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Feminist Formations, Volume 28, Issue 3, Winter 2016, pp. 70-94 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2016.0044

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This paper troubles dominant understandings of North American feminist history as a series of successive, ideologically opposed, generational "waves." While several scholars have critiqued this metaphor, few have grounded their critiques in the lives, perspectives, and organizing strategies of women involved in feminist activism. This paper draws on research with older Canadian women activists involved in the Grandmothers Advocacy Network (GRAN) to call into question three existing critiques of the waves metaphor: its implicit ageism, its simplistic categorizations, and its assumed generational discord. In so doing, it illustrates how women's lives and mobilizations are far too intricate for this framework. This paper thus contributes to understanding the complexities of contemporary feminist activism, particularly as these complexities relate to the contributions of older activists.

Keywords: activism / ageism / feminist waves / generation / intergenerational / older women / second-wave feminism / third-wave feminism

On a rainy Thursday in September 2013, we sat listening to "Sam," an intelligent, energetic, and politically savvy 69-year-old woman, as she shared the story of her journey with activism with us. A recently retired scholar, feminist, and grandmother, Sam was one of the co-chairs of the Grandmothers Advocacy Network (GRAN). GRAN is a Canadian network of older women that then depicted itself as mobilizing in solidarity with grandmothers from sub-Saharan Africa who had lost their children to HIV/AIDS and were caring for their

families with inadequate resources and tremendous insecurity. In the few years since her retirement, Sam had spent many hours leading GRAN, exerting pressure on the Canadian government and industry to adopt policies that would improve access to life-saving medicines, make schooling a priority for girls, and decrease the violence borne by women and girls throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Looking out over the Toronto skyline from her condominium, we asked her to tell us, decade by decade, her life story: what had shaped her longstanding engagement in feminist struggles and what had led her, later in life, to become a leader with GRAN.

As is so often the case in critical qualitative research, what began as a semi-structured interview soon shifted into an epic construction of Sam's life narrative, interwoven with a vibrant three-way dialogue about feminism, politics, and each of our personal struggles. In some circles, it would seem improbable for such a mutually enlightening conversation across presumed chasms in "generation" and "wave" to take place. Such a conversation (and, indeed, this ever-deepening three-way relationship) would be deemed challenging or contentious, infused with nearly insurmountable rifts in language, theory, and politics: rifts assumed to divide North American feminists who have come of age in different political and historical contexts or, more commonly, who are associated with different age groups. Our relationship was, in a biological sense, intergenerational: at the time, the authors were 38 and 22 years of age respectively, while Sam was 69. Yet, our dialogue, Sam's life history, and the operation of GRAN starkly challenged such divisive assumptions.

In this paper, we take our conversations with Sam as a starting point to explore how our broader research with GRAN challenges portrayals of North American feminist history as a series of ideologically opposed, generational waves. In so doing, we add our voices to the growing scholarly discontent over the continued dominance of the waves metaphor, grounding our critique in the lives, organizations, and relationships of older activist women (see, for example, K. Sawchuk 2009; Purvis 2004; Hogeland 2001).[1]

Since the 1990s, a small but growing number of scholars have been debating the appropriateness of the waves framework.[2] Recently, Kathleen Laughlin et al. (2010) provided a critical overview of the dilemmas associated with this metaphor. This significant collection reveals how the waves framework elides many feminist struggles, especially those which have taken place outside of periods of apparent mass movement and by feminists of color or actors holding subordinate positions within society (Springer 2002). As Julie Gallagher wrote in her contribution to Laughlin et al. (2010, 81), "As a construct, the metaphor creates and reinforces exclusivity; it illuminates only certain kinds of activism that were engaged in by a limited set of historical actors." These and other scholars have invigorated efforts to rethink the multiple and variegated histories of feminist activism in North America. We explore their concerns in this paper. Yet, while much work has been done to critique the metaphor's

assumptions, few scholars have interrogated such critiques alongside actual women's lives and organizations (with some exceptions, including Laughlin et al. 2010). There is clearly a need to further bridge these theoretical debates with empirical research into the complex lives and practices of those involved in different kinds of feminist activism.

Our purpose, then, is to contribute to ongoing debates surrounding the waves metaphor by drawing extensively on our research with GRAN. We specifically challenge three of the metaphor's strongly embedded assumptions: its underlying ageism, its overly simplistic categorizations, and its assumed generational discord. Ultimately, we argue that GRAN and its members call into question a number of widely held presumptions about feminist activism—what it is, who it involves, and how it is practiced—which the waves metaphor serves to uphold and reinforce. Our research contests this linear and divisive framework, illuminating instead certain complexities and continuities at play within contemporary feminism.

The Waves: Embedded Assumptions

The waves metaphor can be traced to the late 1960s, when certain North American feminists described their movement as a "second wave" of feminism, evoking a sense of "connection and indebtedness" to the turn-of-the-century suffragists, and drawing on the historical power of that movement to legitimize their struggles (K. Sawchuk 2009, 59). In the late 1980s, feminist activists re-employed the metaphor, this time to combat public perceptions of feminism as "dead"; they named themselves feminism's "third wave" in order to connect with and distinguish themselves from both previous struggles (59–60). However, many scholars argue—and we concur—that this metaphor is both inaccurate and insufficient (Garrison 2000; Hewitt 2010; Laughlin and Castledine 2011). In this paper, we bring our research with GRAN into dialogue with three ongoing critiques.

First, like Jennifer Purvis (2004) and others, we bring attention to how the waves metaphor unveils and deepens ongoing ageism within feminism and society more broadly. We challenge, for instance, the implication that each new wave is comprised of young women with unprecedented ideas, politics, and theories, while women above a certain age are relegated to some past wave and assumed to have outdated politics and practices (Hogeland 2001; K. Sawchuk 2009).[3] Feminist activism, in this framework, tends to be construed as the domain of youth, which dichotomizes the old and the young, associating youth with progressive change, and insisting that the dawn of each "new" generation of feminists necessitates that the "old" has "disappeared, is dated, or is washed up" (K. Sawchuk 2009, 60).[4] In examining the later-life activism among the women in our research, we ask whether such assumptions might be misguided.

