Tweeting Feminism:

African Feminisms, Digital Counterpublics and The Politics of Gendered Violence

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Abstract

Tweeting feminism is a digital ethnographic and archival study of the ways in which Kenyan feminists appropriate Twitter as a site for community building. Firstly, I explore the mutually enabling modes of gendered violence that have been deeply engrained in Kenya's public sphere for the duration of its existence as a nation-state – what I call a continuum of patriarchal violence. These modes of harm ultimately short-circuit women's engagement in mainstream politics and therefore the use of public political space to contend with harm exacted on women. In the wake of this violence, I then contend that a "digital feminist counterpublic sphere"[1] emerges – a term which I use to describe the alternative publics that radical Kenyan feminists have developed to survive their exclusion from formal public sphere engagement. I argue that in this online space, radical Kenyan feminists use disrespectability, care, solidarity practices and archival practices – what I call digital ululations – to generate and strengthen feminist community.

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[1] Nancy Fraser develops the term "counterpublics" in "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," Fraser deploys the term to account for the alternative public spheres that have developed by groups that have been marginalized from the public sphere, in western societies.

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Chapter 1: The Politics of Kenya's Public Sphere

How will you practice freedom today?[2]

*~@keguro_*

I love the word survival, it always sounds to me like a promise. It makes me wonder sometimes though, how do I define the shape of my impact upon this earth?[3]

~Audre Lorde

     Tweeting feminism is a digital ethnographic and archival study of the ways in which Kenyan feminists appropriate Twitter as a site for community building. These networks of resistance emerge in the wake of multiple, mutually enabling modes of gendered violence that have been deeply engrained in Kenya's public sphere for the duration of its existence as a nation-state. Throughout this thesis, the term "digital feminist counterpublic sphere"[4] is used to describe these digital social networks, and to account for the alternative public spheres that radical Kenyan feminists have developed to survive their exclusion from formal public sphere engagement. I study the violent conditions that enable these counterpublics to form and I then explore the implications of these networks in Kenya and beyond. In particular, I am concerned with studying the work of constructing these counterpublics. To this end, I treat Twitter's functions – tweets, quoting tweets, retweets, mentions, etc. – as political technologies, the result

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[2] @keguro_. Twitter Post. July 2, 2018, https://twitter.com/keguro_/status/1013709160536592384.

[3] Excerpt from "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger" by Audre Lorde as cited in Gumbs, Pauline. 2014. "Sounds Like a Promise: From the Shape of My Impact Webinar." *Brilliance Remastered*. http://www.alexispauline.com/brillianceremastered/2014/09/18/sounds-like-a-promise-from-the-shape-of-my-impact-webinar/.

[4] Nancy Fraser develops the term "counterpublics" in "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," Fraser deploys the term to account for the alternative public spheres that have developed by groups that have been marginalized from the public sphere, in western societies.

being what I call "digital ululation." I approach the Twitter users deploying these political tools –
some of whom are my respondents – as my interlocutors and co-theorizers. Together we mine
Twitter's archives and our collective memories, to reimagine this digital landscape as a place of
serious political engagement – a place of critical African feminist work.

The Politics of Contempt

In the Kenyan High Court's judgment of the case *Centre for Rights Education and
Awareness & 2 others v Speaker of the National Assembly & 6 others*,[5] Judge John Mutivo found
that Kenya's National Assembly and Senate had failed to fulfill their constitutional obligations to
implement Article 81b – popularly known as Kenya's 2/3s law – which mandates that "not more
than two thirds of the members of the National Assembly and the Senate shall be of the same
gender" ("Centre for Rights Education and Awareness & 2 others v Speaker the National
Assembly & 6 others" 2016). Through this holding the court agreed with the petitioners original
argument which argued that women had "suffered political exclusion and [had been] denied
rights to participate effectively in the public affairs of the Republic of Kenya," ("Centre for
Rights Education and Awareness & 2 others v Speaker the National Assembly & 6 others"
2016). The court ultimately affirmed what Kenyan women had been stating for years: The state
and its administrators had been willfully obstructing women's participation in the Kenyan public
sphere through an arsenal of institutional negligence and violence.

On August 31st 2017, five months after that critical ruling, the National Assembly Clerk
Michael Sialai swore in Kenya's 12th parliament which included a mere 76 women of a total 349
legislators (Shiundu 2017). Despite the ruling which had been published earlier in *Centre for
Rights Education and Awareness & 2 others v Speaker of the National Assembly & 6 others*,

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[5] This ruling was given on March 29, 2017.

parliament failed to protect women's representational rights. And in spite of its constitutional requirements under Article 81b, Kenya's parliament remained intact. As such, what was being communicated to Kenyan citizens was "a politics of contempt,"(Patel 2013) a term coined by Kenyan poet Shailja Patel. For Patel, these are policies and government actions that render Kenyan citizens, "Disposable. Invisible. Shameable. Useable. Silenceable" (Patel 2013). Patel mobilizes "the politics of contempt"[6] to highlight both the fact of state impunity and the political class' interchangeable use of force and indifference to dispossess ordinary Kenyans. The politics of contempt are illustrated at many junctures in Kenya's political history. For example, despite coming before the International Criminal Court to face criminal charges for the murders of over a thousand Kenyans in the 2007-2008 post-election violence, Uhuru Kenyatta and his co-accused William Ruto were elected as President and Deputy President, respectively, in 2013. Similarly, in 2017 through methods of law breaking and silence, Parliament administered a state-sanctioned assault on Kenyan women's political participation without protest from either the High Court or Executive Branch of the government or the opposition party, the National Super Alliance (NASA). Therefore, in the same way that the state was able to avoid accountability for murdering members of Kenya's minority ethnic groups, it is able to renege on its responsibility to ensure that Kenyan women are represented in government agencies, in line with constitutional requirements.

Following the vote tallying, NASA contested the presidential election results at the Supreme Court. The party alleged that the presidential incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta and the Independent Electoral Board Commission (IEBC) had committed electoral fraud, which resulted in the re-election of Uhuru Kenyatta, the presidential incumbent. Closing arguments were read

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[6] The "politics of contempt" is a term Shailja Patel puts forth in a New Inquiry article titled "Politics of Contempt."

on August 29th 2017, and tension was palpable as Kenyans awaited the court's judgment. Meanwhile, mainstream media outlets speculated on the outcome of the court's decision and political memes circulated on Kenyan WhatsApp groups and Twitter timelines. The presidential election consumed public discourse whilst other contested issues, including parliament's unconstitutionality under the two-thirds rule, were effectively sidelined.

On September 1st 2017, the Supreme Court nullified the presidential election. The court speculated that members of the IEBC might have tampered with the electronic voting system themselves (Sieff 2017). This was an unprecedented demonstration of Kenya's democratic potential. International news outlets such as the New York Times reported the Court's decision as a "potent display of judicial independence on a continent where courts often come under intense pressure from political leaders" (Freytas-Tamura 2017). Similarly, in Kenya, one of the NASA coalition's co-principals, Stephen Musyoka, exclaimed: "The dignity of the Supreme Court has been established, I am happy to be a Kenyan today" (Nation 2017b).

