.

Since a significant portion of YFA members’ “conversations” – collaborative blogging, discussion forums, photo and video uploads and other communications – happen on the Wire, they become archived and, at times, “curated” to enable narratives of young women’s experiences to emerge. For example, when the YFA recently held a “blogathon” asking members to contribute posts relating to “new models for leadership and social justice organizing”, the results were aggregated into one collection, or “storified”74, using a social media application that enables the collecting and manipulation of works by various authors from various places online. It is this kind of

74 The “Storify” creators explain their application is “a way to tell stories using social media such as Tweets, photos and videos” by searching “multiple social networks from one place, and then [dragging] individual elements into [one] story”, therefore “preventing the streams of information quickly lost in a never-ending stream of updates” from “being lost” (Storify, 2011). The YFA Storify can be accessed at http://storify.com/YFWire/young-feminist-activists-share-their-feminist-stories.
process that enabled the YFA team responsible for creating the E-Learning sessions to not just consider the “voices, needs, and perspectives” of the network’s members at each stage of planning for the program, but to build it from “all the information and knowledge this community of young women has already provided”, explains Ghadeer. These various forms of communication were reviewed in determining the themes, questions, and issues the E-Learning sessions would offer.

The YFA team’s strategy of drawing directly from the membership to plan out the online sessions is just one representation of their participatory and collaborative approach to learning. Other facets of the E-Learning program that reinforce this priority include assembling a “multigenerational” team to design and facilitate the sessions and the selection of a virtual “classroom” application that would enable various modes of participation. Both are explained further below.

Plans to run four two-day E-Learning sessions around a broad theme of “Interrogating Movements” were announced in early Summer, 2011. At the time of writing, two sessions had been run. The first series in June 2011 presented “an introduction to the theories and concepts of movement building” and “feminist leadership”. Both sessions lasted for a period of two hours and were held two days apart. The second series in December 2011 explored “the global trend of rising religious fundamentalisms and its impact on women’s rights”. Each of these sessions also lasted two hours, and were offered about a week apart. These two topics, along with a third series planned for early 2012 entitled “Where is the Money for Young Women’s Rights?”, represent some of the most crucial concerns of the community, the YFA team
explain, and so were selected to be among the first of the program.

Each session’s team, responsible for both planning and facilitation, consisted of YFA and AWID members. The sessions on feminism in the context of rising religious fundamentalisms, for example, were facilitated in part by YFA members such as Ghadeer, but also by the experts comprising the administrative and research staff of AWID’s Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms Initiative. Preparatory materials and information for PowerPoint presentations were also sourced from this Initiative, and were made accessible to participants before, during and after the sessions through a password-protected resources page.

The Sessions were only open to Wire community members and limited to 40 participants; no special priorities were made regarding the space and, as Ghadeer explains, registration was “first-come-first-served”. The decision to use a web-conferencing system for the sessions was manifold: its applications enabled simultaneous voice and visual presentations, participants were able to download it for free, and it included several types of participatory features. Beyond voicing their questions and concerns, participants could also type out questions or, at the very least, click on plus or minus symbols to represent their approval or disapproval of a statement or discussion, or even to the direction the lesson was taking.

Indeed, moderators during both sessions of the religious fundamentalisms series often paused to ask the participants whether or not they were interested in hearing more about a term, event, or issue within the lesson, or whether or not they were interested in moving on from a conversation; transcripts from both sessions contain hundreds of plusses and minuses, as this became in some cases the preferred (and perhaps fastest)
way for participants to give feedback on the direction of the lesson. It also may have been a way for participants to communicate despite their level of comfort with spoken or written English; while much of the Wire content is offered in three languages (English, Spanish and French), the sessions were run only in English.

The plan for each segment of an E-Learning session was an even division of instruction and reflection across the two hour period. Preparatory materials sent out to participants in the religious fundamentalisms session explained it would “discuss religious fundamentalisms and women’s rights”, including “the terminology and concepts used, possible factors for the rise in religious fundamentalisms, the impacts religious fundamentalisms have on women’s rights…” (YFA, 2011). In addition, however, participants were told they would be asked to “reflect” on a series of questions following the instructional part of the sessions:

- What is the experience of religious fundamentalisms in your context or area of work? Does age or generation make a difference in the way women experience or respond to religious fundamentalisms? How do religious fundamentalists seek to engage or recruit youth in your context, or are there youth actively challenging fundamentalist ideologies? As women’s rights activists, what do we need to do to build stronger movements and counter regressive ideologies? (YFA, 2011).

In both the December 2 and December 9 segments of this session, the discussion of these questions – and interaction of the participants in general – in fact comprised about 60% of the conversation (or about 72 minutes of the 120 minute session on December 2, and 85 minutes of the 120 minutes session on December 9). It was often reflective, with statements made about the topic framed out by an individual contributor’s experiences. As part of my participant-observation in the session, for example, I had asked whether and how young people are particularly vulnerable to religious fundamentalisms – an idea that had been suggested to me by many young activists when they responded in
interviews to my question of how young people “experience globalization differently”
than their older-generation counterparts do (or did, when they were young). E-Learning
participants offered answers originating from their own regional contexts and personal
experiences, contributing to the lesson by diversifying the groups’ understanding of how
answers can vary. Lejla, writing from Bosnia, offered that “most young people [in
Bosnia] got more religiously radical during and after the war”, as “more radical Islam
was mainly brought from the outside”; Sya explained that in Singapore, where she lives
and works, “there is a certain group of economically marginalized Malays (who are 99%
Muslim) susceptible to being influenced by Religious Fundamentalisms because they are
under-educated”. Later, moderators encouraged participants to again respond, and many
did drawing from personal experience (see Fig. 4). In doing so, participants Maryam,
Ghadeer and Sya initiate a conversation that reflects the aforementioned observations
made by Antrobus and others in the young global feminism anthology Defending Our
Dreams: as is “characteristic” of young feminists in global movements, these women are
speaking of and from their personal experiences and using this to analyze a larger global
issue. More importantly, that this type of analysis is integrated into the YFA’s E-
Learning program, and is not only an “allowed” but featured activity, reinforces the
network’s commitment to the type of learning many young activists had expressed they
preferred. Contrary to models based on “training” and “top-down” approaches to
learning, in other words, the segments analyzed here demonstrate the ways in which the
E-Learning program offers an educational program that is participatory and interactive,
built through a multigenerational collaboration that utilizes the strengths of both older
and younger activists respectively.
While the decision to collect feedback on organizational activities and programs such as a training or learning session is certainly not unique to younger women’s TFNs, the E-Learning evaluations, distributed to participants immediately following a session, do illustrate the prominence of priorities such participation and learning through interaction. Besides the “usual” questions of whether or not participants found the material useful to their work and the facilitators easy to follow, for example, the evaluation also asked whether or not participants felt there was something they wanted to discuss but could not, whether they felt the length of time devoted to discussion and instruction was
appropriate, and whether they had enough opportunities to interact with both the moderators and with each other.