Second, like Laughlin and others, we investigate the metaphor's categorizations, asking who and what this framework renders invisible. As Purvis explains, a distinct set of ideologies, strategies, politics, and people have become bound with each wave, creating a series of temporally, ideologically, and generationally constitutive tropes. The "second wave," for instance, tends to be uncritically equated with formal protest, consciousness-raising, and localized mobilization, and with such ideological slogans as the universal "sisterhood" and "the personal is political" (Showden 2009). Meanwhile, the "third wave" tends to be associated with intersectional analysis, solidarity across difference, greater awareness of power and privilege, transnational alliances, online organizing, and the point in feminist history at which women of color rose to the forefront (Jensen 2000). While feminist activism likely did become ever more transnational and technologically connected as it entered the twenty-first century, the problem with such rigid categorizations is how they elide certain people's struggles.[5] In our analysis, we compare these categorizations to the actual organizing discourses and strategies employed by GRAN.

Finally, and closely related to the above two critiques, we align with Lisa Maria Hogeland (2001) and others, who contest the metaphor's embedded "generational thinking" and assumptions of generational discord. As K. Sawchuk again explains, by framing each wave as "passing the torch to the next generation of young feminists," the metaphor is infused with an essentializing generational rhetoric (2009, 59). It presumes that feminism changed drastically from the 1960s to the 1990s because of some deep divisive generational gap (Garrison 2000; Springer 2002).[6] The metaphor thus reproduces belief in an unbridgeable ideological rupture between those who came to feminism (or even those who came of age) in the 1960s–1970s (and tend to be associated with the "second wave") and those who entered feminist struggles (or came of age) in the 1990s or thereafter (and tend to be labelled as "third wavers"). However, this unquestioned narrative of generational rift prevents us from seeing that continuities might exist: the commonalities in beliefs, issues, and strategies among feminists of different ages and generations might well be rendered invisible (Hogeland 2001). With attention to our intergenerational research encounters, we therefore reflect upon how we experience divisions and/or commonalities among our participants and ourselves.

Storying Women's Later-Life Activisms: Methodology

In order to further illuminate and deepen these critiques, we draw on research undertaken with GRAN in 2013 and 2014. This research was one part of an ongoing study (2013–2018), entitled "Transnational Mobilizations and Older Women's Struggles for Social Justice," which aims to elucidate why and how older women across North America (i.e., including, but extending beyond, those involved in GRAN) are mobilizing for social change and building transnational

networks. Our analysis involves critical explorations of three interrelated dimensions of our work with GRAN.

First, we examine GRAN as an organization, paying attention to its organizing strategies, tactics, and discourses. This has involved observing meetings and actions (i.e., participant observation), analyzing written materials (i.e., archival research and textual analysis), interviewing members across Canada, and following GRAN's website and newsletters (see Kirby, Greaves, and Reid 2006 for discussions of these methods).[7]

Second, we investigate the lives and activist histories of the thirteen most active leaders in GRAN, representing past and present members of GRAN's executive, or "Leadership Team" (LT).[8] At the time of our interviews, these women resided across Canada, including in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. In conducting life-history interviews, we asked them to reflect on their lives, decade by decade, as a way of understanding what each perceived as drawing her into her work with GRAN and shaping her later-life activism. Each interview spanned anywhere from one and a half to five hours in length, for a total of approximately thirty hours of recorded conversation. Like Pamela Sugiman (2011) we recognize that memory is fluid—it is (re)constructed over time, with each (re)thinking or (re)telling; thus, we consider how these women create and tell the stories of themselves as activists.

Finally, we reflect on our dynamic relationships with GRAN members, drawing on research logs in which we documented our changing thoughts, emotions, and encounters, in order to bring ourselves and our connections with our participants into the analysis. Like many other scholars, we view our interpretations as intimately influenced by our relationships and our emotionally charged research encounters (e.g., Kobayashi 2001; Meth and Malaza 2003). We see the knowledge produced as inter-subjective and remain attentive to how we, as researchers, have played a part in constructing the narratives we tell.

GRAN and Its Leadership Team

Our detailed study of GRAN, its members, and our research relationships offers a number of valuable insights for understanding the complexity of contemporary feminist activism, especially in relation to the intricate roles and contributions of older activists. With a view to contributing to the critical scholarly discussions surrounding the feminist waves metaphor, we turn now to an examination of some of our most salient research findings.

GRAN: History, Governance, Mission

The Grandmothers Advocacy Network formed as an independent organization in 2011. Prior to that, from 2007 onward, it operated as the National Advocacy Committee (NAC) of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign (G2G). G2G is an initiative launched in 2006 by Toronto-based organization, the

Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF), with the aim of mobilizing Canadian grandmothers in support of grandmother caregivers in sub-Saharan Africa (Edwards, Wallace-Deering, and Watson 2011). GRAN's membership draws from a sophisticated network of thousands of women across Canada. Its leadership is provided by a rotation of two co-chairs, who are part of the LT, which reports to a larger steering committee. As an organization, all decisions are made by consensus (GRAN 2014b, 4).

GRAN members participate in a number of working groups, organized around the network's three priority areas, listed in the 2014 GRAN Strategic Plan roughly as follows:

- Violence against women and girls, working to decrease sexual violence in mining settings (where HIV is spreading rapidly) by holding Canadian corporations accountable;
- Education, including supporting schooling for girls and life-long learning for African grandmothers; and
- Access to medicines, focusing on supporting the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) and lobbying for fair intellectual property laws. (GRAN 2014b, 8)

These priorities have remained consistent since GRAN's inception in 2011. There has, however, been some broadening of its mission over this time. Originally organized in response to HIV/AIDS, GRAN now grapples with the complexity of how the impacts of HIV/AIDS interact with a number of other processes in southern Africa—poverty, gender inequality, the legacy of structural adjustment, inequitable global trade agreements, and so on—to create disproportionate vulnerabilities especially for women and girls in poorer communities. GRAN's mission is to "advocate in meaningful and strategic ways for the human rights of grandmothers, vulnerable children and youth of sub-Saharan Africa" (GRAN 2014b, 4).

