Chapter 2

Tweeted Articulations of Resistance Against Patriarchal Violence:
Imagining Digital Black Fem/Womanism in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

Research on digital articulations of patriarchal violence—sexual gender-based violence, harassment, intimidation, and bullying—as experienced by women and femmes globally is still exploratory. Despite the continued research development, feminist academics and activists still have challenges designing online platforms that are safe spaces for all genders and expressions of sexuality. Thus, this chapter extends current research and focuses on the root causes of digital violence. This chapter also focuses on the uses of social media, mainly Twitter, and the developments of feminist discourses by activist organizations in Southern Africa: @womenforchange5 and @SisterNambia. This chapter discusses the use of feminist organizations as tools in building community, developing social change strategies, and the ability to combat cis-heterosexist patriarchal conditioning and violence. Consequently, this chapter aims to contextualize social media as an echo chamber of societal violence. Moreover, social media affordances result in digital realms becoming field sites of misogyny and misogynoir.

INTRODUCTION

#Justicefor, #ShutItAllDown, #AmINext, #IBelieveHer, #SayHerName, #EnoughisEnough — all are hashtags that have trended on *Twitter* periodically, cross-culturally (Southern African Development Community – SADC) and transnationally throughout the African diaspora. Other hashtags, such as

#OurBodiesNotWarZones (Mutsvairo, 2020) locally (SADC) and #WhyIStayed, (Linabary et al., 2020) globally, were created to discuss critical issues affecting women in violent patriarchal societies. Therefore, social media is an extension of activist work and feminist/womanist praxis. For example, in the tradition of women like Ida B. Wells and Fanie Lou Hamer in North America (McArthur & Muhammad, 2022) and Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Winnie Mandela (South Africa) who used their voices through print, imagery, and political activism to combat state violence, so too do contemporary feminists/womanist use social media platforms such as YouTube, Blogs, Instagram, Tik Tok, and Twitter to denounce and resist violent patriarchy — misogyny, sexism, racism, capitalism, and cultured violence. Through videos, digital sources (e-books and blogs), and hashtags, women have the capability and accessibility to reach audiences cross-culturally which amplifies their activist work.

Moreover, the abovementioned hashtags were a means to 'talk back' (hooks, 2014) and raise awareness about i. The crisis of violent masculinity/patriarchy, and ii. The abduction, rape, and murder of cis-hetero-women, children, or members of the LGBTQ+ community. This way, using hashtags and media is crucial for women, Black women in particular, to voice their rage and mourning and implement strategies of resistance. Social media offers marginalized and silenced voices the necessary cross-cultural channels to challenge violence, amplify advocacy, and reclaim agency. Feminist practitioners and theoreticians are driven by pursuing solutions to real problems faced by 'real people' (Code, 2006), such as hunger, poverty, and reproductive justice; the focus is on justice and liberation.

This chapter engages with the crimes perpetrated against Southern African women, mainly in South Africa and Namibia and the activist work, digital resistance, and digital disobedience in two organizations — @womenforchange5 and @SisterNambia. Digital disobedience in this chapter is defined as the intentional disruption of violent patriarchy, creating visibility and amplifying marginalized voices, creating alternative, more so, authentic African women's identities and speaking against oppressive cultural regimes. Oppressive cultural regimes include homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, sexism, and rape culture, which leads to femicide. As such, the countries and organizations mentioned above were selected due to their geographic proximity, culture(s), histories, and the exchange of encounters on social media by women from these varying locations who use their platforms to build community and increase digital visibility.

Furthermore, this chapter will focus on the developing and continued development of Black Cyberfeminism (McMillan Cottom, 2016; Matos, 2017; Brown, 2018; Steele, 2021) and digital womanism. Scholarship on Womanism is vast; however, digital womanist praxis must be conceptualized more theoretically. Knowledge production and intellectualizing are not under the sole possession of a singular demographic; feminist epistemologies are multivocal exchanges of lived experiences applicable to the broader society (Code, 2006). Much like feminism(s) discussed in academic text and the physical realm, there are nuances to the varied frameworks in cyberspace. Hence the pluralization and emphasis on Black Cyberfeminism(s) and digital Womanism(s). Which is the intentional focus on Black women across digital and physical geographies; this chapter extends the idea of geography within the virtual realm (Ash et al., 2018). Black women's oppression is nuanced and intersectional (Gqola, 2001); therefore, solutions must adhere to the specificity of Black trauma. Nevertheless, what is more significant is that digital activism, whether womanist or feminist, was needed due to the violence perpetrated against marginalized and minoritized groups, mainly women, primarily Black and indigenous, on various social media and digital platforms (Brown, 2018; Sobande, 2021).

Digital feminists or cyberfeminists fight against and raise awareness of the fact that social media is a breeding ground for rape culture, which is the normalization of violent rhetoric, harassment, intimida-

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