


# Chapter 5

## Digital Memory as Resistance: NGOs and Immigrant Women Using Social Media to Preserve Collective Trauma Through Intersectionality

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter examines the role of digital memory as a form of resistance for immigrant women, concentrating on how they utilize social media to preserve collective trauma and assert their identities. Through the story of Fatima, an immigrant from South Sudan, the chapter illustrates the challenges of displacement and the transformative power of digital storytelling. It examines the critical role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in amplifying these narratives, fostering solidarity, and providing resources for empowerment. By situating the discussion within an intersectional framework, the chapter highlights how factors such as gender, race, and legal status influence the experiences of immigrant women. Ultimately, it argues for the importance of digital memory in resisting systemic erasure and advocating for social justice.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background and Introduction to Fatima's Story

This chapter draws inspiration from the story of Fatima, an immigrant from South Sudan who moved to the United States of America. Fatima, a strong woman, grew up in a close-knit community in South Sudan. Her life revolved around her family, religion, tradition, and the generic responsibilities of a woman in a patriarchal society like South Sudan. Despite the history of conflict in her country, her life was quiet and peaceful until one fateful night. Conflict, which seemed to have died out, reared its ugly head in the big cities. Fatima, in her small village, prayed and hoped that she'd be spared. The conflict lingered for a while, and when she thought it was almost over, her village was attacked. The conflict left much destruction in its wake, not sparing Fatima's home. Her whole town was left in shambles, her parents were killed, and the armed forces seized her husband and two teenage sons. She could barely escape walking with her newborn baby girl and daughter. The only thing that kept her going was her sheer willpower and her maternal instinct to protect her children.

After several months of struggle, going through the hands of several agencies, she made it to the United States of America, the land of opportunities she had always drooled over. She had high hopes and thought her woes were over because she had arrived at a good place. She had her first cultural shock when the asylum process began. The asylum-seeking process was uncertain and brought her a lot of fear. Landing in a country where language was a barrier and with no family and resources, Fatima had to navigate a bureaucratic system that reminded her of the trauma of fleeing war. Together with her daughters, in an immigrant detention center, she felt more like a prisoner due to harsh conditions, inadequate food, and more horrifying stories from other migrants. Fatima eventually learned the basics of the English language with time and found ways to fit into her new reality.

Through a nongovernmental organization (NGO), Fatima was introduced to a network of women who shared similar experiences and avenues for communication. Fatima and her cohorts shared their stories on TikTok, Facebook, Threads, and Instagram. She detailed her experiences, her challenges navigating a new country, and her memories of her country. Through hashtags and popular social media phrases, her network connected with other immigrant communities from diverse backgrounds. They shared their pain and trauma, fighting to reclaim them. Hashtags are keywords or phrases preceded by a “#” symbol that help categorize content and make posts easily searchable on social media. Originally used to organize topics, they boost visibility, join conversations, and connect users around shared interests (Mahfouz, 2020; Laucuka, 2018).

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