Organizing Tactics, Strategies, and Discourses

GRAN is an entirely virtual organization. With no physical headquarters and members spread across Canada, it functions largely through online teleconferencing and an interactive website. Organizing strategies include a variety of tactics at many levels. At the community level, GRAN engages in small, consciousness-raising-style groups, seeking to educate themselves about the roles of Canadian government and industry in the global AIDS epidemic. Members are then connected into a national network online; regular teleconferencing helps build the national network, as do countrywide biannual gatherings. National campaigns organized in an effort to change Canadian government policies often involve countrywide letter writing, petitions, protests, rallies, online organizing, and social media initiatives. With respect to the latter, GRAN's 2013 Annual Report explained,

> During 2012, an important new tool in social media was added to our advocacy and GRAN's use of Twitter flourished. GRAN tweets (@GRAN) resulted in attracting the attention of key arenas of policy influence (media, politicians and other organizations). . . . [As of 2013] GRAN has sent out over 1200 tweets and has about 430 followers. (GRAN 2014a)

In addition, GRAN emphasizes the importance of transnational collaboration, including working with international organizations and beginning to build solidarities with community-based AIDS groups in sub-Saharan Africa (GRAN 2014b).

In its efforts to build both its national and transnational network, a central discourse mobilized by GRAN has been "grandmotherhood." This discourse has been deployed in a number of ways, most notably as an identity and social position that, for many GRAN members, generates a sense of connection and commonality with older women caregivers in southern Africa. It also assumes a certain moral authority and legitimacy to advocate for women and girls. Finally, by conjuring images of older women as non-threatening (and perhaps apolitical), it creates openings for GRAN members to access certain political spaces.[9] Ella's words, in 2013, reveal how pivotal this discourse was to GRAN's mobilization, highlighting the powerful emotions of love and responsibility for future generations that it evokes:

> It makes so much sense in terms of my role as a grandmother to be as supportive as possible to grandmothers around the world—these are grandmothers who are facing so much on their own in their communities—and to try to make a better life for their grandchildren. That just rang with such an echo in my heart and my mind. So it just seemed something that I not only should do, but *had* to do, otherwise I would be sort of abdicating a responsibility as a grandmother to my grandchildren.

The centrality of this discourse was further evident in Laura's words, which likewise demonstrate a perceived commonality among "grandmothers" globally:

> I had been reading about the horrors that went on in Africa, and the challenges that people had, and the ways Western countries had exploited the people there . . . but it was all so far away and there was no way I could imagine making any difference. Then, Grandmothers to Grandmothers happened and I could imagine a grandmother and a grandchild, someone just like me. I could imagine thinking about her, learning from her, and contributing in some way to help things be better for her. So my world just opened up again.

While "grandmotherhood" was a central mobilizing discourse for GRAN, it is equally noteworthy that "feminism" was not part of its official organizational language. As Sam explained, GRAN had strategically chosen not to label itself as a "feminist" organization, although she and most other GRAN

leaders whom we interviewed strongly identified as feminists and believed that GRAN is an example of contemporary feminist advocacy.[10] Like many others (e.g., Msimang 2013; Susser 2009; Hunter 2010; Leclerc-Madlala 2008), they viewed the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, and especially its implications in southern Africa, as among the most pressing feminist struggles of this century. They readily articulated that women are made particularly vulnerable to contracting HIV, for instance, when they are held in positions of economic dependency with men and as a result of pervasive sexual violence (see also Marais 2005; Fassin 2003). They were also concerned with how (older) women are unevenly impacted because of gendered expectations surrounding care (see also Chazan 2013, 2015; Akintola 2006; Campbell et al. 2008; Casale 2011; Kuo and Operario 2009). Thus, while "feminism" was not part of GRAN's official discourse, it was very much part of our conversations with its leaders. Similar to "grandmotherhood," many GRAN members mobilized "feminism," discussing GRAN's work as a continuation of longstanding feminist struggles and an example of contemporary feminist activism.

GRAN Leaders' Lives and Activist Histories: Complex, Diverse

Among the women who participated in our research—and reflective of the broader GRAN network—most were in their 60s and 70s, born between 1936 and 1951. Table 1 shows participants' educational backgrounds and careers. What is evident is that these GRAN leaders are highly educated and many undertook careers involving advocacy and feminist-oriented work. In addition, all were white and middle-class, most lived with a spouse (one of whom was another woman), and several had previously been divorced. All were mothers and eleven were also biological grandmothers. Among those who were not grandmothers, notions of social grandmothering, being of "grandmothering age," or being "in waiting" were raised several times. At the time of our interviews, only three participants were working in paid employment; ten were recently "retired," and one was on long-term disability.

Given their ages/generation—that is, most came of age in the 1960s–1970s—and that they are now all practicing feminist advocacy and most identify as feminists, these women would likely be deemed "second wavers" in contemporary feminist circles. It is, however, important to note that not all of these women described themselves as actively involved in the women's movement of the 1960s–1970s. In fact, among the thirteen GRAN leaders whom we interviewed, only three explicitly discussed such involvement. Several identified as belonging to other concurrent movements (e.g., civil rights and peace movements), while others described being taken up during those years with complicated domestic situations. These women came to identify with feminist struggles at different times over their lifecourses. Moreover, even in instances when there was little to no mention of formal participation in women's movements, many described engaging in various forms of feminist struggle in their personal lives and work.

