Feminist Activism in the Digital Era

Feminist Activism in the Digital Era:

Cultural Perspectives

Edited by

Aslı Kotaman and Gülüm Şener

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INTRODUCTION

GÜLÜM ŞENER AND ASLI KOTAMAN

In contemporary feminist movements, digital media plays a pivotal role in communication, organisation, and the struggle against patriarchal systems. The 21st century has witnessed a radical transformation in the communication strategies of social movements, driven by the widespread adoption of mobile communication technologies and social media. Globally, feminist activists utilise digital media to amplify their voices at local, national, and international levels, sustain advocacy for women's rights, engage in creative actions, recruit new activists, build women's solidarity through online social networks, discuss gender inequality and women's issues, and challenge anti-gender policies of repressive governments.

In the digital age, the concept of "connective action"[1] offers new forms of organisation, action, and communication for feminist movements. Digital feminist activists employ digital tactics such as advocating for women's rights through hashtags and online petitions, exposing perpetrators of violence against women and girls, sharing survivors' experiences[2], producing and managing feminist content on digital platforms, video activism, digital storytelling, feminist podcasts, data activism, feminist hacktivism, organising online and offline demonstrations, intervening in the sexist language of mainstream media, engaging in discursive and legal struggles with misogynistic, anti-feminist online groups, discussing women's issues, weaving affective bonds, and connecting feminist movements at national and international levels[3]. Recent examples such as

[1] Lance W. Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg, The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[2] Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey & Brooke Foucalt Welles, Hashtag activism: Networks of race and gender justice. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020).

[3] Jessamy Gleeson, "(Not) working 9-5: The consequences of contemporary Australian-based online feminist campaigns as digital labour", Media International Australia, 161(1) (2016): 77-85; Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, & Jessalyn

#MeToo and #UnViladorEnTuCamino demonstrate how social media is transforming the structure of feminist struggles. Protests initiated on social media, embraced by numerous women, can quickly spread globally, evolving into transnational feminist movements that effectively lead to the punishment of perpetrators, spark street protests, and create long-term impacts. Hashtag feminism makes sexual violence and systemic injustice visible by politicising the personal and bridging the individual and the collective[4].

Global digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok serve as alternative public spheres for feminist activists, enabling the production and dissemination of messages in various forms and facilitating mutual idea-sharing. The platform choices of feminist movements vary based on their goals, methods of struggle, and the conditions in their respective countries. The user-generated content nature of social media fosters activists' creativity, while its virality ensures the rapid spread of feminist protests. Social media also enhances the visibility and popularity of feminist movements, particularly among younger generations, by enabling them to engage with feminism, thereby strengthening women's solidarity and involving women who were previously unconnected with feminist ideas or movements.

Traditionally, feminist movements maintained their communications through face-to-face interactions and print media such as feminist newspapers and magazines. The proliferation of portable cameras in the 1960s-70s and the emergence of second-wave feminism in the Western world gave rise to feminist video collectives in North America and Europe[5]. Visuality introduced a new language to feminist struggles, making women's lives and issues visible and providing a chance to reach wider audiences. From the late 1990s, with the spread of the Internet and the emergence of the first phase of social media—blog publishing—feminist movements began transitioning into digital environments. The advent of social media platforms further interconnected feminist movements, increasing communication forms and expressions for activists. Today, digital media,

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Keller, Digital feminist activism: Girls and women fight back against rape culture. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[4] Rosemary Clark-Parsons, "'I see you, I believe you, I stand with you': #MeToo and the performance of networked feminist visibility", Feminist Media Studies, 21(3), (2019):362-380.

[5] Stéphanie Jeanjean, "Disobedient video in France in the 1970s: Video production by women's collectives", Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry, 27 (2011): 5–16.

though not the only tool, has become central to communication in feminist movements.

Despite these positive aspects, digital feminist activism faces certain practical limitations. Firstly, digital feminist activism occurs on social media platforms that are owned by global corporations. While these platforms potentially provide a global space for feminist activists to amplify their voices, their technical and economic functioning, the economy of visibility based on algorithms, the structure of social media relying on advertising, marketing[6], and entertainment, and their potential to create "echo chambers"[7]generally limit the visibility of feminist movements. Feminist movements have to frequently produce content that conforms to the commercial and popular language of digital platforms to remain visible[8].

Another barrier posed by digital media is the perpetuation of existing inequalities online and the necessity to evaluate digital feminist activism within its political regime and cultural context. Gender equality in access to digital media has not been fully achieved, either globally or within countries. Women, especially those in poorer regions and rural areas, face a significant digital divide. Even when access to digital media is available, gender-based issues persist in terms of digital literacy. Numerous economic and socio-cultural barriers inhibit women's use of digital media. Factors such as ethnicity, language, class, digital literacy, income, cultural codes, and taboos affect women's use of digital media globally. Schradie emphasises, through the concept of the "digital activism gap," that digital activism is not independent of variables such as ideology, hierarchy, class issues, and inequality. Hierarchical, bureaucratic social movements with resources and infrastructure are more advantageous in digital activism, while it becomes problematic for groups with fewer resources and more working-class members[9].

Additionally, the political climate, censorship and government pressures on dissidents limit digital feminist activism. Authoritarian regimes, in particular, use digital media to surveil, intimidate, and suppress feminist activists. For example, in Iran, following the death of Mahsa Amini after being beaten by police, many women's rights advocates who participated in protest actions and shared photos of themselves unveiling on social media

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[6] Josiane Jouët, "Digital feminism: Questioning the renewal of activism", Journal of Research in Gender Studies, 8(1), (2018): 133-157.