At the same time that the Supreme Court was willfully ignoring the government's non-compliance with the two-thirds gender rule, its decision was being lauded as an example of institutional integrity that needed to be emulated not only by judiciaries in African countries, but judiciaries the world over. For example, that integrity was being asserted by Kenya,[7] at the same time that suspicion was circulating around the question of electoral integrity in the US following the election of Donald Trump, created an environment of exceptionalism that allowed those living in and beyond Kenya to ignore the Court's failure to address the unconstitutionality of parliament on account of the two-thirds rule. In fact, in an NPR interview, the 2016 Democratic

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[7] Given that Kenya is an African country, the fact that the judiciary annulled the election therefore acting with integrity, was received as exceptional. The subtext of this spectacle, is the notion that African countries are incapable of facilitating democratic electoral processes, therefore any displays of democracy become unprecedented.

Party Presidential Candidate, Hillary Clinton noted the Kenyan judiciary's annulment of the election as an example of election accountability that the US was lacking (Gross 2017). The world was *really* looking toward the global south on matters regarding democracy (Holston and Appadurai 1996, 188).

This moment captures the invisibilization of Kenyan women in the public sphere. It offers a material representation of the zero-sum politics that position Kenyan women's interests in opposition to "more serious" national political issues, such as "tribalism," corruption and in this case, election rigging. Here, Kenyan women are effectively relegated to the category of "non-issues,"[8] on both local and global scales – an acute display of the quotidian neglect the government subjects them to in its failure to address gendered issues from the high rates of gendered violence to the inaccessibility of maternal healthcare. Spectacular events like this, in addition to the protracted structural violence Kenyan women are engulfed in, force women to cultivate alternative public spaces in which to generate resistance.

Digital voids

Marilyn, a former adviser on gender for the Ministry of Devolution and Planning, currently works as a consultant on gender and governance in Nairobi. When we spoke via Skype, she was seated on the floor of her living room with a glass of red wine in hand. July had been a cold, gloomy month, and that day was the first in quite some time that Nairobians had encountered some sunlight. She had spent the day soaking in the warmth and attempting to write a chapter of her forthcoming book.

I was interested in the politics of viral digital feminist movements in contemporary Kenyan public memory, and Marilyn was one of the instigators of #weare52pc – a hashtag

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[8] Uhuru Kenyatta previously used the terms "non-issue" to describe queer agitating for decriminalization. I use it here to note the similar logics of neglect and silence used to ignore Kenyan women.

asserting that women make up 52% of the Kenyan population – or *Jikoni* (the Kiswahili word for kitchen) as it is known to its members. #weare52pc is the Kenyan feminist movement that has led efforts to compel the state into ensuring that each of its agencies and branches adhere to the two-thirds gender principle.

Later, as I was retracing the movement's trajectory through articles, blogs, tweets and group messages, I came across Marilyn's early incisive tweets. In March 2017 she tweeted: "The state speaks with its silence. Listen to whether the Presidency will deign to address court orders on #GenderRule at Sunday briefing."[9] And just after the election in August 2017, in response to the European Union's decision to praise the slight increase of women in parliament following the election, she wrote: ".@EUinKenya under our constitution Gender Principle isn't incremental Art 27(8) provides maximum of not more than two-thirds of either gender."[10] Her tweets received very little engagement, garnering two or three retweets and comments that were often derisive.

When we spoke about what it was like to tweet about the unconstitutionality of parliament during those tumultuous days, she described it as "speaking into a void." Here, the "void" is constituted by everyday social media noise, and the urgency of the general election, which worked to drown out feminist concerns. In that sense, the "void" she was speaking into was characterized by unresponsiveness and static – a digital replication of the public sphere's muting of women's voices.

Marilyn's account spoke directly to the potency of digital noisemaking for feminist ends:

I had been ranting and raving online about the two-thirds gender rule. And I was

essentially …... and in my view I was speaking into this void and I was speaking

[9] @marilynkamuru. Twitter Post. March 31, 2017, https://twitter.com/marilynkamuru/status/848047965331697664.
[10] @marilynkamuru. Twitter Post. August 10, 2017, https://twitter.com/marilynkamuru/status/895572118062149633.

because I knew that I was not going to be heard, I was very clear on that, I knew I

wasn't gonna change anything by what I was saying. But I wanted to say it and I

wanted it to be on the record because I know how the law works and I know what the

value of that is, which means that you can't then later on recreate an entire narrative.

So, I was trying to make sure that they[11] couldn't recreate a narrative by being

annoying and persistent on this one issue[12]

Here, "ranting and raving online," as Marilyn names the act of offering uncompromising

anti-patriarchal critique, acts as subversive feminist archival practice, where the archive is a

digital landscape in which African feminist movement is documented and recorded. Marilyn told

me that she knew her tweets would not garner widespread attention. In fact, she acknowledged

that she did not expect to be heard: "I knew I was not going to be heard, I was very clear on

that."[13] Yet, Marilyn's tweets materialized and documented African feminist presence and rage,

simultaneously. Her actions enacted what, Ugandan feminist scholar, Sylvia Tamale calls being

"poetically drunk" – a state in which African feminists are "absolutely giddy, elated, exhilarated

and drunk on our cause" (Tamale 2006, 38). At a time when neither the government nor the

general public seemed to be concerned with parliament's unconstitutionality, Marilyn used

Twitter to persistently remind Kenyans that the government was violating the rights of Kenyan

women. She tweeted with the foresight that her words would be critical for documenting the

government's neglect of Kenyan women's constitutional rights. By "ranting and raving" Marilyn

generated a kind of feminist noisemaking that was necessarily disruptive and archival in form.

That Marilyn took to Twitter to voice her anger because of the government and the general

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[11] Here, Marilyn is referring to the state, as well as the political elite more broadly who often work to silence opposing political narratives.
[12] Marilyn, Personal Communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.
[13] Marilyn, Personal Communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.

public's inattentiveness to parliament's unconstitutionality, is an example of how issues affecting Kenyan women are often ignored. As such Marilyn's actions figure as a model of what *Tweeting Feminism* aims to explore – the gendered public violence and respectability politics that make feminist engagement in the public sphere precarious. *Tweeting Feminism* then proceeds to explore the digital feminist communities that are formed in the wake of that violence – as modes of survival and resistance. I think of these communities as a *digital feminist counterpublics.*

Histories of Kenyan women's resistance

In discussing Kenyan feminist political participation, it is critical to take note of Kenya's 2010 constitution, which reduced executive powers, and formally guaranteed various socioeconomic rights to women, and other minorities (Kramon 2011). The 2010 constitution was the product of an extensive constitutional review process that included participation from multiple civil society organizations, religious groups, and government agencies that worked under the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC). Women were critical to the creation of the constitution. In fact, Yash Ghai a prominent constitutional lawyer who chaired the CKRC, stated that women were the "most active civil society group in the constitutional review process" (Oluoch 2013). As Aili Tripp a US political scientist argues, women's extensive participation in the constitutional review process was made possible by a history of organizing that dated back to the 1990's, which aimed to increase women's political participation.

These efforts began in 1992 with the arrangement of the Women's National Convention organized by FEMNET (The African Women's Development and Communication Network) and lobbying efforts which were led by "women activists and politicians such as Martha Karua, Maria Nzomo, Rose Waruhiu, Phoebe Asiyo, and Wangari Maathai." This coalition aimed to encourage the Inter Parties Parliamentary Group (IPPG) to create a bill that would mandate

constitutional reform (Tripp 2016, 88). This resulted in parliament passing the Constitution of

Kenya Review Act of 1997, which would eventually lead to the creation of the Constitution of

Kenya Review Commission (Tripp 2016, 88). In the years leading up to the referendum that

would approve the draft constitution, there would be multiple disagreements and conflicts that

would derail women's participation in politics. Notably, in 1997 parliament dismissed a motion

made by women activists and parliamentarians to introduce legislation that would amend the

constitution to increase the representation of women in parliament (Tripp 2016, 88).