TABLE 1: Education and career highlights of GRAN leaders

"Name"	Birth year	Education	Career Highlights
JEN	1936	PhD (English literature)	Politician (provincial parliament); director of several major feminist non-profits (including Elizabeth Fry Society)
BETTY	1942	BA (Nursing)	Reproductive health advocacy; Executive Director of major feminist organizations (including Planned Parenthood Canada)
SAM	1944	PhD (Feminist social work)	Professor (women, poverty, social policy); social worker
DORI	1945	BEd, MA	Teacher; University instructor (including advocacy work)
ANNA	1946	MA (French literature)	Health and social services, public policy (government), advocacy-focused
ELLA	1946	PhD (Canadian theatre)	Professor; university administrator (including advocacy work)
JOANNE	1946	BA (English and German)	Teacher (including advocacy in schools)
MARY	1948	Vocational business	Sales; real estate; started a business
PAIGE	1948	BA (Physical education)	Health promotion and policy; aging and gender, athletics
LISA	1949	BA (Philosophy and Native studies)	Worked for Veterans' Affairs; Canada Post; started a business
ALISON	1950	BA (English); BEd	Teacher (special education/ advocacy); actress
LAURA	1951	MDiv (Feminist theology)	Baptist minister; breast cancer support (for Cancer Care Ontario)
CLAIRE	1954	MA	Peace activism; work with non-profits

Sam's story illustrates some of these complexities and is worthwhile examining in detail. She was born in 1944 and grew up in Chicago. With her father working as a professor of social work and her mother trained as a teacher, her family was socially engaged. She attributed some of her socially minded upbringing to her family's involvement with the Catholic Church, although in her late teenage years, she moved away from any such association on the grounds that even the most liberal Catholicism was too deeply patriarchal for her emerging values. She recalled a family trip to the American South when she was 10 years old; there, in 1954, she witnessed racial segregation firsthand, which stayed with her throughout her life. In the early 1960s, she became actively involved in civil rights protests. She described participating in the civil rights movement, but did not view herself as a part of the women's movement at that time. She

did, however, recall taking a strong stand against the Catholic Church's ban on contraception and birth control in those years, at which time she was then attending a small Catholic college.

Upon graduating from college, Sam worked as a juvenile probation officer in Chicago. She met her husband in 1965 and they married the following year; she was 21 years old. Once married, they lived in the UK where her husband completed a doctoral degree and lectured at a university. Sam put her own plans for graduate school on hold for the decade that followed. They had two children; the primary caregiver at home, Sam also worked part time in a psychiatric hospital and in the British equivalent of the Children's Aid Society, and she became involved in the hostel movement. Despite the fact that she was no longer involved in formal protest and her priority was caring for her young children, she remained engaged in politically and socially minded work, much of it strongly informed by feminist values.

In 1974, when Sam's children were 5 and 2 years old respectively, her family moved to Toronto. Once both children were in full-time school, she returned to school herself. Over the following decade, she completed bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in social work; she then became a professor. Sam's academic work focused on women and poverty, looking at how different policies worked (or did not work) for women on the margins of society. In addition, she occasionally volunteered with organizations working with people who were systematically disadvantaged. She noted, however, that her busy home-life coupled with her busy work-life meant that she still had limited time for activism. While she described her volunteer work as "community service" as opposed to "*active* advocacy," she remained engaged in feminist work—both paid and unpaid—throughout these years. As she neared retirement in 2007, she turned her energies toward "active" advocacy, namely through her work with GRAN.

Sam's lifecourse reflects a number of wider experiences as well as areas of divergence among the women in our research. Like Sam, many noted that their commitment to social justice began in their early lives, and some discussed participation in the civil rights, peace, and/or feminist movements of 1960s–1970s. Several then described their child-rearing years as a less political phase of life. Years with young children, followed by years with high work demands, simply did not leave space to "actively" engage. Unlike Sam, many also faced restrictive or abusive marriages, further limiting their opportunities. Many were nevertheless still involved in feminist-oriented work, through careers with strong social justice leanings, volunteer work, and/ or personal struggles (e.g., advocating for children in schools, fighting divorce and custody battles, and so on). Perhaps the strongest pattern to emerge from these stories was that almost all of the women in our research viewed later-life as an opportunity to engage more fully in the issues that motivated them in their youth.

Table 2 summarizes the activist histories of the four women in our research who, at the time of writing, and alongside Sam, were among GRAN's past

Table 2: Activist History Vignettes for Present and Past Co-Chairs of GRAN

Paige described herself as feminist from childhood, taking after her grandmother, who was an ardent feminist. Upon graduating from university, she worked as the director of women's athletics at a university, fighting for women's inclusion in intramural sports. Because "staying the night with someone was taboo unless you were married," and eager to move out from her parents' home, she soon married a colleague and shortly thereafter she became pregnant; she was 22 years old. She noted that birth control was not yet widespread. In fact, she described many aspects of her personal life in relation to feminist struggles and the changing social policies in Canada that took place as a result of the women's movement of the 1960s–1970s. But, because she was "taken up with caring for kids" throughout her 20s and 30s, she described herself as "not directly, but always peripherally involved in the women's movement." Her first marriage was financially and emotionally restrictive; she initiated a divorce shortly after divorce laws changed in Canada to facilitate women's exit from such relationships. She worked first for the Canadian government in health promotion, always with feminist leanings, and later as a consultant for several Canadian and international initiatives around health, gender, and aging. She had a second long-term partnership, which was also restrictive, and which ended in her early 60s. In 2006, as her work commitments were slowing and her partnership was ending, she became one of the co-founders of NAC (GRAN's predecessor organization). Later-life, for Paige, was a time of continued and increased feminist engagement.
Claire grew up with parents whom she described as "small 'l' liberals": "they had a strong sense of a just society, but in the context of a capitalist system." She was very politically active as a teenager. During high school she went on two life-changing trips: one to Germany, where she visited historic sites of the Holocaust, and another to Japan, where she visited Hiroshima. After her undergraduate degree, she pursued master's degree work investigating the peace movement under the mentorship of prominent feminist and peace activists. At 23, she married and soon decided to pursue peace activism full-time. She had her first child at 32, followed by two more at 34 and 37, and stayed home to raise them. During her years with young children, her activism was on a volunteer basis; she often brought her children along to marches and protests. After her children moved out and she "retired" from community organizing, she sought "a calling." The Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign emerged and she dove in. Before long, she co-founded the National Advocacy Committee (predecessor to GRAN) along with Paige. For Claire, her work with GRAN felt like a convergence of her many varied experiences with activism.
Alison described herself as coming from a Left-leaning family, and she engaged in some peace activism in university. Shortly after finishing her undergraduate degree, she got married because she became pregnant; she was 22 years old. A year later, when she was pregnant with her second child, her husband disappeared. She moved in with her parents while she completed teacher training and began what would become her 23-year-long teaching career. She re-married and had a third child. Although, her second husband was controlling and did not share her political leanings, she was unable to leave for fifteen years. She described herself as not actively involved in activism during her 20s and 30s; she was busy raising children and extricating herself from her second marriage. She did engage in advocacy work as an educator, however, and was heavily involved in advocating for her daughters in the school system. After her divorce and remarriage, this time into a very supportive relationship, she left teaching to follow her passion: acting. She joined GRAN after retiring from acting. For her, later-life and GRAN provided a new space to actively engage in activism she had long felt strongly about.