One evaluation question in fact asks whether the participants had made connections to other activists they felt would sustain beyond the session. Providing opportunities for activists to network and connect with one another, explains Ghadeer, is “just as much a priority” as the dissemination of information within an E-Learning session, as “connections themselves can help young organizations grow and pick up new skills”. This is a further demonstration not only of the networks’ more holistic approach to learning, but of its belief that “student”-participants from the YFA community have experience and knowledge of their own to offer (see Fig. 5).

Positioning community networking as extension of the “learning” opportunities they provide helps the YFA move toward “strengthening young women’s voices” in global feminism more broadly, Ghadeer explains. Many young activists – particularly those who are new to global social justice organizing – often work in isolation, “even when they are part of a global network”. Just as Rose and Ann hope their “peer-mentoring” model will facilitate both formal and informal learning for their pan-African network’s members by helping to strengthen the relationships between them, the YFA also remain optimistic that the E-Learning sessions will foster the kind of extended connections that help to strengthen both organizations and individuals and, ultimately, fortify the presence of young women in global activism.
Participants in the sessions I observed certainly represented a range of levels of experience and knowledge, despite the fact that all could be classified within the same age group (“young”, or 18-30). They were both professional and grassroots activists. Some were staff of large and well-known NGOs such as Catholics for Choice, Planned Parenthood and Musawah for Equality in the Muslim Family; others ran local offices of regional or state-level organizations such as Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace.
and Metta Moe Myanmar\textsuperscript{75}. Some claimed no affiliation and identified themselves as “freelance activists” and “independent feminists who wanted to learn more” about religious fundamentalisms and women’s rights. During the session, I observed several activists making plans to send each other information or to stay in touch; the YFA remain positive about the ways in which the program will not only “teach” members about particular topics but will foster connections between them so that the learning continues beyond a two hour, bi- or tri-annual session.

**Conclusion: The Challenges of Learning**
Young women activists from both the YFA and pan-African young feminist network articulate the importance of treating their networks as educational opportunities, and point out the ways in which learning happens both formally and informally through their activities. For Rose and Ann, the interest in building a network of young feminists from various African states was motivated largely by “education”; while the increasingly familiar statements about feeling marginalized and excluded from established transnational feminist networks were also given in response to questions about why a “separate” and “youth-only” network was conceived of and founded, the women emphasize primarily that they recognized their need to learn more about global activism and advocacy work. Rose explains that many young feminists “cannot stand face to face with their elders” in global activism in part because of a lack of experience or knowledge, but also because of a lack of confidence and a failure to recognize that they do possess a valuable body of knowledge and “know more than they [realize]”. Having experienced

\textsuperscript{75} Established in May 2009 by “an energetic group of young people” in Myanmar, Metta Moe supports “community mobilization and capacity building” by “supporting girls through literacy and health care education”. Metta Moe works “with the support of” international NGO Salus World (http://salusworld.org/)
frustration with established networks disregarding the knowledge a young participant brings to a program, and with “being treated as students”, Rose and Ann set out to construct a youth network that draws from “professional” sources of knowledge but also facilitates “peer-to-peer” learning to highlight young women’s “already established” knowledge. Like the YFA team responsible for the E-Learning sessions, Rose and Ann also explain their interest in positioning the experiences young activists bring to a learning-oriented activity or discussion as “knowledge”; as Rose explains, their network views learning as not just acquiring of information, but as a “confidence and self-esteem building” activity as well.

The founding of the YFA was not motivated only by an interest in creating and facilitating more participatory and collaborative opportunities for learning programs and events, but members participating in this study maintain that educating the YFA community about activist and advocacy work – in part by aggregating and utilizing members’ own experiences, strategies, and ideas, in tandem with those of experts and “more experienced” activists – remains a significant part of their purpose. Though not necessarily through formal structures or specific programs, all of the young women’s TFNs included in this study make similar assertions and emphasize the importance of utilizing their networks to facilitate and foster “learning”. The advisors and administrators of the FRIDA fund, for example, point out several times in an interview that young women’s organizations have many strengths and a wealth of experience to share with the global feminist community, but may lack “administrative” skills – human resources, grant management and fundraising were commonly named. This is why FRIDA seeks not just to offer financial but also “administrative” and “management”
support, by having members share best-practices and advisors and staff generate detailed blogs about strategies effective for both advocacy and non-profit management. As Myra Batchelder writes in a blog for FRIDA’s website, the network is concerned with “more than just financial needs” of young activists as its members are “eager to find ways to connect and learn from one another”. Batchelder offers an to provide one instance of the ways in which young activists attempt to stay connected in order to continue learning from each other:

Seven years ago, a friend and I were working in sexual and reproductive health and rights non-profits in New York City and became frustrated with the lack of opportunities to engage with our fellow twenty- and thirtysomethings interested in similar issues. We started up a monthly networking happy hour called “Repro Health Happy Hour” to connect young activists in the New York City area. The event now has a listserv of over 1,100 and the model has been replicated by young activists in over 12 cities, everywhere from Boston, MA to London, England to Nairobi, Kenya! Our effort is just one of many on Facebook, Twitter, and other vehicles that young activists are utilizing to connect with one another.

Young feminists from around the world, Batchelder continues, “have much to learn from one another”, but “creating new avenues to do so” requires that young women create their own networks. For Rose, Ann, and the other members of the pan-African young feminist network, this was articulated as a “safe space to learn” where young women could “make mistakes” and even “practice” before engaging more regularly with older activists; for the YFA team generating the E-Learning sessions, this was explained as a space in which young women participants took the lead in both constructing and running training events – and shared the power to direct and shape current and future sessions with the YFA community at large. Though these examples provide two different approaches to learning within a young women’s TFN, they both illustrate how important “getting training right” is to young feminists, and also illustrate how learning events become avenues for young
women to engage in the more participatory, collaborative and democratic forms of global networking they prioritize.
Chapter 7: Conclusion, Summary of Findings and Recommendations

This study makes the observation that many young feminists have devoted a significant amount of time and attention to developing “youth-only” transnational feminist networks, and ultimately asks why. Existing TFNs and other forms of global social justice networks including gender equity as an issue have certainly made some effort to incorporate younger activists. As this study’s findings suggest, however, these efforts have been lacking in several ways, from a failure to “see young women as individuals with unique experiences”, as one young Canadian feminist explains, to a “reluctance to incorporate young women as leaders”, according to one older-generation Hungarian feminist, to a “misunderstanding of the different things young women need, and are interested in”, according to a young Kenyan feminist. Taken together, these sentiments underscore a prominent finding: that age, especially in tandem with gender, marks an actor for marginalization within global advocacy and activist networks, even within the transnational feminist networks that have seen some success in building more inclusive and participatory organizational forms.