Despite this and other losses, the 2010 constitution would include provisions that were

intended to protect the political, social and economic rights of Kenyan women:

Art 27(3) Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to

equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres;

Art 27(4) The State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on

any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or

social origin, color, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress,

language or birth;

Art 81(b) Not more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be

of the same gender;

Art 100(a) Parliament shall enact legislation to promote the representation in

Parliament of women.[14]

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[14] Tripp, Aili. Mari. "Women's Movements and Constitution Making after Civil Unrest and Conflict in Africa: The Cases of Kenya and Somalia." Politics & Gender 12 (1): 92.

The overwhelming approval of the constitution by the Kenyan public would signify the success of almost two decades of women activists' efforts to organize and negotiate a legal framework that would protect the rights of women, countrywide. However, successive governments have failed to enforce these hard-won rights.

Since the constitutional promulgation in 2010, Kenyan women have been the victims of institutional and interpersonal gendered violence. For example, in 2013 Nairobi Governor Evans Kidero was filmed slapping Nairobi Women's Representative Rachel Shebesh. Despite video footage of the incident, Kidero maintained that "[he could] not remember slapping anyone" (Michira 2013) and he was able to complete his term as governor. On a larger scale, survivors of 2007-2008 post-election sexual violence continue to suffer from physical and mental trauma over ten years after the end of the crisis, whilst the government continues to abstain from its commitment to establish a ten-billion-shilling fund to aid these and other victims of the post-election violence (Odhiambo 2017). Together, these events and others generate what I want to call a continuum of patriarchal violence that displaces and harms women in intimate and institutional ways. This continuum of patriarchal violence describes the constant state of upheaval that Kenyan women are living in and resisting. It asserts that the types of violence the state mobilizes through negligence, the plundering of public funds, noncompliance with laws and policies that protect women, and active attempts to disenfranchise women, are products of the same patriarchal logics that allow mental, physical, emotional and sexual violence to fester in interpersonal settings. A continuum of violence imagines these different registers of violence as mutually enabling, intertwined and *always already* being mobilized simultaneously to threaten and obstruct Kenyan women's abilities to both be and participate in public and private spheres.

Digital feminist counterpublic spheres

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I have developed the term "digital feminist counterpublics" upon reading Nancy Fraser's concept of "subaltern counterpublics," and Marc Lamont Hill's "digital counterpublics." Nancy Fraser, an American political theorist, develops the concept of "subaltern counterpublics," as a descriptive term for the historical modes in which "members of subordinated and social groups – women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians" have constituted alternative publics, in response to German sociologist, Jürgen Habermas' notion of "the public sphere" (Fraser 1990, 67). The Habermasian *public sphere* functions as a singular, exclusive discursive space that reinforces the gendered dichotomy of public and private spheres. The public sphere is imagined through a masculinist lens, therefore precluding women's participation in the public sphere, as well as that of gender-queer individuals (Fraser 1990, 77). Furthermore, the rules of engagement that undergird the public sphere mandate civil discourse or the frictionless theory of "speech acts." Speech action theory delineates the sole goal and means of public engagement as mutual understanding which is achieved through dialogue (Plot 2009). This fails to account for goal-oriented political or non-speech oriented communicative actions such as protest, undressing, riots, strikes, cussing and parades – actions imbued with political potency that are often employed by marginalized communities (Plot 2009, 832).

During my conversation with Marilyn she noted that in Kenya's public sphere "politics is entirely about personality."[15] She also said that Kenyan politics have often been wrought with negotiations between political dynasties and constituted by phallocratic power arrangements (Musila 2009). Habermas develops the concept of "the public sphere" in the context of post-World War II Germany, a temporal and geopolitical location that is distant from the 21st century, digital Kenyan landscape I am describing in this thesis. However, given the exclusionary nature

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[15]Marilyn, personal communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.

of the public sphere that Habermas theorizes – a sphere produced by masculinist, respectability norms – his theory offers a useful parallel for conceptualizing the phallocentric politic that Kenyan feminists are working against. These parallels also allow me to look towards counter theories to the public sphere, in order to develop a framework with which to imagine the resistance that emerges in response to phallocentric politics.

Fraser writes, that within the subaltern counterpublics, "members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser 1990, 67). These dissident discursive sites foment in response to the hierarchies and respectability politics that moderate the public sphere. There, discourse on social inequities is muted in favor of "protocols of style and decorum" (Fraser 1990, 63) thus displacing and silencing marginalized communities. As such, for Fraser, subaltern counterpublics have facilitated the production of new languages and vernaculars to articulate neglected grievances and identities in public forums (Fraser 1990, 67). Here, in these counterpublics, minoritized groups curate "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment" and create "bases and training grounds for agitational activities" (Fraser 1990, 68).

US education anthropologist Marc Lamont Hill's concept of "digital counterpublics" can be read as a development of Fraser's concept of "subaltern counterpublics." Writing four years after the 2014 Ferguson riots, which were triggered by the murder of Michael Brown (Hill 2018, 286), Hill analyzes both Black Twitter's reactions to anti-black American state violence and daily Black Twitter discourse more broadly. Black Twitter is a diffuse digital group of Black Twitter users who often mobilize to critique anti-Black US state violence and comment on popular culture. Hill defines "digital counterpublics" as "any virtual, online, or otherwise digitally networked community in which members actively resist hegemonic power, contest

majoritarian narratives, engage in critical dialogues, or negotiate oppositional identities" (Hill 2018, 287). For Hill, Black Twitter, a "digital counterpublic," figures as a site of both critical pedagogical practice and resistance work. Here, respectability is rejected, erasure is corrected and "transgressive forms of organizing" are developed (Hill 2018, 297). Hill's theorizations of the "digital counterpublics" are useful for this thesis given how they emphasize networked collectivity in the 21st century as a means of negotiating and teaching robust politics, and imagining freedom that rejects respectability. At the same time, he argues that these networked collectives exist as platforms from which to contest state violence, as well as develop political technologies such as hashtags (e.g. #sayhername, #blacklivesmatter) in order to resist erasure. In this way his analysis situates Twitter as an archival site, which is critical to thinking through the potency of digital feminist organizing.

Both Fraser and Lamont Hill imagine counterpublics as discursive locations in which both resistances and communities are fostered. As such the work of creating counterpublics is necessarily a self-reflexive exercise, as much as it is about defying power. Here, critique and resistance are turned inwards, as well as outwards. Fraser's concept of "subaltern counterpublics" is produced through archives that document the historical existence of alternative political forums across time, such as the U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublics, which proliferated through bookstores, lecture series, festivals and academic programs in the 1970's and 1980's (Fraser 1990, 67). This concept necessarily documents a genealogy of resistance that contests the supposition of a singular public sphere at any particular moment.