Mary grew up outside of Boston with a very conservative father and a liberal mother. She described having been interested in the peace and civil rights movements as a teenager, but being "forbidden from going to Boston" because of the protests. She began university in Canada but did not complete her degree; instead, she transferred to a vocational business program in the US. She got married and had a daughter at the age of 23. Working part-time in sales, she spent much of her 20s and 30s single-parenting and working to exit herself from her first marriage, which was very isolating. Due to immense calls on her time and a complete lack of support, she did not engage in activism through these years. Like Alison, she did build her advocacy skills through advocating for her daughter in the school system and working to end her marriage. She later re-married into a much more fulfilling relationship to a man who was more socially minded; she continued to work in sales and then started her own business. After her second husband passed away, she joined GRAN, which offered an opportunity to make the kind of contribution she had long supported, while providing meaning and community in her life.

and present co-chairs. These summaries illustrate this trend toward later-life engagement, while also highlighting some important areas of diversity among them. All revealed how their activism was shaped by their life courses and life circumstances, and discussed the importance of later-life activism. Paige and Claire, however, emphasized longstanding involvement in social justice struggles, while Alison and Mary suggested that their explicit engagement in advocacy came after retirement. In discussing the trend of aging and activism, several GRAN members remarked that later-life was less encumbered and bore fewer social risks. In late 2013, Alison explained,

> We were raised to believe we could move mountains and, somehow or another, we intend to prove it. It's partly the era we were raised in; we learned as young women that you don't just sit back and let things happen, you dig in and get going to change things if they need to be changed. In my case, this didn't carry through to the period of time when I was raising kids, but it certainly was something that I went back to fairly quickly after my kids were gone.

Some also noted how the perspective that came with age strengthened their convictions and propelled them to act, and the urgency they felt to leave the world more just for future generations. Anna expressed the following in 2013:

> I think this is a marvelous time of life. People say, "I hate getting older"—no, it's just so liberating. It's marvelous. I want to play a role, and I feel energy, I feel a drive to do things that are going to make a difference. What's the mark I'm going to leave on this world? Not necessarily individually, but what can I do to make things better?

Over all, then, our research reveals a network of older women with complex lives and ways of engaging in activism. These are women with education, skills, and experience who, in later life, are choosing to dedicate much of their time and energy to working for global justice. Most did not know each other prior to engaging in this network, and reside across a geographically dispersed country.

Yet, they come together—virtually for the most part—to leverage what power they have locally, nationally, and globally, in campaigns that they believe will lead to better and more equitable conditions for women and girls in the Global South. Drawing on strategies and tactics of all varieties and the emotionally charged discourse of "grandmotherhood," GRAN members are contemporary feminist activists. Their lives, organization, and relationships demonstrate the complexity of this activism, thereby, posing a number of challenges to the rigid boundaries and implicit assumptions of the feminist waves metaphor.

Beyond the Waves

We return now to our discussion of the waves framework. In the remainder of the paper, we bring our above findings into conversation with our earlier discussion of this metaphor, drawing on our research to expand and deepen our analysis. In so doing, we revisit each of our three pivotal critiques.

Beyond Ageist Assumptions

As noted earlier, a small but growing body of scholarship has critiqued the waves metaphor for the way it functions to reinforce and reveal the ageism that exists within feminism and society. K. Sawchuk notes, for instance, that the metaphor consolidates assumptions that older women are passive and apolitical by framing them as "washed up" and renders their activism invisible within feminist activism by claiming that they have "disappeared" (2009, 60). In a number of ways, our research with GRAN clearly challenges this ageism.

Most obviously, the finding that later life was a time of new and renewed activism for the women in our research directly opposes any presumption that these women were withering away or disappearing from activist circles. Their lives contest the assumption that feminist-oriented activism is the work of youth, or that each new wave takes up the struggle with new ideas and fresh energy, relegating previous generations to spectate from their rockers on the sidelines (K. Sawchuk 2009).

In addition, particularly in considering GRAN's extensive online organizing, our findings also refute notions that older women are "stuck in their ways," or that their tactics are passé (Bailey 1997, 21). Challenging stereotypes of older women as technologically illiterate, GRAN members use extensive social media campaigns, as was noted by Paige in 2013: "in our last campaign, we had very sophisticated Facebook and Twitter campaigns. So that's a comment on older women and their capacity." In discussing recording their own "granny version" of prominent artist K'Naan's song, "Wavin' Flag," which promotes access to affordable medicines, GRAN's founding leaders further reflected the following: "grandmothers and young people quickly spread the word through Facebook and Twitter, and K'Naan posted a link on his celebrity website. In just one month the video had over 4,500 hits. Who says grannies can't move with the times?"

(Edwards, Wallace-Deering, and Watson 2011, 19). To believe that these women are anything but contemporary feminist activists making use of the most current organizing strategies is clearly false.

Finally, many GRAN members expressed that their activism was not only about advocating for African women and children, but also very much about resisting the invisibility and discrimination they experience in Canadian society as older women. For many, the realities of inhabiting aging bodies motivated their advocacy. They explicitly discussed GRAN as a resistance to the ageist stereotypes of older women as marginalized, frail, and passive (D. Sawchuk 2009; Kutz-Flamenbaum 2007; Matlok-Ziemann 2014).[11] As Alison said in 2013, "It's the image of people surging to the forefront at a time in their life when the public perception would have them fade into the background. It's just so powerful. . . . I'm not willing to be insignificant, and I've got the time and energy right now to make sure I won't be." These women stand alongside feminists in their 20s, 30s, and 40s as global actors, launching sophisticated social media campaigns, and infusing feminist struggles with much-needed labor, experience, perspective, and critical thinking. Their words, actions, and convictions all challenge lingering ageist notions that activism is, or should be, the work of youth, and that older feminists are anachronistic or obsolete.