The following sections reiterate this study’s other main findings and clarify how these offer some advancement to studies of global social movements and transnational women’s organizing. First, I recount specifically that analysis of interviews and participant observation with young women in this sample revealed a pattern of answers in response to the driving research question of why young women form youth-only transnational feminist networks. Study participants identified three predominant reasons despite their varied circumstances and experiences, both personally and “as activists” in established movements: first, the young women felt obstructed from the process of
dialogue, discourse and debate unfolding in established networks and organizations, and thus felt excluded from any “decision-making processes”. By constructing youth-only transnational feminist networks, many participants maintained, they could ensure a broader access that would not, either literally or more subversively, restrict participants based on age. Second, young women in this sample assert they are “different” than older generations of activists and so need their own networks. As the discussion in chapter five shows, this is often articulated through the example of different tactics younger activists take, different “philosophies” or “approaches” to feminism among younger activists and, certainly, the “different experiences” young women have with processes such as globalization and patriarchy. However, as chapter five also shows, both younger and older activists at times struggled to explain how young women are “different”, despite their adamant stance that they are. Finally, participants almost universally explained they had experienced in some established networks’ and organizations’ “young feminist” or “young women’s” programs a type of “training” that did not take into consideration young women’s unique experiences, or the skills young women already have to offer. Not including young women either in the facilitation or planning of educational programs, and not incorporating young women as instructors or “role models” and “mentors”, study participants explained, motivated them to construct their own networks in order to take a more collaborative approach to learning. As many young study participants explained, they were interested in constructing educational or learning programs built around the idea that young women are part of the current movement and its successes, and are not “just” the movement’s “future”. This chapter concludes with recommendations for the ways in which young women’s experiences and leadership
might be more directly incorporated into theorizing a range of global processes, from transnational social movements and the construction of a “global public sphere” to the impact proliferating ICTs have on activism and younger activists in global networks.

**Young Women’s TFNs as “Public Spheres”**

When young women feel marginalized in TFNs and thus convene around “youth” as an identity, envisioning themselves as a “counter-public”, they both construct and utilize “youth-only” networks as spaces in which they can build a more participatory public sphere. Young women cited a multitude of problems with what they perceived to be the existing and established feminist “global public sphere”. Examples that were given included being silenced, ignored, or excluded from the proceedings of global women’s and feminist conferences, or treated as “tokens” but not “listened to” within the same forums, or being “talked about” but not “talked to” or “listened to” within women’s or “youth” divisions and events sponsored by intergovernmental organizations – many study participants made references in this way to the proceedings of the United Nations 2011 “Year of the Youth”, for example, and quite openly in some cases to AWID’s 2008 International Forum and the Women’s Worlds 2011 Congress.

When study participants were asked what they felt would redress this exclusion, answers took two particular forms: first, young women articulated that they need their “own space” or “safe space” in which to debate and discuss issues related to both feminist ideas and theories as well as organizational and tactical approaches to activism and advocacy work. This manifested for women in the Young Arab Feminist Network,

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76 A “world-wide interdisciplinary gathering to focus on research pertaining to women’s issues and to be open to all interested researchers and activists”, the event has taken place every three years since 1981 in a range of host countries, in Israel, the Netherlands, Ireland, the USA, Costa Rica, Australia, Norway, Uganda, Ireland, Korea, Spain and Canada. http://www.womensworlds.ca/event/brief-history-ww
for example, as an interest in talking about feminism and religious orthodoxy or fundamentalisms without an older generation’s “interference” or “version of the debate”; in networks such as Astra Youth it emerged as “new” approaches to “what it means to collaborate” and “whether or not feminists must first agree” on a particular issue before working together. Second, many young women felt not just a desire for their “own” space for dialogue and debate but also for more unobstructed channels to the forums of global feminism. While “multigenerational exchange” was cited as a goal among the YFA, FRIDA and pan-African young women’s network respectively, members of the pan-African young women’s network presented this as a sequential occurrence: first, they needed their “own space” for dialogue and exchange, so that young women could establish a “firmer sense of identity” and “knowledge”; only after this, asserts one founding member, would young women be able to “stand face to face with [their] elders” in a more established forum and have an opportunity for “legitimate leadership”.

The Young Women’s Regional Dialogues held by the YFA prior to AWID conferences in 2008 and 2010 were presented as efforts to both create public forum spaces for young women and, in ways similar to those articulated by the pan-African young feminist network, to allow women to strengthen their voices both as individuals and collectively. As one young 2008 Dialogue attendee from Lebanon wrote on the YFA’s blog, it was because she “formed an alliance” with younger women during the event that she felt “empowered” enough to raise the issue of “sexuality rights” among an older group of activists she feared would not be receptive to more “progressive” ideas. Other examples emerging from the 2008 and 2010 conferences as “productive” debate and dialogue were issues pertaining to feminism and religion, and financing of feminist
and “global development” work; many participants of this study pointed out that FRIDA and the YAFN were conceived during these dialogues.

Much of the “public sphere” young women construct through their networks is discursive and “virtual”, emerging through platforms facilitated by the increasing reach and availability of information and communications technologies. Interview participants were widely aware of access difficulties, “especially for women”, as many would add; nevertheless, statements revealing a cognizance of this issue were framed by more optimistic statements – complete with examples and anecdotes – of how Internet access and other forms of digital communication are becoming “easier” to access and are in fact perceived by some to be “more open” to young women as places for debate and discussion. The forum at both the YFA and Sawt Al Niswa provided representative examples of exchange many young women “wanted to have” in established networks but “could not”; the case of a young Lebanese participant explaining that her interest in discussing the young Egyptian women who, in protest of censorship, posted naked pictures of herself on her blog was satisfied by an exchange that took place over Sawt Al Niswa clearly illustrates this.

**Young Women’s TFNs as “Alternative” Tactical and Organizational Spaces**

A second finding this study offers is that both younger generation and older generation feminists perceive young women to be “different” than older women in the ways they engage with global activism. When pressed for examples, many participants from both cohorts struggled to articulate a specific response. Some of the suggestions which did emerge included the idea that young women have different perceptions of feminism and political engagement than older women do, or that younger and older women might disagree on what constitutes activism; while both older and younger women asserted that
any contemporary “global activist” is likely to use technology regardless of age, most of the participants suggested it is younger women who are more likely to prefer to engage technology to facilitate activism or to believe that work with or through technology platforms “is” activism.