Even as I cite Fraser and Lamont Hill, I am cognizant of the fact that like Habermas, they both mobilize these concepts to describe contexts and communities that are far removed from the group of Kenyan feminists I am describing. Fraser uses "subaltern counterpublics" to broadly

describe the parallel discursive spheres that are generated by marginalized groups including women, queer people, workers and people of color in the global north. Similarly, Lamont Hill conceptualizes "digital counterpublics" in order to describe Black people resisting anti-Black violence in the US using Twitter. However, both Fraser and Lamont Hill generate these concepts in order to theorize resistances that emerge in response to a hegemonic public sphere. Given that the Kenyan feminist digital communities I think about arise due to similar gendered precarity, "digital feminist counterpublics" is a useful term for theorizing the alternative public spheres they create.

Furthermore, whilst North American Black Feminisms are critical to the analyses that African feminists have generated, many of the feminists I spoke to explicitly label themselves African feminists. Their decisions to situate themselves in an African feminist theoretical and activist genealogy are political choices in themselves, given how Black feminisms in North America often fail to consider the specific conditions that affect Black African women (Azodo 1997, 201). As such throughout this thesis I largely engage with African feminist scholarship. Nigerian feminist theorist, Obioma Nnaemeka offers a critical definition of an African feminist framework:

> To meaningfully explain the phenomenon called African feminism, it is not to
> Western feminism but rather to the African environment that one must refer. African
> feminism is not reactive; it is proactive. It has a life of its own that is rooted in the
> African environment. Its uniqueness emanates from the cultural and philosophical
> specificity of its provenance[16]

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[16] Nnaemeka, Obioma. 2004. "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Praticing and Pruning Africa's Way." Signs 29 (2): 376.

This definition affirms what one of my respondents Stacy, a student at the University of Nairobi and member of Jikoni, would later tell me when I asked her what African feminism meant to her. When we spoke on the phone in early July, she told me that African feminism is critical to her because it is rooted in "an understanding of various African experiences."[17] Through this ideological framework, Kenyan feminists share feminist readings with each other, from Audre Lorde's "Sister Outsider," to Wambui Mwangi's "Silence is a woman"; they theorize their quotidian lives, as well as more extraordinary happenings in public life and engage in affective processes that range from joy, camaraderie and humor to injury, anger and despair. They organize using both old and new strategies, from spectacle to disrespectability. And they stand in solidarity with other radical African feminist movements, as seen through their active support for #Totalshutdown and #womensmarchUG. As such, Kenyan feminists draw on a transnational body of African feminist work in ways that simultaneously crisscross borders and remain rooted in their specific context.

In this way, I think of the digital Kenyan feminist counterpublic as a space of sustained feminist discourse marshaled against the patriarchal violence that infiltrates daily Kenyan life. As Nnaemeka makes clear, "African feminism is not reactive" (Nnaemeka 2004, 376). Here, a digital feminist counterpublic, which in this case is constituted of Kenyan feminists, can be imagined as a Kenyan feminist community that gathers in order to educate and learn; theorize and organize; survive and resist, and create pedagogical and radical legacies in the wake of the specific quotidian and spectacular misogynistic violence Kenyan women are faced with.

Digital resistances

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17 Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

This digital feminist counterpublic sphere emerges from larger digital communities. One such group, colloquially referred to as KOT or Kenyans on Twitter, consists of Kenyan Twitter users who sometimes tweet as part of a national digital movement which appropriates Twitter to contest, noisemake, theorize, and lament the multiple states of crisis that mold daily Kenyan life. KOT also surfaces in moments of collective terror, sadness and anger, as well as occasions of joy and celebration. In these instances, KOT produces tweets and memes en masse, with such speed, consistency and tenacity that its social impact surpasses cyberspace and spills into policymaking arenas and media houses. For example in 2013, KOT generated and proliferated the hashtag #someonetellCNN in response to the US and international cable network CNN's decision to stereotype Kenya as a "hotbed of terror," in their coverage of President Barack Obama's Presidential visit in Kenya (Ma 2015). KOT's backlash was so severe that a CNN executive was forced to fly to Kenya to apologize on behalf of the network (Mutiga 2015). And in 2014, using the hashtag #kasaraniconcentrationcamp KOT created international consciousness around the government's "war on terror" which culminated in the uprooting of over a thousand Somali people from around the country. These individuals were then quarantined in Kasarani Sports Stadium[18] under precarious conditions, as the state "investigated" their links to recent terrorist attacks (Migiro 2014). However, given that KOT encompasses a broad group of Kenyan Twitter users, who often have differing political commitments that are sometimes misogynistic and anti-queer, it often fails to advocate for women and queer people, hence, the particular importance of the digital feminist counterpublic sphere.

It is also critical to note that the digital communities I address in this thesis are part of a genealogy of African feminist resistances that have been forged across the continent. Many of

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[18] Kasarani Sports Stadium is in Nairobi Kenya, it is currently known as the Moi International Sports Centre.

the feminists I talked to have always been ready to offer solidarity with these movements, even when they are positioned beyond their immediate scope of interest and context. In this way, digital feminist counterpublics are both a product of existing movements and "something completely new,"[19] as Marilyn told me. Similarly, Shalom, a university student in Nairobi as well as a member of Jikoni, told me that movements developed in other locales across the African continent have been critical to the progression of her feminism. She said #menaretrash, a hashtag developed by South African feminists in 2017 to highlight and critique patriarchal violence, "definitely enriched" her understanding of African feminisms, and gave her critical insights into the "pitfalls" faced by African feminists, despite not originating from her own country. In fact, despite the contextual differences, Shalom believes that #menaretrash encouraged her to confront the fact that Kenyan feminist needed "to pull up [their] socks," in terms of direction action and disrespectability.[20]

In my conversation with Stacy, she corroborated Shalom's sentiments. She said that #menaretrash "radicalized her."[21] What Stacy communicates here is an appreciation for the disrespectability that South African feminists enacted in their creation and proliferation of the hashtag #menaretrash. I define disrespectability as a political technology used to subvert patriarchal norms of respectability and civility for feminist ends of resistance and accountability. Here, African feminists deploy insult, spectacle, cussing, generalization, defiance and ungrammatical social media posts in order to resist patriarchal order. Therefore, disrespectability becomes a type of feminist refusal of the status quo. In addressing men writ large through the hashtag #menaretrash, instead of solely abusive men, these feminists demonstrated refusal to

[19] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.
[20] Shalom, personal communication with the author, Skype, August 3, 2018.
[21] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

shelter men from the totalizing effects of their violence. Instead, as Stacy said, these feminists articulated a disinvestment in respectability, which was important for the ideological development of many Kenyan feminists, and therefore the disrespectability that has been so critical to the development of Kenyan feminist counterpublics. This is to say that #menaretrash, initially a South African anti-gender violence movement, served as an important milestone in the development of online Kenyan feminism. In particular, it served as a catalyst for critique and the dismissal of the respectability politics that have so often governed Kenyan feminist spaces in the past.

Is digital space radical or precarious?

In articulating itself through hashtags, the Kenyan feminist digital counterpublic transforms hashtags into both an archival method and a political tool. On a functional level, hashtags work to "[bookmark] content" (Herrera 2018, 315). By clicking on a hashtag or searching for a hashtag, a Twitter user gains access to an archive of thoughts, articles, photographs and videos captioned using the same hashtag. In similar ways, "retweets," like hashtags, proliferate the subversive digital archival practices that are embodied in an individual's tweets and at the same time offer quantifiable, visual representations of the magnitude of support for these campaigns.

