

# **Introduction**

## **Day 1**

Module 2, *Feminism and Freedom*

Tshisimani Centre for Activist  
Education

# Backlash – undeclared war on women

“a counterassault on women’s rights...an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to achieve for women”

Susan Faludi, 1991





## **Attack on Sexual and Reproductive Rights**

Georgia, US bans abortion after 6 weeks of pregnancy (“the heartbeat bill”)



Bolsonaro moves to delete all references to feminism, homosexuality, and violence against women from the nation's school textbooks.

# **Signs of the backlash**

- Erosion of sexual and reproductive rights
- Re-asserting 'family values', natural order – with men as superior and women and inferior
- Appeal to traditional gender roles
- Policy pronouncements and legislation
- Dismissing concerns about gendered violence

- A gendered expression of authoritarianism / the “strong men era” (Time Magazine)
- Politics of fear, regressive nostalgia and exclusion (“us and them”)
- Use of the internet as a tool to censor, silence and surveil
- Use of democratic instruments as ticket to power followed by an attack on these instruments
- Growing insecurity fueled by the years of economic policies that called for budget cuts for social services



## **Kenya bans Marie Stopes clinics**

Kenya bans Marie Stopes clinic from offering post abortion services

Abortion is illegal in Kenya

7 women die everyday from 'botched' abortions



## **Uganda bans Pride marches**

Homosexuality is illegal in Uganda under colonial-era laws, punishable by a jail sentence



# **Backlash or push for a breakthrough**

- Caution against the reference to the 'backlash' in general terms
- Some of the freedoms that are being eroded in places like US are still to be won elsewhere
- Status of women & LGBTIQ reflect realities of living and struggling in 'partial democracies'

# **Areas of agreement**

- There is a big challenge to freedom in the world today
- There is a need to resist erosions to freedom
- Fight against the deliberate shrinking of spaces for freedom
- Strengthen the efforts of those who are struggling for a breakthrough under authoritarian regimes



What emancipatory ideas are at our disposal as we fight for freedom?

# Three questions

1. How does feminism help us to defend freedom?
2. How does feminism help us to expand notions and understandings of freedom?
3. In what ways does feminism give us insights that are neglected in other political traditions?