[7] Carl R. Sunstein, Republic.com. (Princeton University Press, 2001).

[8] Aristea Fotopoulou, Feminist activism and digital networks: Between empowerment and vulnerability, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

[9] Jen Schradie, "Digital activism gap: How class and costs shape online collective action", Social Problems, 65(1), (2018): 51-74.

were detained, tortured, imprisoned, and killed. In China, where surveillance technologies are used effectively for political pressure on citizens, online spaces are also used to surveil feminist activists[10]. In Saudi Arabia, women's mobilisation is perceived as a threat to society, moral codes, and family, and women are punished for their social media posts[11]. Nevertheless, while digital platforms alone do not have the power to revolutionise, they function as networks that enable users to interact with transnational feminist movements, leading to mindset changes, influencing social demands, and organising street protests, especially in authoritarian regimes.

A further issue is the organisation of misogynistic rhetoric and anti-feminist groups on social media, who attack women's organisations and spread misogynistic rhetoric. Feminist activists on digital platforms are criminalised, demonised, presented as a threat to national and religious identities, threatened with physical violence, and humiliated by these groups. These groups find a ground for misogyny on social media, form alliances, and their common goal is to push women out of online public spheres and silence them. Sarah Banet-Weiser perceives popular misogyny as a structural force perpetuating hegemonic masculinity. She argues that online spaces offer a novel platform for the reinforcement of these traditional gender norms, presenting new avenues for objectifying and devaluing women. In the contemporary landscape, misogyny has become as popular as feminism, finding expression across multiple media platforms[12]. Consequently, digital platforms often become toxic environments for women and spaces where everyday sexism is reproduced.

The purpose of this book is to contribute to the study of digital feminist activism by moving beyond utopian narratives of digital activism, focusing on practices in different countries, and examining the opportunities and limitations that digital media offers feminist movements in various cultural contexts. This book brings together chapters that explore the impact of digital media on feminism across different countries and cultures. The chapters analyse digital feminist activism within the context of specific countries, considering the impact of cultural and social norms, political regimes, and the colonial past of these countries on digital media and

[10] Lixian Hou, “Rewriting “the personal is political”: Young women's digital activism and new feminist politics in China”. Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 21(3), (2020): 337-355.
[11] Huda Alsahi, H. “The Twitter campaign to end the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia”, Journal of Arabian Studies, 8 (2), (2018): 298-318.
[12] Sarah Banet-Weiser, Empowered: Popular feminism and popular misogyny. (Duke University Press, 2018).

feminist activism, as well as the relationship with global feminist movements. This collection aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how feminist activism navigates and confronts various forms of oppression and state power, fostering a dialogue between global movements and local realities.

Amna Nasir, in her chapter, **"Will the 'Real' Feminism Please Stand Up? Discourses on Digital Feminism in Pakistan: A Case Study of the Aurat March"**, introduces the global dimensions of digital feminism and explores how this movement resonates within the complex socio-political landscape of Pakistan. By focusing on the Aurat March, Nasir sets the stage for understanding the power and challenges of digital feminist activism in a highly contested environment.

Following this, Selime Büyükgöze's chapter, **"Feminist Resistance and Digital Strategies: Challenging Anti-Gender Narratives on Social Media in Turkey,"** allows us to explore further how feminist resistance is articulated through digital platforms in Turkey. Her analysis of anti-gender narratives and feminist responses in the context of Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention aligns well with Nasir's exploration of digital feminism, offering a comparative perspective.

Next, Sony Jalarajan Raj and Adith K. Suresh's chapter, **"Digital Populisms and Gender Justice: The Attack on Female Activists in Cyberspace,"** expands on the theme of digital activism by examining how social media in India has become a battleground for feminist activists, facing coordinated online harassment. This chapter highlights the broader implications of digital populism and its impact on gender justice, creating a crucial link to the earlier discussions on digital resistance.

Ezgi Sarıtaş's chapter, **"Local Translations of Embodied Transnational Feminism: Un Violador en tu Camino Performances in Turkey,"** shifts our focus from digital strategies to embodied performances as a form of feminist protest. By examining the global impact of the "Un Violador en tu Camino" performance, Sarıtaş illustrates how feminist movements adapt and respond to local contexts, building on the ideas of digital and embodied resistance discussed earlier.

Mariana Fagundes-Ausani's chapter, **"The Social World of Feminist Media Activism from a Transnational Perspective: A Comparison between Brazil and France,"** expands the analytical framework by comparing feminist media activism in Brazil and France. This ethnographic analysis not only enriches our understanding of how feminist activism is shaped by different cultural contexts but also ties into the transnational themes of resistance and media engagement explored in the previous chapters.

Moving forward, Fernanda Briones-Medina and Guiomar Rovira-Sancho's chapter, **"Women Activists Caretaking Digital Networks: Hack Feminists in Mexico,"** delves into hack feminism in Mexico. By examining the intersection of technology and feminist activism, this chapter builds on our understanding of digital strategies and highlights the importance of technological empowerment in feminist movements.