Even as study participants expressed a belief that older and younger generations of activists were “different” they would acknowledge the similar founding principles, mission statements or “visions” that maintain between older and younger networks and organizations. These are similar in character to the observations made by scholars of global feminist organizing such as Mohadam (2006) and Stienstra (1994), which suggest transnational feminist networks evolved to use less formal, bureaucratic and top-down methods of organizing and rely on a “feminist process” which is “participatory, democratic, [and] inclusive, with emphasis placed on standpoint and personal experience as well as on knowledge and credentials” (Moghadam, 2005: 95). Younger activists, however, would point out that while older or existing networks were “only” committed to this process “in theory” – evident by their “marginalization” of younger women – younger generation-networks, as one activist from Kenya explained of her network, were “really committed” to “considering personal experience from [one’s local community] work to be as valid as a degree in human rights”, and thus “very different” in their application of these principles.

This example of how generations of networks differed in their application of “democratic” organizational structures was both contentious and highly subjective, depending on an activist’s personal history and experience with specific transnational feminist network leadership. Other examples provided, however, were more uniformly
represented in the interview data and related to the idea of the different tactical and mobilization approaches taken by younger women. Several examples illustrated this difference. Members of the sexual and reproductive health and rights network Astra Youth made the case that while they maintain good working relationships with older generations of activists, and thus perceive the network as a whole to be effectively “multigenerational”, creating a separate network for “youth” better addresses both the unique ways SRHR issues impact young people and the different tactical approaches taken by younger activists. In the former case, Astra Youth members explained by way of example that some organizations in their network focus exclusively on the quality of sex education young people are receiving in state schools; in the latter, members cited a youth organization’s almost exclusive use of ICT applications, ranging from social media and blogs to digital conferencing and communication, as the center of its activities. This included in one example a group of young activists’ collaborative decision to address the lack of adequate sexual and reproductive health education in Polish schools through a series of digital videos they produced and aired through YouTube; activists explained that as an “alternative” to continuing to focus on policy and legal changes that might ensure improved education, the more “effective” solution was to offer a more developed curriculum made accessible immediately through widely available technologies many young people would be familiar with.

Similar motivations were cited in the case of several YAFN members organizing the HarassMap project in Cairo, Egypt. The intention of addressing “with immediacy” the epidemic proportions sexual harassment on Cairo’s streets led several young women to leave their work with existing anti-harassment campaigns run by established women’s
organizations. HarassMap’s founders explain that they felt frustrated with the slow progress of such campaigns, which drew on more conventional approaches such as signature-gathering and lobbying for the creation of anti-harassment law and policy; more significantly for this study, the founders also felt frustration with older-generation activists’ “reluctance” to invest in “alternative tactics”, such as the idea to create an ICT platform drawing on the global trend of “crowd-sourcing” and mapping software used to produce citizen-generated information about violence and other often censored or “under-reported” phenomena. While it’s clear that both existing campaigns and HarassMap share some methodological goals – consciousness-raising and the collection and documentation of sexual harassment, for example – their divergent tactical approaches, which to some extent have been framed by the HarassMap team as related to age and generation, were cited as one factor motivating the decision to create a separate, youth-led project.

While there is perhaps less tension related to generational divides within FRIDA, which is both a fund established for the support of young women-led initiatives and a network of young feminist advisors from a diverse range of countries, there were certainly references to “old” and “established” methods of generating funding for women’s rights organizations cited in contrast to the “different” way funding “should” work. FRIDA advisors and staff participating in this study explained that young women-led organizations seldom receive any funding for a variety of reasons, including donors’ or supporting foundations’ perceptions that young women would be incapable of managing resources, and thus are part of a global pattern of women’s organizations who might be part of a “transnational feminist network” but rarely have access to resources. “Traditional” or “top-down” methods of funding that are determined by a small group of
decision-makers looking for “particular characteristics” within a receiving organization were perceived to be deeply flawed; “innovative” or “community-oriented” projects that do not have the same professional or human-resources capacity as more established organizations, participants explained, cannot compete with larger organizations. Interested in drawing on models that include more “participatory” approaches to decisions about which organizations receive funding, FRIDA advisors enlisted the help of established and older-generation activists they felt reflected their commitment to a more democratic process. This resulted in an advisory partnership with both AWID and the FCAM, whose method of “participatory grant-making”, wherein potential grantees have some role in determining which applying organizations receive funding, was the inspiration for FRIDA’s “donor-plus” approach. Positioning themselves as a more comprehensive and “alternative” funding source for young women-led initiatives, FRIDA provides another example of a young women’s network fueled by perceptions that “different” approaches to transnational feminist activism are needed and will only be developed within separate spaces. However, FRIDA also offers another example of the “eventual” or “ultimate” goal almost universally cited within interview data: interest in creating more sustained and “respectful” partnerships across generations of the transnational feminist community.

**Young Women’s TFNs as “Learning” and “Educational” Spaces**

The third major finding this study offers is that young women are likely to form a youth-only TFN when seeking educational or learning opportunities that do not neglect or discount their own knowledge, experiences, priorities and philosophical differences. Many of this study’s participants argue that such neglect is characteristic of established networks’ and organizations’ educational programs directed at young women; more than
half of the sample made some reference to feeling “trained” within such programs, rather than feeling they were “learning” information in a way that was useful or meaningful to them.

Interview data suggests widespread acknowledgement by younger activists that they need the “experience” and “wisdom” of the older-generation and so often voluntarily seek out opportunities for advice and learning created by established organizations. However, many participants assert that young women also possess wisdom and in some cases bring with them extensive experience as activists and community organizers; their frustration that such notions are “rarely” acknowledged by the facilitators and designers of established programs is what led many young women to feel they were treated as “students” rather than “colleagues”. In addition, young women expressed an interest in working collaboratively to design and facilitate learning programs, but cited limited opportunities or invitations to do so.