Despite treating these digital practices as radical and liberatory and subsequently exploring the specific processes by which this digital feminist counterpublic sphere emerges, *Tweeting Feminism* does not imagine the Kenyan digital counterpublic sphere as distinct from the geopolitical context in which it emerges. As political sociologist, Paulo Gerbaudo argues, social media are a set of processes which "re-cast the organization of the spatial and temporal scenes of social life" (Gerbaudo 2012, 12) as opposed to virtual spaces that are developed

distinctly from the geopolitical contexts they evolve in. The daily misogyny that necessitates this digital counterpublic sphere is reshaped and interwoven into Twitter's networks. As such, where harassment offline comes in the form of public stripping, assault, or institutional neglect, online harassment takes the form of a defamatory tweet or the vulgarization of seemingly benign language. Here, phrases such as "Twitter feminist" become pejorative and "slay queen", a versatile, derogatory label given to women who refuse to conform to patriarchal tropes of feminine passivity, becomes a transnational signifier of men's hate for women who use disreputable methods of resistance and sustenance to survive under precarious conditions. Though tweeting from disparate locations, the Internet's fast pace and its interconnectedness shrink time and space such that feminists share digital space with misogynists. This is to say that the Kenyan digital feminist counterpublic, though radical, is also porous and therefore entangled with the same oppressive systems that necessitate it. Violence emerges in various forms in this digital space, in ways that alternate between online harassment and more banal responses focused on distracting and disrupting these important conversations. As Stacy, one of the feminists I interviewed said:

> There's a response from the younger generation of people online and the middle-
> aged generation of people online and I think the younger people are more willing
> to listen and more willing to support the work that "We are 52 PC" does – both
> men and women. Both men and women see the work that "We Are 52 PC" does
> as important. Then there is a misogyny specific to the older closer to middle aged
> population and their response has been hostile and violent and very you know….
> marinated in misogyny, in misogynoir and in you know homophobia, in violence
> etc etc etc.[22]

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[22] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

As Stacy expresses, even as this counterpublic garners support and provides a somewhat sheltered digital space in which to gather, it also attracts misogynistic attacks that are created to derail and distract feminists. Stacy specifically identifies these attacks as "misogynoir," a term developed by Black feminist scholars, Moya Bailey and Trudy (@thetrudz) to describe "the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience" (Bailey and Trudy 2018, 762). In using this term Stacy indicates that it is Black African women, in particular, who are aggressed within her digital networks. The term misognyoir also gestures to how the particular tenor of the misogynistic insults leveled against African feminists are bound up with racism. As such, globalized narratives of race and colonial racial legacies, which intersect with misogyny and sexism, surge through these digital landscapes.

Feminists, especially those who are young and/or queer, as she points out, are often the targets of misogynistic and anti-queer attacks. Although this counterpublic sphere acts as a space of refuge from the relatively more hostile and exclusionary Kenyan public sphere, it also serves as a place where feminists experience discursive violence, and in some cases material violence. As sociologist Andrea P. Herrera argues in her study of the construction of lesbian identity in online communities, there is overlap between online and offline spheres, such that the Kenyan digital feminist counterpublic figures as a site of slippage between resistance and repression (Herrera 2018, 316). Here, gendered, classed and age-mediated power relations are extended and refigured onto digital landscapes, in ways that lead to digital harassment and sometimes translate into offline consequences. At the same time, feminists themselves engage in exclusionary practices within this digital counterpublic sphere. Cisheteronormativity and classism are propagated just as they are in radical feminist movements offline, such that those most injured by patriarchal violence are excluded from these critical feminist conversations. As such I am also

attentive to the ways counter-resistance is practiced from both within and outside the digital Kenyan feminist counterpublic sphere.

More broadly, these practices also emerge in a digital sphere that the government has facilitated through large scale investments in internet connectivity, even as it continues to renege on its commitment to provide public services including affordable and accessible health care (Ngumi 2018), an effective education system (Kahura 2018), efficient transport infrastructure (Warah 2018), and policies that reduce wealth and income disparities (Oxfam 2018). These state failures unfold in the same political moment that Kenya is emerging as a hub of technological advancement in east and central Africa. In a country of 45 million people, Kenya has a mobile phone penetration rate of 87%, as well as Internet speeds that rival those in the US. This has also led to a surge in Kenyans' social media engagement on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook with over 700,000 users and 4.3 million users respectively (BAKE 2015, 2). These high levels of Internet connectivity are made possible by the state's 2009 investment in an undersea fiber-optic cable, part of a larger $2.4 billion expansion that sought to "help connect Africa with Europe, Asia and parts of the Middle East at higher speeds and lower costs" (Mallonee 2018).

Despite this innovation, access to this connectivity is mediated by proximity to urban areas. As such peri-urban and rural areas do not have access to the same level of connectivity as urban areas such as Nairobi (Mbaka 2018), thus reinforcing the uneven development that marks Kenya's rural-urban dynamics. Here, widespread neglect in public sectors with biopolitical implications, such as public healthcare and education, co-exists with extensive developments in the communication sector, which is mainly accessible to urban middle- and upper-class communities. This signifies what Tavia Nyong'o calls "the relative indifference of the necropolitical to life" (Nyong'o 2012, 55). Using the concept of necropolitics, developed by

Achille Mbembe, which describes conditions under which "the state intervenes less to preserve life than to manifest its power over death" (Nyong'o 2012, 54), Nyong'o's analysis forces us to contend with the ways in which African states are not concerned with actively conserving and improving African lives, hence the Kenyan state's indifference toward women's political participation, relative to the communication sector, for example. Instead, the state is more interested in expanding technologies that enable its ability to engage in surveillance, control, and determine when death occurs, amongst other uses. As such, even as I explore the ways in which feminists cultivate community in the wake of another type of state and social terror, patriarchal violence, I am attentive to the fact that the ability to survive and subsequently live as a woman or non-binary person in Kenya is often an extrastatal achievement.

Methodology

This thesis is the product of broader research interests in transnational African feminist movements. In the wake of the murder of Karabo Mokoena, a South African woman murdered by her former boyfriend, Sandile Matsoe, South African feminists and subsequently feminists across the continent made clear their anger through the Twitter hashtag #menaretrash, which I mentioned earlier in this introduction. As I previously argued, women across the continent deployed that hashtag in order to narrate their ordeals under misogynistic violence; in order to commiserate with each other under shared conditions of patriarchal violence. I captured the moment through a blog post "The Importance of Spectacle: Why men are trash is important," which explored the methods of insult and accountability–making that were generated through the hashtag using Pumla Dineo Gqola's frameworks for community accountability in her critical book, *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (Kanyogo 2017). Writing and reflecting on #menaretrash gave me the impetus to imagine Twitter as a site of resistance and community

building and to reconceptualize previous and subsequent moments of feminist twitter

engagement as part of a genealogy of digital resistance and community building, particularly

within my own context as a Kenyan feminist. That article and necessarily this research are

products of the feminist rage and disillusionment that #menaretrash signified.

The narratives I reference throughout this thesis were obtained through semi-structured

interviews with eight Kenyan feminist respondents carried out via calls, Skype and WhatsApp,

as well as other face-to-face conversations between May and August 2018. The interview

questions I used were open-ended and explored the relationships and affective communities

formed through digital feminism. These interviews were recorded with the consent of my

interviewees, who I refer to by their first names with their permission, given that they all

participated in their respective movements publicly. From these narratives, I was able to develop

an analysis of the affective implications of digital feminism, and gain intricate insight into the

processes and dialogues that shape digital Kenyan feminist movements and quotidian digital

feminist engagement alike. These interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one and a half hours.