Karolina Szpyrko explores the often overlooked struggles of non-metropolitan feminist activists in Poland in her chapter, **"Digital Universality and the Embodied Costs of Feminism: Multi-Dimensional Abuse in Non-Metropolitan Feminist Activism in Poland".** This chapter emphasises the physical and emotional toll of activism in marginalised areas, linking back to earlier discussions on the embodied experiences of feminist resistance and the challenges of digital activism.

Next, María José Fuenteálamo and Yanna G. Franco's chapter, **"Ana Botín's Feminist Discourse on LinkedIn: Feminist Activism or Marketing?"** critically examines the intersection of feminism and corporate branding, questioning the authenticity of feminist messages in the business world. This chapter provides a contrast to the grassroots activism discussed in earlier chapters, offering a nuanced perspective on how feminism is appropriated in corporate spaces.

Alessandra Micalizzi and Marica Spalletta's chapter, **"Between the Media Stage and the Digital Backstage: Models and Practices in the Creative Industries on Visual Social Networks,"** explores how female artists navigate self-representation and body politics on social media. This chapter ties together the themes of digital and visual strategies, showcasing how feminist narratives are shaped and challenged within the creative industries.

Dominique Gagnon's chapter **"Rethinking Anti-Fandom Through an Intersectional Feminist Lens: "Let's rob the bank" to Save *A League of Their Own*"** article discusses the feminist anti-fandom that emerged after Amazon Prime canceled *A League of Their Own* (ALOTO). Fans, particularly those invested in the show's LGBTQ+ and racial representation, used social media to campaign for its renewal. Their activism highlights the ongoing struggle for better media representation of marginalised groups. Despite their efforts, there is a sense of fatigue as these stories continue to face cancellation.

In the article "**We Demand Answers, Solutions, and Results: An Investigation of Institutional and Student Responses to a Local Sexual Violence Crisis"** Fanny Ramirez, Lance Porter, Caley Hewitt, Kyle Stanley, Ashlyn Barclay, Gabriella Jensen, Lyric Mandell, and Caroline Cantrelle analyse the institutional and community reactions to the sexual

violence crisis at Louisiana State University (LSU) following the tragic death of Madison Brooks. The study uses critical discourse analysis to examine how different groups—university administrators, student organizations, and the public—interpreted and communicated about the incident. The authors highlight the persistent issue of rape culture on college campuses and advocate for a discourse of community repair that prioritises the voices and needs of students, urging universities to engage more meaningfully with student activists and eliminate rape myths from their communications.

Feminist digital activism, while powerful in amplifying voices and mobilising movements across the globe, also contends with significant challenges rooted in patriarchal structures, both online and offline. This complexity mirrors the struggles faced by historical feminist figures who navigated oppressive systems. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, articulates the perpetual tension between the individual's quest for freedom and societal constraints, a struggle evident in today's digital feminist movements. Just as Beauvoir argued for the liberation of women from predefined roles, digital feminists must now fight against the algorithmic biases and corporate interests that shape online platforms, which often serve to silence or marginalise feminist voices.

The resilience required to continue this fight, despite the overwhelming presence of misogyny and anti-feminist rhetoric in digital spaces, echoes Audre Lorde’s assertion that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Lorde's warning serves as a reminder that while digital platforms offer new avenues for feminist activism, they are also controlled by the same power structures that perpetuate gender inequality. Thus, the task ahead for digital feminists is not just to use these platforms but to reimagine and reclaim them in ways that truly serve the cause of gender justice.

This book aims to contribute to this ongoing dialogue by exploring how digital feminist activism navigates and challenges these barriers across various cultural contexts, striving to create a more equitable digital landscape.

As we navigate this complex landscape, we envision a world where our collective efforts in digital and physical spaces converge to dismantle patriarchal systems. We wish for a future where our digital activism transcends its limitations, empowering every voice, and where our shared struggles lead to a global community rooted in equality, justice, and mutual respect. Together, we strive not just for a more equitable digital landscape but for a world where all women, regardless of their background or location, can live free from oppression and thrive in their full potential.

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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHORS

Amna Nasir is a communications expert and feminist media scholar from Pakistan, currently pursuing her doctorate at the University of Wollongong, Australia where she is researching the #MeToo movement, celebrity culture, digital activism, and socio-political movements in South Asia, particularly Pakistan. Amna has a background in journalism and currently works as a Communications Lead for a feminist think-and-do tank called, Noor and is on the board of feminist organisations including Women Living Under Muslim Laws and Feminist Studies Association. Her work has been featured in Women's Media Center, Thomson Reuters Foundation, Al-Jazeera and more. She lives in Sydney, Australia with her toddler.

Selime Büyükgöze holds a doctoral degree in Communication from Istanbul Bilgi University and is an associate professor in the New Media and Communication department at Istanbul Topkapı University. As a feminist activist, she works primarily on violence against women and has contributed to various international reporting mechanisms for the Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation. She also serves as a board member for the Women Against Violence Europe Network. Her research interests include film and new media in the context of memory and activism. She has published articles on the use of social media by feminists in Turkey as a tool for activism and on the discrediting of feminists in Turkey.

Dr. Raj Sony Jalarajan is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication, MacEwan University, Edmonton, Canada. Dr. Raj is a professional journalist turned academic who has worked in different demanding positions as a reporter, special correspondent, and producer in several news media channels.

Mr. Adith K. Suresh is currently associating as a research assistant at the Department of Communication, MacEwan University. Adith holds a Master's Degree in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University. His research interest includes Film Studies, Literary Criticism, and South Asian Cultural Studies.