“Education” and approaches to learning therefore emerged in interviews as a prominent reason young feminists felt the need to establish their own transnational networks. Citing “bad” experiences within “training” programs offered by established networks as well as an interest in having a more direct role in shaping their own learning, participants within this study offer several examples of what they argue are more democratic and participatory approaches to educational programs enacted through their own networks. The activists in the pan-African young feminist network assert their peer-mentoring approach exemplifies such values and a more “successful” and “respectful” method of learning; by pairing women similar in age but different in “levels of experience”, co-founders Rose and Ann assert that “learning will happen in partnership”.
This is in part because of the effort to pair women from different countries or regions together; this way, they explain, “mentors learn too” – about other young women’s communities and concerns. This approach yielded some surprising findings for Rose and Ann that reiterated the continued need for their efforts: despite the diverse national and socio-economic contexts of their members, all had experienced marginalization within established organizations that either “angered” them or made them feel “insecure”. Rose explains that this clarified the need for specific and separate learning spaces for young women premised on this idea of more participatory learning that reinforces the value of young women’s already-established “wisdom”: “young women cannot stand face to face with their elders” in a multigenerational partnership, she concludes, without them.

The YFA’s interest in cultivating not just more participatory educational programs but also multigenerational partnerships is exemplified by their “E-Learning” sessions. YFA members responsible for the sessions partnered with AWID research staff to gather information about topics ranging from religious fundamentalism and the history of women’s transnational organizing; in this way, senior AWID members and YFA members became co-designers and co-facilitators of each session. More significantly, the E-Learning sessions draw from the YFA’s collaborative web space “The Wire” to source questions, interests, concerns and priorities of their membership when constructing the sessions’ agenda. In addition, each “session”, happening in real-time through the use of collaborative software, devoted as much time and attention to participants’ reactions to and experiences with the topic being “taught” – and as pointed out in chapter six, in some cases devoted more time to encouraging participants to discuss their interests and needs within the topic than to the predetermined order of information. Finally, like the pan-
African young feminist network, the YFA’s E-Learning program conceptualizes members’ networking as an “extension” of learning opportunities and “the learning process”; attention to whether and how an E-Learning session facilitates in-the-moment and on-going communication between its community members remains a significant priority for the YFA.

**Theoretical Implications**

For theories investigating global social justice organizing more broadly, these findings offer several advancements. First, as young women’s TFNs have emerged and become significantly more visible, they offer cases for consideration within studies observing various shifts and “eras” in transnational social justice organizing. With their multi-issue focus and emphasis on inclusive and participatory leadership, young women’s TFNs epitomize what Bennett has identified as “emerging properties” of a “second era” of transnational protest (2003: 203). Two properties in particular can be found across all of the cases presented here: “inclusive organization models” that “favor diversity” and “issue-linking”, for example, are a clear priority for interview participants who expressed their commitment to feminist or women’s issues as a broader form of “global social justice”; in addition, “social technologies that facilitate these relatively decentralized, ‘leaderless’ networks” (Bennett, 2003: 203) are utilized within young women’s TFNs and clearly are conceptualized by members as one way to “decentralize” and even “democratize” network participation to produce more collaborative decisions and leadership.

Another example of how studies of young women’s networks can contribute to advancing theoretical understandings of transnational activism emerges when considering
Tarrow’s discussion of “new” transnational activism. For Tarrow, new opportunity structures created by internationalization and the increasing interdependence among states, global institutions and non-state actors has created “an opportunity space into which domestic actors can move, encounter others like themselves, and form coalitions that transcend their borders” (2005: 25). As actors within these movements “shift their activities among levels” of both local and global targets, they “take advantage of the expanded nodes of opportunity of a complex international society” (2005: 43) to broaden and strengthen their efforts. That young women are experiencing subordination within the mechanisms and institutions of global activism both reifies and challenges this notion. Despite the variation of their national, cultural, and socio-economic circumstances, young women in this study have almost universally expressed some degree of exclusion or marginalization from transnational feminist organizing, with some expressing that they would like to “shift” their levels of activism more routinely, or in more “established” forums, but cannot. This complicates the construction of the transnational activist conjured by theorists such as Tarrow in this 2005 study and elsewhere, as with his and della Porta’s explanation of “new activist stratum” (2003: 237). To some extent, the young women participating in the study can be subsumed within that stratum; they are “rooted cosmopolitans”, or “people…who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in regular activities that require their involvement in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts”; they have “multiple belongings”, or “…overlapping memberships linked with loosely structured, polycentric networks”, and also have “flexible identities”, or “…identities characterized by inclusiveness and a positive emphasis on diversity and cross-fertilization, with limited identifications that develop
especially around common campaigns on objects perceived as “concrete” and nurtured by search for dialogue” (2003: 237). But they maintain that their exclusion from “official” proceedings within the movement and within the forums of global activism and advocacy positions them uniquely as transnational activists. They are part of the “new generation of transnational activism” that Bennett has identified as working toward “less NGO dominance of campaign and policy networks” and “more direct individual involvement aimed at setting the agenda from below” (2003:213), but explain that even within this generation they feel excluded from leadership roles and treated as subordinates because of both their age and gender and, in some cases, their status as citizens of developing countries.

In line with Tarrow’s theorizing, however, these young women have also understood this experience of marginalization – and the internationalization that produces “institutions” of global organizing – as one that has afforded them some opportunity. Specifically, young women participants have explained that their age-based subordination has given them something to coalesce around, and therefore has transcended, to some degree, the divisions that varying backgrounds can produce. As activists within the YAFN explained, for example, members of their network are both “Islamic feminists” and “secular feminists”, but foreground their experiences as young women to find points of connection in conducting their network activities. Activists from the pan-African young women’s network similarly explained that they have had very “different ways of experiencing the world” because of their varying class positions, providing the example that some network members had not had the finances to complete secondary school, while others were sent abroad for some years to attend schools in Europe. But, explains
one member, “what we experience the same is that young women are not listened to”. So while young women are finding opportunities for networking, drawing strength from these collaborations and therefore fortifying their presence in transnational activism, these young women suggest it is not “just” the increased internationalization or even the mechanisms consequently produced – della Porta and Tarrow and many others (Smith, 2001; Bennett, 2003; Ayers, 2005; Clark and Themudo, 2006; Juris and Pleyers, 2009) offer the global diffusion of ICT, for example – that create these opportunities. It is, in addition, the ways in which the phenomena of globalization position them as “youth” and “women” – markers of subordination that persist in following them even into the institutions and official proceedings of global activism.