The social media material I reference throughout this thesis was obtained through a

digital archive of Twitter and Facebook conversations, hashtags and images that are the essence

of the digital feminist counterpublics I theorize in this research. The primary information I use is

also the product of my own observations as a Kenyan feminist who has engaged in these

networks and platforms, in addition to informal conversations and interactions with other

Kenyan feminists. I also analyze local and international news coverage of some of the incidents

that triggered these movements, as well as articles, statistics, public reports and blogs.

Chapter Progression

This thesis is organized thematically, such that Chapter Two explores the continuum of patriarchal violence in both private and public spheres, in response to which a digital feminist counterpublic has emerged. It also explores how the depoliticization of the women's movement, through non-governmental organizations, has created an activist space that is hostile to the types of radical African feminism the feminists I reference espouse. Chapter Three investigates the methods and processes through which these digital feminist counterpublics are forged. This chapter explores the quotidian, ordinary practices, as well as the spectacular on- and offline events that aid in the development of these digital communities. This chapter also studies the challenges that Kenyan feminists encounter as they form these communities, as well as the subjectivities that congeal under conditions of digital violence. I conclude by analyzing the value of the counterpublic to broader African feminist organizing efforts and suggest further lines of inquiry within digital feminist research.

Chapter 2: The politics of gender violence

Life as a woman in Kenya is often marked by upheaval across public and private spheres. According to the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, 39% of women aged 15-49 years had experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetimes (UNWomen 2016, 78). The Kenya Violence Against Children Survey of 2010 indicated that 30% of girls experienced sexual violence during their childhood (Ministry of Gender 2010, 8). Statistics recording the rates of gender-based violence experienced by gender non-binary, intersex and transgender individuals were unavailable.

Although these rates of gender-based violence are not unique to Kenya, given that there are similar trends in other parts of the region,[23] I use these statistics to provide some sort of quantifier of the intimate violence operating in Kenyan women's lives. These statistics provide somewhat of an empirical representation of what Sophie, one of my respondents, was referring to when she said, "When I think of abuse, it's almost synonymous with a woman."[24] Sophie makes clear the intimate and totalizing ways in which abuse is intertwined with Kenyan womanhood, such that it even comes to define it.

And yet at the same time it is impossible for a statistic to do the work of capturing the magnitude of the patriarchal terror reigned on Kenyan women's lives – particularly that generated by the state. It is impossible for these statistics to trace the non-linear, invisible connections between public and private violence as they emerge simultaneously to displace women. And yet those invisible constellations are essential to theorizing and articulating the

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[23] 50% of Ugandan women experience physical and or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime, whilst 34% of Rwandan women experience physical and or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

[24] Sophie, personal communication with the author, Call, August 15, 2018.

kinds of private/public violence that force Kenyan feminists to seek out the digital feminist

counterpublic sphere I write about in this thesis.

<center>***</center>

In her critical essay, "Silence is a Woman," Kenyan political theorist, Wambui Mwangi

writes about the intimate consequences of patriarchy. As Mwangi writes, in Gikuyu, a linguistic

marker of the Gikuyu25 ethno-nationalist violence that has ravaged post-colonial Kenya,

Mūtumia – woman - literally translates into "one whose lips are sealed" (Mwangi 2013). As

Mwangi argues, this is to say that to be a woman, to be *called* woman in Kenya, is to be silenced

twice: Once, by the patriarchal forces that displace our bodies in both public and private spheres

through physical, sexual and verbal violence. And then it is to be muted– to be *named* silence.

The concept of patriarchal ethno-nationalist violence points to the democracy-centered

threats posed by the dominance of "patriarchal ethnic Gikuyu elites," in post-colonial Kenya, as

Mwangi puts it. And whilst this thesis does not focus on Kenyan ethno-nationalisms it is

impossible to disentangle the patriarchal violence that marks Kenya's public space from Gikuyu

political hegemony. As one twitter user @MIEREKERO wrote "Kenyan Identity and Kikuyu

imagination of Nationalism...are intertwined ideologies."26 This illustrates the extent of Gikuyu

cultural domination – the ways it permeates beyond Gikuyu community and comes to usurp the

Kenyan public sphere. This process is not a benign one. Instead, this cultural hegemony is

"enforced" and spearheaded by Gikuyu political elites including three of Kenya's four

presidents, who have been Gikuyu, as Mwangi argues. In this way, because Gikuyu identity is

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25 The Gikuyu or Kikuyu are Kenya's largest and wealthiest ethnic group having benefitted from kleptocracies established in the Jomo Kenyatta and Mwai Kibaki eras.
26 @MIEREKERO. Twitter Post. June 29, 2018, https://twitter.com/MIEREKERO/status/1012635031238467584.

often imagined and enforced as Kenyan identity, *mūtumia* comes to denote a *Kenyan* woman, not just a Gikuyu one. As such, silence becomes enforced as a norm and expectation for Kenyan womanhood. In this way, *Mūtumia* figures as a linguistic thread through which to trace how Gikuyu ethno-nationalism and patriarchal violence in post-colonial Kenya unfold simultaneously.

In this chapter I want to attempt to unravel this thread of violence – to understand the events and conditions that generate silence, *mūtumia* – in order to reveal a continuum of patriarchal violence that permeates both private and public spheres. This exercise in unfolding this thread to view a continuum of patriarchal violence brings us closer to capturing, to some extent, the violence that so many Kenyan women are subjected to in a diverse series of locations. It does not capture patriarchal violence in its totality and this is not my objective. Instead, I engage in this exercise to show how the public and private spheres are co-constitutive in generating patriarchal violence. This is to say that the types of violence the Kenyan state mobilizes in its refusal to adhere to the two-thirds gender rule or in its refusal to compensate sexual violence victims of the 2007-2008 post-election violence, for example, are products of the same patriarchal logics that allow mental, physical, emotional and sexual violence to fester in interpersonal settings.

Such an exercise makes clear the importance of a radical approach to contending with gendered violence. Here, obliterating gendered violence in domestic spaces must correspondingly necessitate the end of gendered violence and neglect in the public sphere. This approach allocates accountability for women's precarity to multiple state and private actors, and makes clear the impossibility of a single theory of precarity[27] having the capacity to account for

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[27] Judith Butler defines 'precarity' as "that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at

all the events and systems that have made Kenyan women's precariousness possible. It lays bare the importance of women's material wellbeing, as well as their psychic, social and political security.

Whilst the concept of patriarchy is used to theorize political, social and economic hegemony and some women's investments in maintaining these systems of domination, I want to use this "continuum of patriarchal violence," to detail the active and more insidious ways in which Kenyan women are dispossessed on grand and intimate scales, using a series of narratives and references to critical moments of misogynistic violence in recent Kenyan public memory. Using four genres of violence: femicide, political violence, government neglect and respectability, I argue that public and private patriarchal violence are mutually enabling, intertwined and *always already* being mobilized simultaneously to threaten and obstruct Kenyan women's abilities to participate in the public sphere. It is this spectrum of violence that necessitates the generation of a digital feminist counterpublic sphere.