Ezgi Sarıtaş received her PhD in Gender Studies from Ankara University. Her dissertation was published as a book in Turkish in 2020 under the title Cinsel Normalliğin Kuruluşu (Construction of Sexual Normality). She is a former visiting scholar at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor with a grant from The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK); a former postdoctoral fellow of "Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe" (EUME) at the Forum Transregionale Studien; and a former visiting scholar at the Center for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies at Humboldt-Universität with a grant from the Gerda Henkel Foundation. She has published in journals such as Gender and History, Diyâr and Fe Journal and several edited volumes. She is a research assistant at Ankara University, where she teaches courses on feminist and queer theories, gender and sexuality, and the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic.

Mariana Fagundes-Ausani has a PhD in Communication from the University of Brasilia and in Information and Communication from the University of Rennes (2023). She holds a master's degree in Journalism and Society - UnB (2017) and a MBA in Marketing and Digital Media - FGV (2020). She has a degree in Communication and Journalism - UnB (2013). She conducts research into feminist media activism, digital and political activism and the relationship between audiences and content disseminated via social media. She is a member of the Madalenas in Action research group, which seeks to understand the participation of the media in the representation of women, and collaborates with the International Student Information Observatory, a partnership between UnB and UQTR. She is a member of the French laboratory Arènes, a mixed research unit in the humanities and social sciences, and of the Laboratoire des pratiques et des identités journalistiques (LaPIJ) at ULB.

Guiomar Rovira Sancho holds a PhD in Social Sciences and is currently an Associate Professor in the Political Science Department at the University of Girona, Spain. She is the author of five books: *#MeToo: La ola de las multitudes conectadas feministas* (Bellaterra), *Activismo en red y multitudes conectadas* (Icaria-UAM), *Zapatistas sin fronteras* (Ediciones Era), *Mujeres de maíz* (Ediciones Era), and *Zapata vive!* (Virus). She lived in Mexico for 28 years, during which she worked as a journalist covering the indigenous Zapatista uprising in Chiapas. From 2008 to 2021, she was a professor at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) in Mexico City. She was a Marie Sklodowska-Curie research fellow of the European Union from 2021 to 2023 (Grant agreement 893348 FEMONMETOO) with

the project: ‘Online feminist global actions. Potentials and pitfalls of the #MeToo campaign’. Nowadays she holds the project “Digital feminist activism in Latin America: From the Internet to the critique of Artificial Intelligence” (AIDIGITALFEM- CNS2023-144907) funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain. Her areas of specialization include social movements and communication, feminisms, and digital networks.

Fernanda Briones Medina holds a PhD in Social Sciences and a Master's degree in Women's Studies from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco, and a BA in Sociology from the Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, México. She has over 10 years of experience in feminist research-action and popular education. As an activist, she has focused on disseminating feminist thought through audiovisual formats such as fanzines and podcasts, and on promoting the critical appropriation of technology by women and other marginalized identities. As a teacher at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute in Mexico City, she has conducted numerous trainings on the prevention, response, and eradication of violence against women, as well as on the integration of gender perspectives into public policies. Currently, she is the Coordinator of the Capacity Building area at Insad, a consultancy specializing in social research and the evaluation of projects, programs, and social policies with a gender and human rights approach.

Dr Karolina Szpyrko is an interdisciplinary scholar, cultural animateur, artist, and lecturer in media and communications at Regent’s University London. She holds a PhD in Media and Communications from the University of Sussex and an MA in Film and Television Studies from the University of Warwick. Her academic expertise spans across social sciences, digital humanities, and nontraditional modes of knowledge production. Specialising in the evolving value of activist labour within contemporary feminist movements, her research focuses on notions of mediatised labour and the juridification of human rights activism.

María José Fuenteálamo holds a degree in Journalism and is currently a PhD student in Journalism, focusing on Gender and Financial Press during the Me Too movement, at the Faculty of Ciencias de la Información, University Complutense of Madrid. She has previously served as an Associate Professor in Judicial Journalism at CESAG University in Mallorca, Spain. Additionally, she holds a postgraduate degree in European Politics from ULB, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium. Currently,

María works as a columnist and Economics reporter for the Spanish journal ABC, and she also contributes as a political commentator on television and radio. Prior to her current roles, she has worked as a freelance journalist in Euronews, Lyon, France, and Brussels, Belgium.

Yanna G. Franco holds a Ph.D. in Law and a Bachelor's degree in Economics, specializing in Monetary Economics and Public Sector. She is a Full Professor of Applied Economics at the Complutense University of Madrid, where she teaches Economics to students of Journalism, Audiovisual Communication, and Advertising and Public Relations. She is the Director of the academic journal "Comunicación y Género" and the Co-director of the Interdisciplinary Group of Feminist Research. She is also a member of the International Association of Feminist Economics (IAFFE). Professor Franco has been a visiting scholar at various international universities, including the National Autonomous University of Honduras, the Federal University of Santa Catarina (Brazil), Harvard University (USA) and the National University of Córdoba (Argentina). Her research interests focus on feminist economics, communication and gender studies. She has authored several academic publications and is involved in numerous competitive research projects.