And what of “official” proceedings of “global activism” – what do the young women in this study perceive them to be? While not in a uniform way, most of the young women in this study referred to such a concept when trying to articulate in interviews how or, more specifically, where their marginalization from participation in transnational feminist networks would manifest. This was often also a reference young women would make in attempting to explain how they do not have power in the movement, or that their power rests in the control over their own “networks”, which were not necessarily incorporated within or reflected by the “global feminist public sphere”. So while the concept of a “global public sphere” remains significantly contested among both theorists and practitioners, as does what its definition would be in both the literal and metaphoric sense, another conclusion that can be drawn from the findings within this study is that young women both believe in and articulate a “global public sphere” and more specifically the idea of a global feminist public sphere, citing spaces and events such as
the headquarters of international and transnational women’s organizations, both grassroots and professional; recurring international conferences led by transnational social justice networks and transnational feminist networks, both grassroots and professional; regional meetings and conferences of the same; and the meetings and conferences of both grassroots and professional local or national women’s organizations that in some ways focus on women’s issues at the global level or work with counterparts in other countries. Many young women also referred generally to the Internet as a “type” of “global public sphere” that they might in some ways have more access to especially, as one young activist from Mexico explained, since they are “excluded at the official level from physically speaking at places like United Nations s, and physically not invited into the decision-making rooms in our own local organizations”.

Around the idea of a global or transnational public sphere, feminist scholars such as Nancy Fraser (2007) have urged caution; participants in an imagined “global public sphere”, she contends, are “not fellow members of a political community, with equal rights to participate in political life”, and thus challenge existing theoretical visions of the public sphere as it correlates to the “normative legitimacy” and “political efficacy” functions of public opinion and its role in “[discrediting] views that cannot withstand critical scrutiny” and “[assuring] the legitimacy of those that do”. It is difficult, she continues, to “associate the notion of efficacious communicative power with discursive spaces that do not correlate with sovereign states”. Fraser finds the idea nevertheless an essential and clear part of a “postnational constellation”, arguing that beyond casual reference to the notion of a “transnational public sphere”, theorists must “problematize public sphere theory – and ultimately…reconstruct its conceptions of the normative
legitimacy and political efficacy of communicative power” in order to produce a “critical-theoretical approach that seeks to locate normative standards and emancipatory political possibilities precisely within the historically unfolding constellation”.

Cases such as those presented in this study should contribute to such re-conceptualizing. The study’s participants certainly do not present themselves as cohorts in a post-national, “global citizenry” targeting a common set of institutions and officials through their contention; they are in fact very much “rooted” in their national identities and community experiences. Nevertheless, they clearly believe they are part of a “global civil society” – one with a very literal “public sphere” that emerges through forums, conferences, meetings, and other forms of dialogue. In fact, most of the young women expressed that they were constructing their own networks because they wanted to have more “official” and “powerful” roles in “global public spheres” so they could have more of a hand in shaping “global civil society”, as they envision this to be very “significant” in their lives. “This [regionalization and globalization] ‘from above’ impacts our lives directly, every day,” explains a young activist from Azerbaijan, speaking specifically of the Central and Eastern European and Balkan regions’ incorporation into the European Community, and the effects of the process on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR):

…it is so much more important than even our local and national policies. For us, it is becoming all about that [regional] level, and it will be even more [globalized] in the future. So our point is to get in there, to get into their meetings as a community. We see how [young women] are experiencing this [rights] crises in ways that are similar, because we decided to come together as a community in this network and heard each other’s stories. We discuss what we need to do about it ourselves, but the real work is getting that discussion into the [regional] places too.
This young activist maintains that “with one eye” on her own community and her own country, she also has a “constant eye” on the European Community and “on the world”. She also maintains that as much as young women in her SRHR transnational network who are not her fellow citizens have experiences quite distinct from her own, they are nevertheless “part of a group” that finds “what we have to share, the good and the bad” through “having a place to communicate”. What the “empancipatory political possibilities” of this experience are should be included in the re-constructed theories of public spheres that Fraser speaks of, not just for the sake of constructing a more accurate picture of “post-national” realities but to also understand the ways in which actors who are not “fellow members of a political community” can nevertheless convene around common identities – in this case, the “oppositional identities” that youth and gender facilitate – as they confront global hegemony.

While Tarrow has expressed in *The New Transnational Activism* that it is young people who generally are the more likely actors to “feel attachments to the continental or global levels than their elders” and thus practice “global thinking” (2005: 209), many young activists’ statements within this study remind us of what within that observation needs some modification: these participants understand their positions as young women to be distinct but also similar; if these young women “practice global thinking” or “feel attachments to the global level”, it is because they have found *other young women* embedded in their own local or regional contexts who share their frustrations. Without that element, many study participants explained, young women are often left feeling “isolated” and “marginalized”, in fact feeling *no* significant connection within a movement at *any* level despite their interest in global issues and global activism. What
transnationalism or transnational activist organizing has done for these young women, they explain, was to enable the formation of an “oppositional identity” – the formation of a counter-public to what they envisioned as “the public”, or more powerful, actors in social movements – and thus to provide both spaces and opportunities for participation in transnational activism.

**Recommendations**

I offer in this final section several recommendations for both practitioners and scholars of transnational activism. These are drawn from the analysis of this study’s data and from the conclusions based on that analysis. While the primary data was gathered using qualitative research methods and limited to a sample consisting of 25 younger generation activists and 12 older generation activists, the near universality of experiences with ageist marginalization – which older generation activists also cited as a “problem” in transnational feminist organizing – suggests this is a pervasive issue that crosses boundaries of nation, class and culture. Content analysis of sources such as blogs and postings to Internet forums further reinforces this, as the authors’ discussions of their experiences with transnational feminist activism corroborate rather than contradict the conclusions in this study. Finally, the sample represents a diverse population in terms of activists’ interests, targets, experience with global activism, geographic location, socio-economic status and religious and cultural practices; this again reinforces that common refrains about ageism and marginalization despite the diversity of the sample suggests the issue is widespread.

One of the first and most important recommendations based on this study’s findings, however, is to develop research projects that can reach beyond a sample of young women within what Desai (2009: 34) and others have termed the “transnational
activist class”. While I maintain here my earlier point that these young women are certainly not primarily from middle- and upper-class networks of professional actors, as many are volunteer and would identify as “grassroots” activists, most are educated, live close to urban centers or global cities, have relatively easy access to some form of information technologies and do recognize their positions as relatively “privileged” in comparison to the majority of young women in their respective countries. This means they can easily participate in research such as that of this study, and can be easily reached for interviews over an extended and consistent period of time. As the research questions and analysis of findings evolved within this study, for example, I was able to communicate several times with the same activists whom I had interviewed face to face during 2011 fieldwork in Central and Eastern Europe, either to ask new questions or to seek clarifications for responses to “old” ones. In addition, the relative connectedness of activists in Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria and Egypt, where I did not interview participants in person but rather though the use of communications technology, meant lengthy and sometimes frequent conversations over an extended period of time were relatively unhindered, with the exception of a few dropped calls or frozen images on Skype.