Beyond Simplistic Categorizations

Our research also complicates the simplistic categorizations associated with the waves metaphor, pointing instead to the complexities and continuities within contemporary feminism. Despite the fact that the GRAN leaders in our research described varied levels of connection to the 1960s–1970s women's movement, coming to feminist advocacy in different ways and at different times in their lives, in most feminist circles their ages alone would classify them as "second wavers." With this label, moreover, they would then be assumed to organize in certain pre-prescribed ways and according to certain pre-prescribed discourses and strategies (K. Sawchuk 2009; Hogeland 2001). As Purvis (2004) notes, distinct mobilizing discourses, strategies, politics, and ideas have become rigidly associated with each wave: the "second wave" inextricably linked to formal protest, localized mobilization, and the discourse of "the sisterhood"; and the "third wave" synonymous with intersectionality, transnationalism, and online organizing (Showden 2009; Jensen 2000). Our research blurs these boundaries.

This is particularly evident in how GRAN members position themselves in their transnational solidarities—drawing nuanced intersectional analyses alongside a remobilization (and rebranding) of the discourse of "the sisterhood." The powerful mobilizing discourse of "grandmotherhood," discussed earlier as key to their transnationalism because of how it evokes connectedness and commonality between older women in Canada and southern Africa, also resonates with the essentialist 1960s–1970s "sisterhood" discourse.[12] Yet, while GRAN members certainly draw on some strategic essentialism in their deployment of

"grandmotherhood," it is not entirely accurate to simply transfer the well-known critiques of the "sisterhood" (Spivak 1995; Mohanty 2003): that is, to assume that GRAN members have failed to recognize intersecting forms of power, privilege, oppression, and differences among grandmothers (see Lorde 1983; Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982). Most of the GRAN leaders in our research were, in fact, keenly aware of the systems of power operating within their network. For some, the passage into grandmotherhood was not about identity politics or some sameness of experience, but rather acted as a reminder of how vulnerable each child is and of the massive *inequalities* for children globally. As Sam eloquently noted in 2013,

> Being a grandmother, and I don't necessarily mean a biological grandmother, I think what happens is we come back to little children, and when we come back to little children we think about what we want to do on behalf of little children—usually, but not always, our grandchildren. You think about what the grandmothers in Africa are doing for their grandchildren, which we can't imagine having to do or perhaps being able to do. The courage is just amazing. For a period of time before becoming a grandmother, you are away from small children, and then grandchildren bring back to you the wonder of life—and the vulnerability. For our children and our grandchildren it's lucky that the wonderment is perhaps larger than the vulnerability, but not so for others.

The meanings given to their transnational "sisterhood," then, sometimes have to do with recognizing, rather than masking, the differences among them; these meanings underpin their sense of privilege and their responsibility to work for more just conditions for African women. Furthermore, many of our participants drew on intersectional analyses in discussing their activism, thereby further revealing their awareness of how interlocking forms of oppression implicate people differently.[13] Mary, for example, reflected in 2013 on the confluence of certain systems of oppression—ageism, gender, and geography—which contributes to the erasure and infection of African grandmothers:

> It's a double whammy for the grandmothers in Africa because they've got the gender inequality—which puts them at risk for the whole gamut—but also *older* women in Africa don't exist; they don't keep stats on their health issues. So the ones that do have the HIV virus, they are the last and the least likely to get treatment.

Rather than adhering strictly to some uni-dimensional, universalizing approach, GRAN members were melding complex theoretical ideas and discourses associated with feminisms across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—grappling with issues of power and privilege and adopting intersectional analyses, while simultaneously and strategically remobilizing a discourse akin to the feminist "sisterhood."

Moreover, just as this merging of discourses and theoretical leanings destabilizes the rigid categories of the waves framework, so too does the versatility of GRAN's organizing strategies debunk these associations. As discussed previously, GRAN uses a variety of tactics—from localized consciousness-raising groups, formal protest, and rallies to transnational solidarity-building, social media campaigns, and online organizing—which also clearly merge a combination of strategies, old and new, from across the "waves" of feminist activism.

GRAN's multiplicity of organizing strategies, together with its complex mobilizing discourses, challenge the imagined categories associated with the waves, demonstrating instead the prevailing continuity of feminist activism. GRAN members are struggling with their positions as white, middle-class women in the Global North who are seeking to build solidarity—through a combination of virtual and embodied practices—with older women in sub-Saharan Africa, across enormous, intersecting differences in power and privilege. Meanwhile, they are simultaneously drawing on a discourse reminiscent of the "sisterhood," re-thinking it in ways that serve their political purposes and allow them to move beyond, to some extent, the earlier critiques of essentialism (Jensen 2000).

Beyond Generational Discord

Returning to the third of our critiques, we examine our own relationships with GRAN members, and particularly how these challenge pervasive notions that different generations of feminists are necessarily ideologically opposed. As K. Sawchuk and others note, the waves metaphor assumes that "feminism is generational, that depending on when one was born, one is of a particular worldview," with different generational worldviews deemed incongruent (2009, 61; see also Purvis 2004; Henry 2006; Garrison 2000). Our conversations with GRAN members unsettle this generational thinking, revealing stark similarities—not gaps—in our personal politics and views (K. Sawchuk 2009). We return to our dialogue with Sam to highlight some of these cross-generational consistencies.[14]

Back in Sam's home, we moved to her dining room table, where she had prepared lunch for our day together. As we ate, the tone and content of our conversation shifted. No longer were we guiding Sam through the chronology of her life; instead, she reflected on her perspective that came with aging. She drew us into a three-way discussion about an entirely new topic: childcare in Canada. This lunchtime conversation illuminated striking commonalities in our political and theoretical positions, despite our differences in age and generation. Consider the following excerpt from our interview in 2013:

> Sam: I think it is true that we see the world just a bit differently with the passage of so many years and it may be we're motivated because we see how long it has been, and how some things have changed, but how many things haven't. It's a funny perspective, and I'm not sure when you're 40 it's as clear.