Alessandra Micalizzi is Associate Professor in Sociology, Communication and Culture at Pegaso University and Senior Lecturer at SAE Institute where she teaches New Media and Society. She is a psychologist; a sociologist and she obtained her PhD in Communication and New Technologies at IULM University. She collaborated with several institutions such as IED Communication and Design, IUSVe, IUSTo and IULM where she was post doc fellow for 4 years. She is the director of the center of research in Digital Humanities of Pegaso University. All over the years, her research has been focusing on the role of Internet in social and communicative practices. She studies social emotions and the impact in online environments and more recently she has been focusing her interests on the application of the gender perspective in the wider creative industries processes. She published more than 70 publications among which “Women in creative industries” (2021 – Franco Angeli).

Marica Spalletta (PhD) is Associate Professor of Sociology of Cultural and Communication Processes at Link Campus University of Rome, where she teaches “Media Sociology” and “Media & Politics”; she is also the scientific manager of the BA in Political Science, and of Link LAB (Social Research Centre). Over the last 20 years she has participated in and led

several national and international research projects in the field of media sociology, including the H2020 DETECt (*Detecting Transcultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives*). She is currently the principal investigator of the CERV project GEMINI (*Gender Equality Through Media Investigation and New Training Insights*). She is the author of more than 90 scientific publications, among which: "Unsuitable Jobs for Women. Women's Behind-the-Scenes Employment and Female On-Screen Representation in Italian TV Crime Drama" (*Comunicazioni sociali*, 2023); "Audiences of popular European television crime drama: A nine-country study on consumption patterns, attitudes, and drivers of transcultural connection" (*European Journal of Communication*, 2023).

Dominique Gagnon is a PhD candidate in Communication at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). She is interested in fan and anti-fan studies, videographic criticism, and humour studies. Her PhD thesis focuses on gender-based violence in online fan spaces. She recently published a chapter about casual and non-fans of *Doctor Who* in *Adventures Across Time and Space: A* Doctor Who *Reader*, published by Bloomsbury Academic. She is affiliated with the Research laboratory on consumer and media culture in Quebec (LaboPop), the Quebec Network in Feminist Studies (RéQEF), and the Laboratory on communication and digital technology (LabCMO).

Fanny A. Ramirez is an Assistant Professor at Louisiana State University where she holds a joint appointment with the Manship School of Mass Communication and LSU's interdisciplinary Center for Computation and Technology. Her research examines the use of information communication technologies in sexual violence and criminal justice contexts with a focus on issues of privacy, discrimination, and race and gender inequality.

Lance Porter is the Karen W. and Daniel J. King Distinguished Professor in Advertising in the Grady College of Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. Prior to UGA, Porter spent twenty years at Louisiana State University, where he founded the Social Media Analysis and Creation (SMAC) Lab. Porter has focused on digital media since 1995, when he built his first commercial website. As executive director of digital marketing for Disney's film studio and later on retainer as a creative consultant, he has worked on hundreds of film-marketing campaigns. His research focuses on emerging media and power.

Caley Hewitt is a Ph.D. student at the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. Her research focuses on gender, technology, and politics. She's worked on projects about gendered political issues, including female candidates' electoral strategies in all-women electoral contests.

Kyle Stanley is a Mass Communication Ph.D. Candidate at Louisiana State University. His research focuses on popular and digital culture. With a passion for exploring the intersections of fandoms, celebrities/ influencers, cultural trends, and the impact of media law on these communities. His research dives deep into the intricacies of online communities, examining the relationships and interactions between fans and their chosen media.

Ashlyn Barclay is an M.A. student at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication, where she also earned her B.A. in Political Communication. Her research examines news coverage of international conflicts, along with the history of journalism and foreign correspondence. She is also interested in exploring media censorship.

Gabriella Jensen is an undergraduate student at LSU receiving degrees in Political Science and Political Communication. Her research interests include the roles of religion and ethnicity in conflict, forced migration, and the media's role in international conflicts. She plans to pursue an MA in Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Lyric Mandell is a doctoral candidate in Media and Public Affairs at the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. Her research investigates media effects, specifically examining mass media portrayals of marginalized groups and stigmatized health issues, seeking to understand how these representations shape audience perceptions, influence public opinion, and impact societal norms. Lyric's academic pursuits also encompass elements of popular culture and music, probing their role in media discourse and audience engagement.

Caroline Cantrelle received her Bachelor of Science from Louisiana State University and her Master of Mass Communication and Strategic Communication graduate certificate from LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication. Her research interests span a variety of social media-related subjects, including pop culture, AI and algorithms, and gender discrimination in social media communication. She currently works as a

Social Media Specialist, creating strategies and collaborating on integrated marketing efforts for clients across various industries.

CHAPTER ONE

WILL THE "REAL" FEMINISM PLEASE STAND UP? DISCOURSES ON DIGITAL FEMINISM IN PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF THE AURAT MARCH

AMNA NASIR

Introduction

The Aurat March (AM) is Pakistan's version of the women's march and takes place every year on March 8th. The AM is a highly divisive and contentious movement as it openly challenges patriarchy[1] and uses slogans that call out gender roles, shun conservative religious practices, and condemn men for harassment, which are considered attacks on the cultural and religious sentiments of society and consequently face an extreme backlash[2]. Resentment of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, and asexual (LGBTQ+) community is also a reason why AM receives such an exponential backlash[3].