More localized, rural or smaller-scale young women-led organizations, at both the community and regional level, do exist and are somewhat connected to transnational networks – even the young women’s networks profiled here – but not in ways that render them this accessible. While some of the young women participating in this study might consider themselves, as Loubna Skalli-Hanna has suggested in her studies of generation and young women’s activism in Morocco (2006), to be “mediators”, creating connections to and for these more “removed” young women, they would still be forthcoming in
acknowledging they cannot speak “for” them. The stories and experiences with young women positioned even more “at the margins” of global activism than their urban counterparts, as well as their understanding of the necessity for or benefits of forming a “young women’s” organization, need to be included in our more general understanding of the ways in which “youth” and “gender” mark activists for marginalization. While the actors in this study and their networks do offer examples important to consider in our construction of both feminist and social movement theory, they are hardly a complete or fully representative picture of what all young women activists experience in global networks. This sort of research would require lengthy and extensive fieldwork – and perhaps a team of researchers – especially to build more sustained observations of young women activists who are not routinely connected to digital networks of communication.

A second and related recommendation for researchers is to refrain from de-contextualizing young activists in global networks, particularly those who seem to be most “visible” online. Attention to “youth movements” and the seemingly central role “digital activism” played in mobilizing a variety of global protests, from those associated with the “Arab Spring” to the proliferation of Occupy Wall Street, has created particular narratives about “young people” and global activism. Mainstream media staples such as Thomas Friedman, for example, have taken the marriage of young people, activism, and ICTs at face-value, arguing movements of youth “from Athens to Barcelona…[and] across the Arab world” are not only interconnected because of technology, but also exemplify a “globalization of ideas” generated by a common set of Internet-based practices and cultures. Numerous scholarly studies have made similar assertions; the

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work of Juris and Pleyers (2009), Nilan and Feixa (2006) have examined the ways in which young people the world over share “similar” activist practices, often oriented around technology. This study’s findings underscore the danger of not considering the young activist “behind” his or her “online presence”; understanding the depth of experiences and richness of contexts young activists bring to a global movement, including the ways in which their online presence can mask their distance from power, is essential for making any steps toward theorizing “youth” and ideas about youth vis-à-vis transnational activism broadly or feminist activism specifically. Because of the level of visibility the Internet can provide, for example, many of the young feminist networks and projects profiled here might appear more “powerful” than the activists feel they are in a global social network; a member of the HarassMap team assured me – as she has done for many interested parties, from researches to journalists – that the group is “just a bunch of volunteers with a website”, and not a “large corporation”, or “group of women that has upturned some part of the Egyptian government”. A search for “HarassMap” on Google turns up hundreds of pages, many of them articles about the project by global news sources such as the Huffington Post and Guardian UK. However, the HarassMap team asserts they are “still struggling to be taken seriously” by multiple institutions with “far more power” than they feel they have, including not just government offices but established women’s organizations running long-standing anti-harassment campaigns in the country.

A third recommendation is for both researchers and practitioners to consider the various ways in which young women might interpret the idea of “power” or power-sharing within a network. Many young women expressed frustration with organizations
that would offer them travel funds, mini-grants or other forms of finances as a show of support but provide little opportunities for young women to become involved with a networks’ or organizations’ major decisions. These were cited in the interview data in a range of ways, but often included young women expressing wishes they could make more decisions about how to target an issue, be more centrally involved in “the agenda and planning process” for major international feminist conferences, and have a greater role in determining how an organization’s funds should be spent. Many young activists explained their feelings that “older generations” of women understand support of “multigenerational” feminist organizing to be limited to the financial; the young women participating in this study clearly interpreted this aspect of support to be just one of many.

As many TFNs have expressed a commitment to multigenerational organizing, and will include age among the identity markers listed in their statements about diversity and inclusion, the understanding of whether and how young women feel represented and included in the mechanisms of global feminist activism must be carefully refined to reflect such variation.

Finally, researchers seeking to develop both theoretical and practical understandings of young women’s transnational feminist networks would benefit from a longitudinal analysis that collects data in methods similar to this study but over a sustained period of time. A question this study is incapable of addressing but is nevertheless quite important is how these young women’s networks might change over the next decade. This study’s participants seem to have accomplished something in creating a diverse transnational network that their predecessors struggled with: they have foregrounded common experiences in ways that allow them to work collaboratively
toward common goals of “gender equity” despite their vastly different life experiences, and, in some cases, religious and cultural beliefs. This study has found that these young women were able to do so by coalescing around the idea that both their gender and age mark them for marginalization in unique ways, and so they believe that they share a common understanding that supersedes or negates any differences.

But being so positioned is temporary; these young women will age, and some will undoubtedly become the more professional and “powerful actors” in transnational feminist networks and beyond. Will this shared sense of identity sustain through inevitable change? Will the common experiences that render these women a “counter public” survive the changing realities of their individual and collective experiences? Will a particular group of young women maintain an exclusive network even if a more established TFN begins to address ageist marginalization more thoroughly? Will young women’s transnational feminist networks continue to emerge now that the networks profiled here have made youth a more visible issue within transnational feminist organizing?

The young women profiled in this study are certainly the “children” of the global feminist movement that preceded them. Their emphasis on democracy, transparency and participatory processes reflects the language and values of a generation of activists attempting to correct past fragmentation and feelings of exclusion. However, these young women have made both feminism and the processes and tools of global activism very much their own. How that persists in changing both global feminist organizing and the character of transnational activism will indeed be an essential question for future scholars to consider.
Bibliography


Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui (1999). *Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Sphere in Transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.


Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Phase 1 Interview Questions

Interview Participants: Structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 11 activists, both older (6) and younger (5) generation, from North America, Eastern Europe, West Africa and the MENA region. These activists all identified as feminists engaged in work at the global level, and targeted a range of issues included sexual and reproductive rights and health, global development, economic justice, women’s human rights and the advancement of women’s political leadership. Interviews were conducted by phone, through Skype and email, and in person during fieldwork in Eastern Europe.

Background
1) What is your age?
2) What is your nationality?
3) When was your first experience with women’s organizing in a transnational context? What was it like?

Mobilization tactics
1) What kind of activism/issue are you involved with?
2) What is the outcome you are pursuing with your activism?
3) What is the most effective action that will accomplish this outcome?