> I'm not sure whether you can see how much has changed and how much hasn't, and how in some ways these can be the same things. . . .
> May: I'm starting to get little glimpses of what has changed now [as I reach 40], especially when I spend time with Melissa.
> Sam: Well I think the clearest case for me is when I think about how far women have come in some ways, and then I look at my daughters and I think: you know, life is crazy. How can we as a society expect families to have both parents working and provide so little, so really little?
> May: Most families can't survive without both parents working. I don't know how you could possibly make ends meet because even when you have both parents working, it can be tough. And there's no national daycare program.
> Sam: Exactly! I watch the stress in them trying to balance. And they do a wonderful job, as you do. But you have to think of the toll, and how can we be so inhumane? So . . .
> May: Short sighted!
> Sam: So short sighted, so totally short sighted. And I don't say that it was a wonderful thing; I found it very frustrating during the time I was at home, but . . . we should approach the business of children's development, of children thriving, as all of our responsibility, to make provision. And we don't.
> Melissa (Nodding in agreement.)

We each sat back, acknowledging our shared frustration. May continued the conversation:

> May: Well it's the unfinished business of feminism. There are many such areas; childcare is certainly an important one.
> Sam: We came so close [to a national childcare strategy] in the early '70s. I think you probably weren't born when that report came out, but it was a fabulous one. That was the first of the National Childcare Action Plans. It never came about. . . .
> May: Well, I'm hopeful that it might still happen. I'd really like to see my daughters in a different and better situation. . . . I know it's better for me than it was for my mother, who was a single mom at a time when there just was no protection or support. But when I think about the struggles around childcare—the balancing act, the juggling act—surely we can come up with a better plan.

We paused again. While we understood the distinct perspectives we each brought to the conversation because of our contrasting life experiences and the different contexts in which we came of age, our politics were not incongruent (Alfonso and Trigilio 1997). Rather, our differences invigorated the conversation. May continued again:

> May: [In terms of a feminist struggle, though,] I feel like this is a tricky one, because until you're in the middle of [raising children], you don't realize what

a huge issue this is. I think most people at 20, even if they're political and engaged in important issues, I think most people at 20 who don't have children are not necessarily aware. . . .
Melissa: It wasn't until I starting working closely with May that I was confronted with these realities.
May: Most people don't really understand it unless they have some first-hand experience with it, I guess? I didn't anyway, even though I watched my own mom. I didn't get it until I was trying to do too many things, pulled in too many directions. This is the way it is for so many people—mostly women. And in my case, it isn't even as difficult as it is for so many others. My partner does at least an equal amount of childcare, if not more. We have resources, support. But I feel like there's still a particular time of life and, *in* that time, it's hard to get involved in anything more because there's too much going on to begin with.
Sam and Melissa: (Nods and affirmations)
Sam: Exactly! Exactly!

Concluding Thoughts

The waves metaphor is entrenched as a framework for thinking about feminist history in North America. It has allowed feminists to justify their struggles by simultaneously connecting them to their predecessors and staking out radical, new political agendas. Yet, this dominant discourse also elides certain people's struggles and reinforces the ageism, classism, and racism (among other -isms) operating within feminist movements and society more broadly. While many have critiqued the metaphor, few have brought empirical research to bear on these debates. Thus, in this paper, we have detailed the lives, activism, perspectives, and relationships of older women involved in GRAN, bringing this research into dialogue with the ongoing critiques of the waves. Our analysis has pivoted around three of the framework's implicit assumptions: its underlying ageism; its simplistic categorizations; and its assumed generational discord.

In contrast to dominant narratives of activism as the domain of youth and of older generations of activists as washed up, the women in our research are contemporary feminist activists engaging with the "newest" of ideas and organizing strategies. They describe their later lives as periods of activist renewal and resurgence—they feel fewer calls on their time, fewer social risks, and a growing sense of urgency and responsibility to work for change. These women are not, as they age, disappearing from feminist circles; nor are their ideas or practices anachronistic. In fact, many frame their activism as a resistance to such ageist stereotypes. Through their work with GRAN, they are deliberately defying images of older women as apolitical, disengaged, inconsequential, and invisible.

Our research also challenged the idea that people's ages or generations (simplistically associated with specific "waves") are inextricably linked with their organizing strategies and discourses. Because many of the women in our research came of age in the 1960s and 1970s and now identify as feminist activists, they would, in most feminist circles, be deemed "second wavers." However, their activist histories revealed that they came to activism and to feminist identities at different times in their lives and for different reasons. Some were engaged in the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, but many were not. Nevertheless, their "second wave" label presumes certain ways of organizing—notably formal protest, consciousness-raising, and localized campaigns—as well as some connection to the essentializing discourse of the "sisterhood." In reality, though, their activism involves a combination of localized and transnational organizing, online and embodied practices. And while they draw on a rebranded version of the "sisterhood," many infuse this with reflections on power, privilege, and intersecting forms of difference. Thus, GRAN merges strategies and discourses associated with feminism across the "waves," pointing to important complexities and continuities within contemporary feminist activism.

Furthermore, our intergenerational research relationships challenged notions that feminists deemed to be from different "waves" are necessarily divided by irreparable ideological ruptures, or that generation is even an accurate predictor of politics or worldview. Instead, our encounters with GRAN leaders depicted significant continuities in politics and theoretical leanings among us. Here, we concur with Hogeland's critical insight:

> It is easier to construct these differences as generational because of the persistence of ageism, and, more benignly, simple age-stratification, in and outside of feminist movement. Our friendship networks are rarely integrated by age, and too often form the core of our sense of feminist identity and practice; our issues rarely assemble us in truly multi-generational movement or organizations. Our sense of "our" generation is too often simply our friendship network, our institutional location, our geographic situation, our own lives and the lives of a few other folks significant to us. (2001, 117–18)

Our relationships with Sam and other GRAN members certainly imbued us with the possibility—and indeed the urgency—of creating progressive, mutually-energizing, and critically-enriching movements based on cross-generational feminist solidarities.