While a large group of society questions the march, its motives, relevance, and credibility and justifies their opposition with cultural, religious, and class-based rationales, there is also a dissenting group that

[1] "Women Take to the Streets of Pakistan to Rewrite their Place in Society", The Guardian, accessed January 19, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/mar/08/women-take-to-the-streets-of-pakistan-to-rewrite-their-place-in-society-international-womens-day.
[2] "The 'Womanspreading' Placard that Caused Fury in Pakistan", BBC, accessed January 19, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-47832236.
[3] Faris Khan, "Khwaja Sira Activism: The Politics of Gender Ambiguity in Pakistan", TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly, No. 1-2 (May 2016): 158 – 164.

supports the march and everything it stands for. This group is willing to question the status quo in society. The discourses surrounding the AM show that the social media landscape in Pakistan is a contested space where different definitions of "the right kind of feminism" are competing for visibility.

This chapter engages with Judith Lorber's "Classification of Feminisms" to contextualise the themes found in online discourses around AM, using the framework and rationale for grouping certain feminisms under specific themes. It also builds on this list and includes certain themes that are quite pertinent in the context of Pakistan.

The scale of online discussion regarding the Aurat March is large and has grown steadily since AM was announced in 2018. On average, 25–45 Facebook posts per day were analysed for this research, including various mediums like memes, images, videos, and more. Data was gathered using hashtags including #AuratMarch, #AuratMarchPakistan, #AuratMarchLahore, #AuratMarchKarachi, and #AuratMarchIslamabad. Two hundred public posts were examined, and themes were manually extracted from analysing these posts through discourse analysis which Gee[4] understands as the study of language-in-use. It involves studying both the form and function of language in its social context, focusing on how language is used to perform actions, construct social identities, and build and maintain social relationships.

After observing some emerging trends and concepts from these social media discourses regarding the Aurat March, particular understandings of 'real' feminism and 'real' women empowerment were extracted, including what it means to be a feminist and what versions of a 'Pakistani' and 'Muslim' feminist are accepted in society. These discourses were categorised into themes, and scholarship was consulted to theorise these themes and how they correspond to different perceptions regarding feminism. Some of the most commonly emerging themes included religion, culture, class divide, anti/pro-LGBTQ+, decolonial, postfeminist, State and nationalism, the ideas of normal and abnormal, and more.

In *The Variety of Feminisms and Their Contributions to Gender Equality*, Judith Lorber classifies different kinds of feminist ideologies into three main classifications: gender reform feminisms, gender resistant feminisms, and gender revolution feminisms"[5]. Lorber argues that these various kinds of feminisms have contributed to our overall understanding of gender inequality and the intersections of race, class, and ethnicity that

[4] James Gee, An Introduction to Discourse Analysis (New York: Routledge, 2005), 94 – 115.

[5] Judith Lorber, The Variety of Feminisms and their Contributions to Gender Equality (Oldenburger Universitätsreden, 1997), 8.

enable these inequalities, as well as the hegemonic structures that create and maintain social order and the status quo[6]. However, feminist scholars like Linda Zerilli[7] and Donna Haraway have critiqued this idea of contesting and branching feminisms. They are of the opinion that the significant contestation within feminism has further marginalised already marginalised groups and divided feminists rather than bringing them together to collaborate[8].

Gender Reform Feminism

According to Lorber[9], the second-wave feminists were gender reform feminists who emphasised the basic individual rights of women as citizens, and their ideology was rooted in the liberal political philosophy that argued against class and anti-colonial ideas. Gender reform feminism seeks to end gender inequality and allow women to enter the same spheres of life as men, and participate equally, however, gender reform feminisms do not attempt to question the gendered status quo.

Liberal Feminism

The words 'liberal(s)' or 'libtards' were abundantly used in various Facebook posts regarding the AM. Many of these used the words 'liberal', 'libtard', 'feminazi' to insult feminists and express disdain towards the march. In Pakistani sensibility, the word 'liberal' means westernised; something against the basic cultural and religious ethos of Pakistani society[10].

Figure 1. shows a snippet of a Facebook post critiquing the march for going against the religious sentiments of the society and promoting liberalism. Another post mentioned: "These (referring to women marching in Aurat March) liberal feminists are corrupting the innocent women of Pakistan by polluting their minds with feminist nonsense that has resulted

[6] Lorber, The Variety of Feminisms and their Contributions to Gender Equality, 7 – 37.
[7] Linda Zerilli, "The Trojan Horse of Universalism: Language as a 'War Machine' in the Writings of Monique Wittig", Social Text, No. 25/26 (1990): 146 – 170.
[8] Verna Williams and Kristen Kalsem, "Social Justice Feminism," UCLA Women's Law Journal, No. 8-14 (March 2008): 131 – 194.
[9] Lorber, The Variety of Feminisms and their Contributions to Gender Equality, 7 – 37.
[10] "In Pakistan, 'Liberal' is a Dirty Word", Express Tribune, accessed April 21,2012, https://tribune.com.pk/story/413859/in-pakistan-liberal-is-a-dirty-word.

in the moral corruption of the West". One more commented on the "liberal agendas" behind Aurat March, which supposedly "ridicule the moral and social fabric of the society". Some posts debated that men and women are intrinsically different and therefore, need to be "placed in the society based on those inherent differences."

Figure 1.: Snippet of Facebook post critiquing Aurat March for implementing liberalism.

On the other hand, those who supported the Aurat March called for a reshuffling of the structures and systems in Pakistan to include women and make them more accessible for them. Both sides of the argument—the critique of Western feminism as well as the maintenance of gender order—relate to the concept of Lorber's gender reform feminism.