"When I think of abuse, it's almost synonymous with a woman"

During our time talking, Sophie, a program consultant with HAART (Awareness Against Human Trafficking), an anti-trafficking NGO, told me:

> The main thing I've been seeing is how normal it is to have abuse happen to women
>
> consistently and systematically. Ahhh to the point that people are not shocked when it
>
> happens. And then the stigma and the shame and the blaming, the lack of just

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heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection. Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection." Butler, Judith. 2009. "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics." *AIBR. Revista De Antropología Iberoamericana* 4(3): 1-13.

protection….I don't know.[28]

Sophie describes victim blaming, as a phenomenon that facilitates what she later names "the normalization of abuse."[29] Here, the frequent abuse of women and subsequent community silence, become routinized in Kenyan life. Another cause of this "normalization of abuse" is what South African literary scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola calls the "female fear factory," (Gqola 2015, 78) in her incisive book *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. Gqola's book offers a contextual analysis of rape by interrogating the social and political histories of sexual violence in South Africa from the era of slavery in the Cape Colony to the current post-Apartheid dispensation. Although South Africa and Kenya differ in multiple respects, Gqola's analysis of rape and gendered violence as a type of symbolic language through which citizenship and belonging are communicated, is useful for thinking about rape and gendered violence in Kenya.

Gqola develops the theory of the "female fear factory" to describe the processes by which the initiation and maintenance of gendered violence is dependent on the systemic manufacturing of fear amongst women. Gqola writes that the female fear factory "uses the threat of rape and other bodily wounding but sometimes mythologizes this violence as benefit" (Gqola 2015, 78). The "threat of rape," when frequently performed, becomes an effective strategy to remind women that their bodies are always under threat in both private and public spheres. As Gqola argues, the material cost of this psychic and corporeal violence is to curtail women's movement – physically and politically. In Kenya, a country where 39% of women aged 15-49 experience some sort of gendered violence in their lifetimes; a country where femicide, political violence and government neglect have become normalized, women's participation in the public sphere as political candidates and voters becomes tenuous (Berry

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[28] Sophie, personal communication with the author, Call, August 15, 2018.
[29] Sophie, personal communication with the author, Call, August 15, 2018.

2017). Women are pushed toward muteness. For Gqola, another effect of the "threat of rape" is the creation of a culture in which women are disposable. In order for this culture to foment, women are constantly reminded of their "rapability" (Gqola 2015, 79) as Gqola puts it, and aggressors are assured of their security through various forms of media and the ubiquity of gendered violence. One example of how this disposability is manufactured is the recent murder of Sharon Otieno. Her case is one in a series of homicides of young women under circumstances connected to their wealthy male partners that has captured Kenyan public discourse.

On the morning of September 4th 2018, the bodies of Sharon Otieno, a 26-year-old woman, and her seven-month-old fetus were found in a thicket in Kodera forest, near Oyugis, a small town in Homa Bay County, western Kenya (Ochieng' 2018). Otieno, a student at Rongo University,[30] had allegedly been engaged in an intimate relationship, with the governor of Migori County, Okoth Obado, at the time of her murder. In Kenya, their relationship was referred to as a 'sponsorship relationship,' which refers to a transactional relationship in which one party offers some sort of financial support in return for companionship and/or sex (Aljazeera 2018). The police investigation established that their relationship had resulted in a pregnancy that "the governor was unhappy about," therefore positioning the governor as a prime suspect in the ongoing investigations (BBC 2018a). Although Obado was eventually arrested on charges of aiding and abetting murder, he was released on a cash bail of five million Kenyan shillings, arguing that "the people of Migori would suffer irreparable loss for being denied the opportunity to be led by the governor of their choice," had he been denied bail (Ogemba 2018). As I write this chapter, less than three months after Otieno's murder, Obado continues to occupy the Migori County governorship.

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[30] Rongo University is a public university in Rongo, western Kenya.

This case has critical implications for this thesis given that it depicts how women's lives are rendered disposable in both private and public settings. Obado, a representative of the state, allegedly ordered Otieno's murder following their affair – a relationship that even his constituents were aware of, according to Cliff Ombeta, Obado's lawyer. At the same time, by invoking his position as governor, his "rising political star" as one daily newspaper put it (Ogemba 2018), as well as his financial responsibilities to his family as "the sole breadwinner," he was granted bail (Ogemba 2018). Here, his position as both a patriarch and a political elite came together to both facilitate the murder of Otieno and her child, and facilitate his evasion of accountability. What began as intimate partner violence was transformed into public political spectacle and Otieno's body – mangled and abandoned in the bushes of Kodera forest – became a logistical obstacle, bypassed through payouts and the leveraging of political reputation.

The public violence of that moment was further exacerbated by the fact that the murder itself was not at the center of public discourse surrounding the case. Instead, it was the details of her relationship with Obado that occupied the public imaginary. At the time of Otieno's murder, the Kenyan public was engaged in moralizing debates about the complexities of sponsorship relationships, much like the one Obado and Otieno were engaged in. As such, although there was widespread outrage regarding the brutality of the murder, many treated it as an inevitable outcome, even as a deserved one. Many imagined her murder as the price to be paid for "grooving with sugar daddies" instead of "concentrating on her studies,"[31] as one Twitter user put it. One counseling psychologist even rationalized the event as being a result of the neglect of the "boy child," – an alleged failure of society to focus on the needs of men and boys, as a result of the proliferation of "women's empowerment" interventions (Star 2018).

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[31] @CharleeOddie1. Twitter Post. September 4, 2018, https://twitter.com/CharleeOddie1/status/1037196888829833219.

Muthoni, one of my respondents, told me that Kenyans are sympathetic to victims of abuse based on their "respectability." Muthoni said, "when it comes to say a young woman or a woman who we don't necessarily want to protect…a prostitute….that's who we deem disposable in society."[32] Muthoni's analysis gives us insight into how Otieno's subjectivity as a young attractive woman rendered her vulnerable at the hands of Obado and the general public, not only at an individual level, but at a systemic one as well. Interpretations of Otieno's actions and character as both disrespectable and disrespectful, extended the horror of her murder into the public sphere, such that her dead body was enscribed with patriarchal anxieties concerning women's agency and sexual autonomy. This moment of private/public violence represented the disposability of women – the fact that a lack of respectability could make a woman's demise justifiable.

When I asked Sophie what she thought about Kenyans' responses to gendered violence she said:

> There's a normalization of abuse…of the fact that survivors should get over it…of
> the fact that this is ok, that this can continue happening, of an entertainment culture
> that promotes this, of the fact that if you're trying to fight it then you're being an
> idealist.[33]

Here, Sophie describes a culture in which the afterlife of abuse proliferates through multiple sectors of Kenyan public life – from the entertainment industry to civil society. For Gqola this can be understood as evidence of the spectacularity of gendered violence – the way in which it "retains a grip on the imagination after the encounter has passed," as Gqola writes, quoting South African scholar Njabulo Ndebele (Gqola 2015, 78). Though the female fear factory

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[32] Muthoni, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 25, 2018.
[33] Sophie, personal communication with the author, Call, August 15, 2018.

is necessarily manifested through the "quick, effective transfer of meaning" (Gqola 2015, 78), its power can be found in the ways its aftereffects linger and haunt Kenyan society. Here, the threat of violence in private space alters the subjectivities of victims, passive onlookers and perpetrators of assault, which then proliferates through Kenya's public sphere therefore creating a mélange of gendered violence generated by individuals, the state and private organizations.