Our research challenges a number of widely-held presumptions, which the waves metaphor consolidates and reinforces, about what feminist activism is, how it is practiced, and who it involves. Women's lives, organizations, and relationships are far too intricate for a framework underpinned by teleological linearity and simplistic categorizations. Our findings provide insights into the intricacies of contemporary feminist activism, particularly as these relate to the contributions of older activists. Like Linda Kerber, we believe that "there

is no longer any excuse for such a simplistic story" (2002, 92). Rather, we call for a conceptualization of feminist activism as a complex multiplicity of stories, which, together, should challenge oppression and render visible everyday resistances.

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Notes

1. While some variation exists, an overview of what is associated with each wave is roughly as follows. The first wave (1880s–1920s) tends to refer to the mobilization of the suffrage movement, which is typically associated with winning the vote for middle-class, white women. Following several decades of purported inertia, the second wave (1960s–70s) supposedly emerged, characterized by more widespread struggles for women's equality, efforts to transform traditional gender roles, and the universalizing notion of "the sisterhood." The third wave (1990s–present), which arose from another supposed lull, is associated with women of color challenging the essentialism of the (still predominantly white, middle-class) second wave, as well as with increasing transnationalism, multi-vocality, and the analytic of intersectionality (K. Sawchuk 2009; Alfonso and Trigilio 1997; Showden 2009). Like Aili Mari Tripp (2013) and others, we recognize that this framework has been critiqued for being North-centric. A number of scholars further argue, and we concur, that the framework also elides many feminist struggles, particularly those undertaken by women of color and working-class women. Kimberly Springer (2002) argues, for example, that, by marking the third wave as the point when women of color gained prominence, these women's struggles become erased from all other moments in feminist history. This paper focuses on challenging, in particular, the perpetuated ageism and false divisiveness within this historical narrative.

2. See Laughlin et al. 2010; Hewitt 2010; Reger 2005; Garrison 2001; Aikau, Erickson, and Pierce 2007; and Laughlin and Castledine 2011 for comprehensive reviews of this scholarship.

3. Despite increasing attention to difference, feminist movements have yet to fully incorporate ageism as an intersecting system of oppression (e.g., Macdonald and Rich 2001).

4. Hogeland similarly analyzes the embedded ageism in this generational discourse, arguing that "the effect of using claims of generational difference to stand in for political difference is to reify ageism in the movement—on both sides of a putative divide" (2001, 108). While we recognize that ageism is two-sided, our analysis focuses on challenging the assumptions associated with aging.

5. This is the case with the assumption that women of color were not actively leading North American feminism until the "third wave" (or the 1990s); not only is this assumption false, it also makes invisible the significant contributions of these women throughout the twentieth century (see Springer 2002).

6. Interestingly, in considering whether a generational rift exists among feminists of color, Springer (2002) argues that such generational discord is a phenomenon of white feminism and that, among feminists of color, generational *continuity* bears greater importance. She states that "as young white feminists are seeking to step outside of what they consider rigid lifestyle instructions of their feminist foremothers (e.g., stylistic and political), young Black women are attempting to stretch beyond the awe-inspiring legendary work of women like Fannie Lou Hamer, Coretta Scott King, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, and Angela Davis" (Springer 2002, 1068).

7. This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through the Canada Research Chairs program. It was approved in 2013 and 2014 by the Review Ethics Board at Trent University in Canada and thus complied with ethical protocols set out by Canada's Tri-Council, including obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality. In addition, we have based our research practices, to the best of our abilities, on an anti-oppressive framework (Brown and Strega 2005) and ethics of care (e.g., McEwan and Goodman 2010; Carmalt and Faubion 2010), allowing time for building trusting relationships, and being mindful of the subtle ways participating in this research could affect participants. At the same time, we recognize that all research relationships are shaped by the shifting subject positions of researchers and participants and by the contexts in which their relationships arise and exist, including the multiple, shifting, and overlapping systems of power (Rose 1997; Haraway 1988).

8. Note that GRAN's leadership team is dynamic: new people came on and others left over the course of this research and the writing of this article. For more on GRAN, see Chazan, Baldwin, and Madokoro 2015.

9. For further discussion of the strategic mobilization of "grandmotherhood" as a political strategy, see D. Sawchuk 2009; Chazan and Kittmer 2016. For a discussion of how older women in southern Africa perceive and remobilize "grandmotherhood," see Chazan 2015.

10. In a conversation in 2015, Sam explained that GRAN has taken the strategic but difficult decision not to use the word "feminist" in its materials. She explained the "unfortunate" reality that such language might deter people from engaging with GRAN.

She also explained the feeling among some on the LT that it might be just as problematic to omit the word "feminist" from GRAN's materials, acknowledging a certain dynamic tension surrounding this decision.

11. For more on how age is socially constructed and disciplined, see, for example, Katz 1996; Chivers 2003; Sandberg 2013; Ellison 2014; Marshall and Rahman 2015; Krekula 2007; Ratzenböck, Maierhofer, and Kriebernegg 2014.

12. Furthermore, in many instances throughout GRAN's archival material, "African grandmothers" are also framed as their "African sisters." For instance, "listening to," "learning from," and "cultivating primary relationships" with their "African sisters" were listed as GRAN's goals (Edwards, Wallace-Deering, and Watson 2011, 20).

13. Analyses of sexuality and gender identity, for instance, appear prominent to GRAN's advocacy; members recognize how sexuality interacts with other prejudices to increase risk of HIV and hinder access to treatment. This was evident in a discussion on their website regarding the marginalization and stigma faced by African women who identify as "LGBT."

14. Such consistencies were evident with a number of other participants as well. In particular, our conversation with Betty revealed similarities in our politics and concerns regarding sexuality and consent. We talked at length about the shifting landscape of awareness, education, and attitudes toward sexual health, comparing how norms have changed across the points at which each of came of age. Even with our awareness of shifting norms and political contexts, our ongoing views revealed commonality and not division.

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