Lorber[11] grouped liberal feminism under gender reform feminism alongside socialist and development feminisms because she understood it as a kind of feminism that was rooted in "liberal political philosophy". She organises these categories based on their approach and focuses on the extent of their limitations.

The findings suggest that liberal feminism in Pakistan is understood in two ways: Firstly, liberal feminism is criticised for turning a blind eye toward the patriarchal construction of social structures. It is criticised for reinforcing the same system and finding a place for women within patriarchal mindsets and anatomies[12]. In an approach similar to that of radical feminist writers, various Facebook posts understood feminism as "elite" in Pakistan, as seen in Figures 2. and 3. Opponents of the march believe that liberal feminists in Pakistan focus too much on the issues of the "elite" and fail to acknowledge the hierarchy and hegemony[13] used to

[11] Lorber, The Variety of Feminisms and their Contributions to Gender Equality, 9.
[12] Diane Bell and Renate Klein, Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1996), 9 – 470.
[13] Bell and Klein, Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed, 9 – 470.

subordinate women from other social classes and groups, a critique also shared by Western critics of liberal feminism[14].

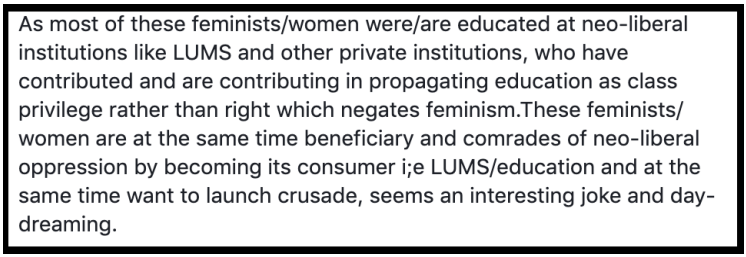

Figure 2. Snippet from a Facebook post criticising Aurat March and feminists for being elitist.

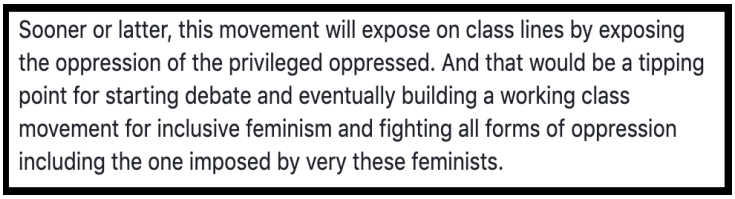

Figure 3. Snippet from a Facebook post criticising Aurat March for not being intersectional.

Secondly, in Pakistan, much like the rest of the world, liberal feminism is understood to advocate for equal rights for men and women because it is believed that gender differences are not rationalised by biology. According to Susan Wendell, "liberal feminism's clearest political commitments, including equality of opportunity, are important to women's liberation and not necessarily incompatible with the goals of socialist and radical feminism"[15] (p.6), and as observed from the of AM[16], liberal feminists in Pakistan advocate for the same. Debunking the elitism critique, feminists believe AM is an intersectional movement that includes women from various intersecting social groups, as seen in Figure 4. They advocate for women's participation in all fields of life and argue that women cannot be discriminated against based on their gender. They argue that women in

[14] Catherine MacKinnon, Towards a Feminist Theory of the State (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3 – 60.
[15] Susan Wendell, "A (Qualified) Defense of Liberal Feminism," Hypatia, No. 2 (June 1987): 65-93.
[16] "Aurat March launches Manifesto of Justice", Dawn.com, accessed March 20, 2022, https://www.dawn.com/news/1675882.

Pakistan deserve representation in any governmental, educational, bureaucratic, economic, or social field and must be provided with it[17].

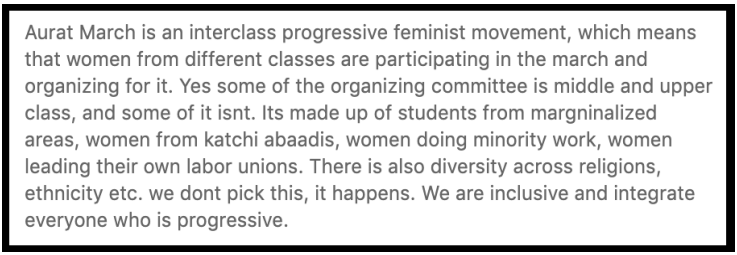

Figure 4. Snippet of Facebook post by one of the organisers of the Aurat March.

In the case of Pakistan, women are still fighting for their basic rights, and even with a narrow focus, liberal feminism is still able to advocate for the inclusion of women in otherwise male-only spaces. They are constantly challenging gender norms and stereotypes and struggling to sustain themselves in male-dominated spaces[18]. Therefore, the theme of liberal feminism is quite pertinent in Pakistan's case because it can contribute greatly to the gender progress of the country by providing women with platforms in different fields of life.

Socialist Feminism

Economic justice and the class divide are important themes that emerged from analysing the Facebook posts about AM. Many supporters of the AM cited the class divide and economic inequality[19] as major factors in the subordination of women in Pakistan[20]. The majority of women are forced

[17] "Aurat March to highlight 'Sisterhood and Solidarity'", Dawn.com, accessed March 7, 2019, https://www.dawn.com/news/1468109.
[18] "Pakistani Women Hold 'Aurat March' for Equality, Gender Justice", Al Jazeera, accessed March 8 Day, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/3/8/pakistani-women-hold-aurat-march-for-equality-gender-justice.
[19] Dawn.com, "Aurat March to Highlight 'Sisterhood and Solidarity'".
[20] Monazza Aslam and Geeta Kingdon, "Can Education be a Path to Gender Equality in the Labour Market? An Update on Pakistan", Comparative Education, No. 2 (May 2012): 211 – 229.

to remain in abusive households and with partners because they are unable to sustain themselves otherwise[21].

