

2019

# I'm not convinced that the celebratory 'we're having a feminist moment' helps feminism

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa

*University of Wollongong*, [sharoncd@uow.edu.au](mailto:sharoncd@uow.edu.au)

---

## Publication Details

S. Crozier-De Rosa 2019 I'm not convinced that the celebratory 'we're having a feminist moment' helps feminism *The Militant Woman*  
<https://themilitantwoman.wordpress.com/2019/03/08/im-not-convinced-that-the-celebratory-were-having-a-feminist-moment-helps-feminism/>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:  
[research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

# I'm not convinced that the celebratory 'we're having a feminist moment' helps feminism

## **Abstract**

It hurts to say this on International Women's Day. The IWD2019 website says: 'From grassroots activism to worldwide action, we are entering an exciting period of history where the world expects balance.' I want to join in the celebrations while remaining mindful of the work that has yet to be done to reach this year's aspirational theme of #BalanceforBetter. But one thing stops me – the relationship between notions of 'waves', 'turns', 'moments', 'phases' and memory.

## **Keywords**

'we're, celebratory, that, convinced, not, i'm, helps, moment', feminist, having, feminism

## **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | Law

## **Publication Details**

S. Crozier-De Rosa 2019 I'm not convinced that the celebratory 'we're having a feminist moment' helps feminism The Militant Woman <https://themilitantwoman.wordpress.com/2019/03/08/im-not-convinced-that-the-celebratory-were-having-a-feminist-moment-helps-feminism/>

Crozier-De Rosa, Sharon, 'I'm Not Convinced that the Celebratory 'We're Having a Feminist Moment' Helps Feminism', The Militant Woman Blog, March 2019:  
<https://themilitantwoman.wordpress.com/2019/03/08/im-not-convinced-that-the-celebratory-were-having-a-feminist-moment-helps-feminism/>

### **I'm not convinced that the celebratory 'we're having a feminist moment' helps feminism**

It hurts to say this on International Women's Day.

The IWD2019 website says: 'From grassroots activism to worldwide action, we are entering an exciting period of history where the world expects balance.'

I want to join in the celebrations while remaining mindful of the work that has yet to be done to reach this year's aspirational theme of #BalanceforBetter.

But one thing stops me – the relationship between notions of 'waves', 'turns', 'moments', 'phases' and memory.

Feminist scholars have pretty much discounted the idea of feminist 'waves' on the basis that this framing is dismissive of all the work that feminists persisted in doing in between those 'waves'. Yet, we persist in chasing feminist 'moments'.

What is the problem? Or, more accurately, what is my problem with this?

It is memory.

Memory helps to provide continuity. Alongside continuing activism, it bridges past and present activism.

### **Memory of Feminism as Problematic**

The recent Women's Marches capitalised on a pioneering feminist tactic of the early twentieth century, the women's public protest. Suffrage pageantry and marching – spectacular displays of mass dissent, mass mobilisation – inspired and inspire women to mobilise globally.

Early twentieth-century feminist activism harnessed the power of commerce as they marketed feminist merchandise to fund their campaigns. Past feminist-branded tea cosies and cups and saucers now sit alongside Pussyhats in the feminist memory, in the archive of feminist material culture.

We acknowledge this.

Yet, we continue to talk about 'moments', thereby overshadowing the linkages – the continuity – between feminist protests, past and present.

By pursuing this tack, we risk distracting from a very real problem for feminist activism – how the mis-remembering and not-remembering of past feminist activisms damages faith in the idea of persistent feminist resistance and activism.

So, say we continue to talk about ‘moments’ – what then do we say happens in between moments of activism?

We know that women continue to push the boundaries. From our historical research, we know that they continue to fight for equal pay, for protection from domestic violence, for equitable citizenship.

But what happens to the memory of those ‘big’ moments – those ‘waves’?

### **Remembering Women’s Activism**

In our recently published book, *Remembering Women’s Activism* (Routledge 2019: <https://www.routledge.com/Remembering-Womens-Activism-1st-Edition/Crozier-De-Rosa-Mackie/p/book/9781138794894>), Vera Mackie and I found that women activists were extraordinarily diligent as they worked to archive and preserve their own memory.

They collected their speeches, campaign brochures, material artefacts, and formed ongoing, growing archives. (This is not so different from today. For example, the Women’s March on Washington was barely over before the movement started the process of documenting the event through oral histories. In January 2018, just before the first anniversary, a book of oral histories and photographs was released.)

They began the task of memorialising their respective movements as they wrote published and unpublished memoirs.

They actively sought homes to publicly house and display evidence of their labours, their successes. They worked tirelessly to raise funds to preserve their archives.

They worked to keep the feminist moment – feminist momentum – going.

And yet, we discovered the continual difficulties they faced in trying to preserve and perpetuate their own memory.

Often the memory of feminist activism fell prey to the whims of nationalist politics. Irish women who fought in anti-colonial campaigns had to be ‘forgotten’ in line with the masculinised priorities of the new post-colonial nation.

International politics trumped gender politics. Korean women seeking redress for those who experienced wartime sexual abuse at the hands of the Japanese military were silenced as relations between Japan and Korea were being negotiated.

Racialised positioning determined memory. African American suffragists – who were forced to march at the end of early twentieth-century American women’s marches – struggled to find a place for themselves in the most recent iteration of these displays of feminist solidarity.

### **Sustaining Feminism**

Do we understand enough about how gender politics and the memory of past feminist activism have played out, nationally and globally, to be able to understand how to sustain feminist activism – how to move beyond the framework of ‘moments’ and ‘waves’?

Without attention to memory – without interrogating how and why feminist activism are remembered in certain ways, misremembered, completely forgotten (that is, subjected to historical amnesia), can we hope to learn how to sustain feminist activism without necessitating the massive outlays of fiscal, organisational, physical and emotional energies generated by the ‘phase’ or ‘turn’ moments?

### **Marching On**

Foremost in my mind at the moment, then, are the questions: How will this feminist moment be remembered? Will current activists succeed in protecting, preserving, perpetuating their own memory? Or will forces external to them – national, geopolitical – shape, hide, obscure that memory?