Organizational preferences
1) Are you involved with a specific organization or network?
   +Yes+: a) Which one? b) How long? c) What has your experience as a member/staff member/volunteer been like? d) How are decisions made in the organization (i.e. resource allocation, targets and goals)? e) What role do you have in making decisions?
   +No+: a) Why not? b) Have you ever been? c) What was the experience like?
2) What is the most effective type of organizing/organization for the issue you focus on?
3) Are you involved with any online organizing or activism?
   +Yes+: a) Separate from or part of another organization/network? b) How long? c) What has your experience with this been like? d) Is organizing / activism online “different” than face to face organizing?
   +No+: a) Why not? b) Have you ever been? c) What was the experience like?
4) How often do you work with activists outside of your country? What was the nature of the work? What was your experience like?
5) How often do you work with older / younger generation activists? What was the nature of the work? What was your experience like?

**Targets and goals**

1) Is the issue you focus on is local or global?
2) Does your activism address local institutions or people?
3) Does your activism address global institutions and organizations?
4) How do your relationships with activists in other countries influence the issues you focus on or institutions you target?
Phase 2 Interview Questions

Interview Participants: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 23 activists involved with a young women’s transnational feminist network. Two of the participants were “older generation” advisory members; the rest of the sample were women under 30 years old who were directly involved in constructing and facilitating the five young women’s TFNs profiled here: the Astra Youth Network, the Young Arab Feminist Network, the pan-African young feminist network, the FRIDA fund and network, and the Young Feminist Association of AWID. While these activists didn’t all identify as “feminist”, they all worked on “gender equity issues”, including SRHR, development, sexual harassment and violence against women, women’s political leadership and gendered dimensions of development and economic justice. Interviews were conducted by phone, through Skype and email, and in person during fieldwork in Eastern Europe.

Founding and Constructing the network
1) When was the network created?
2) Why was the network created?
3) Who was involved in creating the network?
4) What is the organizational structure of the network?
5) What qualifies as a “young woman” in the network?

Targets and Goals
1) What issue(s) does the network address?
2) What is the geographical scope of the network?
3) What sort of institutions are targeted by the network?
4) What are some of the network’s main goals?

Collaboration & Debate
1) Does the network partner with any other established TFNs or global organizations?
2) Does the network partner with any older-generation activists or feminist advocacy professionals?
3) Do past movements or organizations influence the network’s decisions?
4) How are decisions made within the network about funding and resource allocation?
5) How are decisions made within the network about targets and goals?
6) How are decisions made within the network about publications, reports, etc.?
7) How are disagreements regarding any of these negotiated / how are agreements reached?
8) How do members of the network from different countries communicate?
9) Do members of the network outside of HQ contribute or collaborate to the network’s activities?

Learning and Training
1) Has the network developed / does the network plan to develop any training programs?
2) What are the outcomes / what outcomes does the network hope to achieve through these programs?
3) Are there assessments following training programs / are there plans for assessment?
4) Do the network’s training programs draw from models used by established TFNs?

**Comparison**

1) How does working with the youth TFN compare to working with your previous organization?
2) Has your activism changed since working with the youth TFN?
### Appendix B: Participant Sample Information

**Phase 1: Structured Interviews**

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**Participant Code:** NAm.A1  
**Issue:** VAW, SRHR  
**Region:** North America  
**Status:** Volunteer | **Name:** Anika  
**Participant Code:** CEE.A1  
**Issue:** SRHR, Roma Rights  
**Region:** CEE  
**Status:** Volunteer | **Name:** Marion  
**Participant Code:** NAm.E1  
**Issue:** WHR, VAW  
**Region:** North America  
**Status:** Volunteer & Professional (Ret.) |
| **Name:** Colleen  
**Participant Code:** NAm.B1  
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**Status:** Volunteer | **Name:** Malgosia  
**Participant Code:** CEE.B1  
**Issue:** SRHR, WHR  
**Region:** CEE  
**Status:** Professional/Staff | **Name:** Saba  
**Participant Code:** MENA.B1  
**Issue:** WHR, Women & Legal Rights  
**Region:** MENA  
**Status:** Volunteer & Professional |
| **Name:** Jessica  
**Participant Code:** NAm.C1  
**Issue:** WHR, SRHR  
**Region:** North America  
**Status:** Professional**/Staff* | **Name:** Morgane  
**Participant Code:** NAm.D1  
**Issue:** VAW, LGBTI  
**Region:** North America  
**Status:** Volunteer |  |
| **Name:** Ore  
**Participant Code:** WAf.A1  
**Issue:** WHR  
**Region:** West Africa  
**Status:** Volunteer | **Name:** Bolanle  
**Participant Code:** WAf.B1  
**Issue:** WHR, Women & Tech access  
**Region:** West Africa  
**Status:** Volunteer & Professional |  |
| **Name:** Yasmine  
**Participant Code:** MENA.A1  
**Issue:** WHR, LGBTI  
**Region:** MENA  
**Status:** Staff |  |  |

* Indicates a current salaried position in an activist organization  
** Indicates the participant identifies as a “career activist”
## Phase 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

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*Indicates that the activist holds a salaried position in the young women’s TFN
## Appendix C: Online Writing Sample Information

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Figure 5: Evaluation for December 5, 2011 E-Learning Session, “Interrogating Religious Fundamentalisms” (YFA) 218
Appendix E: List of Abbreviations

AWID: Association for Women’s Rights in Development

CEE: Central and Eastern Europe

DAWN: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (TFN)

GBV: Gender-based Violence

IGO: Inter-governmental Organization

INGO: International Non-governmental Organization

LGBTI: Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgendered, Intersex

NGO: Non-governmental Organization

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

TAN: Transnational Advocacy Network

TFN: Transnational Feminist Network

VAW: Violence Against Women

VOF: Voices of the Future Program (WorldPulse)

YAFN: Young Arab Feminist Network

YFA: Young Feminist Association

UN: United Nations
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Rutgers University            Ph. D. in Global Affairs, October 2012
Rutgers University            M.A. in English, May 2002
Rutgers University            B.A. in English and Secondary Education, May 2000

PRINCIPLE OCCUPATIONS & POSITIONS HELD, 2000-2012

Spring 2006-Present            University Lecturer, Humanities Division
                               New Jersey Institute of Technology

Spring 2002-Present            Part-time Lecturer, Program in Women’s & Gender Studies
                               Rutgers University, Newark

Fall 2001-Spring 2007          Part-time Lecturer, Writing Program & English Department
                               Rutgers University, Newark

Fall 2001-Fall 2003            Adjunct, English as a Second Language & English Division
                               Essex County College

CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PUBLICATIONS

Rights in the Global System. Proc. of 2009 International Studies Association Conf., February 15-
19, 2009, New York, NY.

Pinochet’s Chile. Proc of 2009 American Comparative Literature Association Conf., March 26-
29, 2009. Harvard University, Cambridge MA.

Engineering Education Conf., June 22-25, Austin, TX.