On the other hand, just as in the theme of liberal feminism, there were FB posts that perceived feminism to be "elitist" and "focused on the issues of women of a particular class," as demonstrated in Figure 5. These narratives critique AM for being a movement of "elite, English-speaking"[22] women who pay little attention to the issue of the class divide. The theme of class and economic capital is pertinent to Pakistan's case, especially as the country is 'third world'. Given these circumstances, it is interesting to note the role of capitalism in the state of women in Pakistan and the contribution of socialist feminism to achieving gender equality in the country.

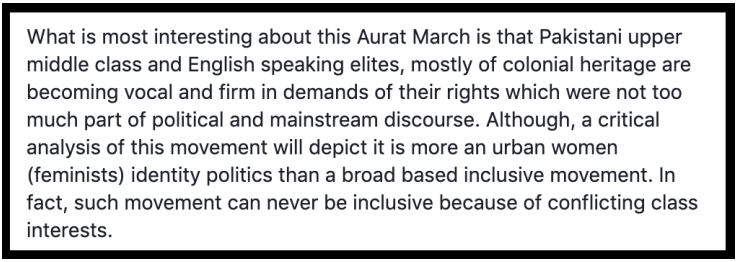

Figure 5. Snippet from a Facebook post critiquing Aurat March for being exclusionary.

Judith Lorber has organised socialist feminism under the category of gender reform feminism because she understood this theme to focus primarily on class divide and economic dependency. However, she has also criticised it for fixating too much on the State and not enough on challenging the basic structures of power that create cycles of inequality[23].

In Pakistan, the class divide intersects with education, health facilities, reproductive rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of information[24]. This is why socialist feminists emphasise the class divide as well and critique other forms of feminism, such as liberal feminism, that do not share

[21] Anita Weiss, "Benazir Bhutto and the Future of Women in Pakistan," Asian Survey, No. (5 May 1990): 433 – 445.
[22] Shemeem Abbas, "The Power of English in Pakistan," World Englishes, No. 2 (February 2007): 147 – 156.
[23] Lorber, The Variety of Feminisms and their Contributions to Gender Equality, 11.
[24] Farida Shaheed, "Contested Identities: Gendered Politics, Gendered Religion in Pakistan," Third World Quarterly, No. 6 (2010): 851 – 867.

a similar approach[25]. Socialist feminists argue that true equality cannot be achieved unless there is economic equality across genders. They assert that bourgeois, upper-class women cannot understand the issues of proletariat women and, therefore, a genuine alliance cannot be formed[26].

On the other hand, many organisers and supporters of the march hailed it as intersectional as well as criticising labour division, as seen in Figures 6 and 7. Upon looking at the individual profile pages of the commentators, I found out that a great section of the organisers, participants, and supporters of the Aurat March include socialist activists who identify as "Marxists" and advocate for a socialist revolution in Pakistan. Their activism and feminism focus on the disruption of the capitalist system in Pakistan to end gender inequality because they believe that the economic dependency of women is the main reason for gender-based discrimination in the country, and the only way to challenge that is by challenging the status quo and the capitalist machinery[27].

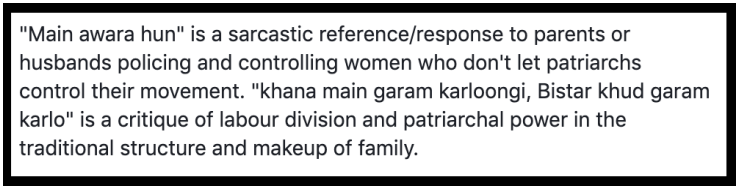

Figure 6. Snippet from Facebook post supporting Aurat March for critiquing class divide[28]

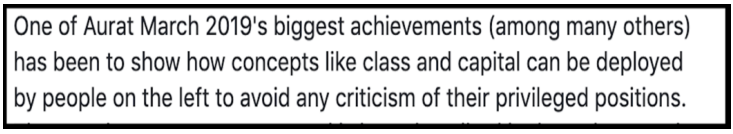

Figure 7. Snippet from a Facebook post applauding the Aurat March for challenging class politics.

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[25] Jinee Lokaneeta, "Alexandra Kollontai and Marxist Feminism," Economic and Political Weekly, No. 17 (April-May 2001): 1405 – 1412.

[26] Joan Roelofs, "Alexandra Kollontai: Socialist Feminism in Theory and Practice", International Critical Thought, No. 1 (February 2018): 1 – 10.

[27] Dawn, "Aurat March to highlight 'Sisterhood and Solidarity'".

[28] *'Main awara hun'* is an Urdu phrase which means 'I loiter'. The word '*awara*' is used as an insult to women who leave their houses without much purpose. The second phrase, '*khana main garam karloongi, Bistar khud garam karlo*' means 'I will heat the food, you can warm your own bed', and is a response to the backlash of another slogan of the Aurat March that read '*khana kudh garam karlo*', meaning, 'heat your own food'.