The threat of rape

On another level, the female fear factory is maintained through the visibility and inconspicuousness of gendered violence in the public sphere. The threat of rape is not only ominous due to its seeming ubiquity, it is also haunting because of its spectacularity. As we spoke about the #MyDressMyChoice movement which was generated in response to a series of events in which several women were stripped of their clothes at *Matatu* (minibus) ranks, Brenda, one of my respondents, told me of the violence protestors encountered as they protested public stripping in Nairobi's central business district. As the activists marched through downtown Nairobi, they came across a group of idle men who were part of *Maendeleo wa Wanaume*.[34] According to Brenda the group of men had been given fifty shillings (about fifty US cents) in order to steal their banners and disrupt their protest. Brenda said:

> They were basically telling us they would rape us and they would strip us if we are
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> dressed inappropriately and for me that was threatening. Like the fact that people
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> were only paid 50 bob,[35] and they stole our banners and they tried to disrupt our
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> protest.[36]

For Brenda, the fact that someone had "paid idlers to come and heckle [them]" because women

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[34] "Maendeleo wa Wanaume" is Kiswahili for "development of men." This non-governmental organization was formed in 2007 to take care of aging men and protect the rights of boys.
[35] 50 bob is the equivalent of $0.50.
[36] Brenda, personal communication with the author, Call, July 8, 2018.

were asserting their political right to protest for the protection of their bodies, was "surreal" or "spectacular" (Gqola 2015, 37).

In analyzing similar incidents where women were stripped in response to their choice of dress at a taxi rank in Johannesburg, South Africa, South African literary scholar Desiree Lewis interprets these acts as types of ritualized humiliation. For her South African men's precarious masculinity is affirmed (D. Lewis 2009, 131). More significantly, Lewis argues that as a result of what she calls "the enduring structural basis of patriarchal entitlement in much of South Africa," these degrading actions are used to control and regulate women and force them into performing decorum and obedience (D. Lewis 2009, 130-131).

In Brenda's narrative, Kenyan women are exercising their agency much like the South African women Lewis is referring to in her analysis. In the context of the #mydressmychoice, Women's decisions to exercise their political agency are then imagined as threats to the phallic disposition of Kenya's politics. Therefore they are treated as spectacle or what Kenyan literary scholar Grace Musila calls "gynocratic transgressions" (Musila 2009) Ultimately they are responded to in kind, through the (threat of) violence – a malevolent type of spectacle.

This same kind of patriarchal anxiety emerged in response to women's political participation in Kenya's 2017 general election. For example, Sarah Korere a political aspirant for the member of parliament seat in Laikipia County was violently assaulted in her office by her opponent (Houreld 2017) and Ann Kanyi who was running for the parliamentary seat in Tetu County, was brutally beaten by a group of men with metal bars and a gun (Berry 2017). Berry et al., argue that these were not just individual acts of violence, but instead a systemic, misogynistic strategy deployed to disrupt the increase in women's political participation since the promulgation of the 2010 constitution (Berry 2017).

Perhaps the most memorable and publicized incident of gendered political violence as the country approached the 2017 elections was Miguna Miguna's harassment of Esther Passaris on live national television. Miguna Miguna and Esther Passaris, both contestants in the 2017 Nairobi gubernatorial race, were guests on Jeff Koinange Live, a popular Kenyan talk show. During one of the intervals, Miguna laughingly said of Passaris "Esther is so beautiful, everybody wants to rape her" (Dela 2016). He continued, "You are chasing men all over, nobody wants you" (Dela 2016). In the video, which was allegedly filmed secretly, Jeff Koinange, the show's host can be heard laughing in the background, yelling "drain the swamp,"[37] ultimately failing to intervene. Although Kenyans' outrage eventually forced the broadcaster KTN to cancel Koinange's show, the incident galvanized misogynistic fervor as the general elections approached.

This event highlighted the patriarchal violence inherent in Kenya's public sphere in several ways. Following the show, the hashtag #MigunaRespectWomen proliferated through Kenyan Twitter networks. Whilst many decried the incident, others celebrated Miguna for telling the "truth," and for giving Passaris, who they described as a "socialite" and a "bimbo," what she "deserved." Here, Passaris a famed entrepreneur and political aspirant, was attacked on the basis that her appearance negated her ability to be an effective leader. Though not unique to Kenyan politics, this attack reflected broader assumptions that have long been held by many Kenyans, that feminine expressions of womanhood indicate an inability to govern. As one YouTube user put it, "what we want is a leader with good brains and not one with good looks" (Miguna 2016).

Furthermore, the incident reified the notion that patriarchy is both intertwined with

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[37] "Drain the swamp" is a phrase used as a call to clean up government corruption. The phrase was used frequently in US Republican rallies by Donald Trump to gesture towards intentions to rid Washington D.C. of corrupt, establishment politicians, particularly those in the Democratic party.

Kenyan political discourse and a political tool that is weaponized to bolster political popularity. In her critical work "Phallocracies and Gynocratic Transgressions: Gender, State Power and Kenyan Public Life," South-Africa based scholar Grace Musila argues that state power has long been treated as a male-centered arena, where "the phallus [has been] a symbol for power and leadership" (Musila 2009, 1). By tracing the characters, policies and politics of Kenya's first three presidents, Musila weaves a compelling narrative that situates gender as a critical lens through which to understand Kenyan politics.

Under these conditions of hegemonic masculinity, power, particularly during elections, is negotiated through "phallocratic grammars of state power" (Musila 2009, 2) When Miguna said "Esther is so beautiful everybody wants to rape her" (Dela 2016), he invoked, the material threat of rape (as evidenced in the statistics I provided earlier in this chapter), as a political tool with which to disparage and generate fear within Passaris and Kenyan women more broadly. Here, rape became a "phallocratic grammar," with which to win a debate on Kenya's most watched political show, and therefore one strategy that he mobilized to secure state power. Not only could Miguna verbally assault a woman on live television without fear of losing support, he could do so whilst galvanizing his supporters, given that some interpreted Miguna's rape threats as affirmations of his masculinity. Here, he was characterized as a "real man" and therefore capable of leading. This served as evidence of misogyny as a normalized feature of Kenyan politics and therefore the "phallocratic landscape of state power in the country" (Musila 2009, 2).

At the same time, Passaris' attempts to refute Miguna's slurs and instead identify his actions as "prejudices of patriarchy"[38] were interpreted as a performance of victimhood. Some

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[38] @EstherPassaris. Twitter Post. November 16, 2016, https://twitter.com/EstherPassaris/status/799134149298843648.

accused her of invoking the "gender card,"[39] and argued that there was "no gender issue here."[40] This affirmed Marilyn's claim that often feminists are seen as "annoying activists" in Kenyan public space.[41] Even though Miguna attacked Passaris using gendered language such as "bimbo" and "socialite," (Dela 2016) that Passaris addressed the gendered nature of Miguna's attack was seen as an attempt to divert from politics to "gender issues" and moreover as evidence of her inability to survive in a tough political arena. Furthermore, many were quick to dismiss any feminist engagement with the issue. This incident generated critical questions about Kenyan hostility toward feminist discourse, as well as any conversation that highlighted gender inequalities and prejudices.

As such, not only was Passaris subjected to a humiliating, misogynistic attack, she was chastised and mocked for using any rhetoric that analyzed the attack as evidence of a wider problem of national misogynistic violence. In this way, that moment also revealed that what many Kenyans wanted of Passaris and women, more broadly, was silence.

The Miguna incident generated two questions that are critical to the exploration of violence in this thesis: Why are gender issues not "real" politics in Kenyan public space? What are the consequences of ignoring gendered injustices? These questions provide us with a lens through which to explore how patriarchal violence also emerges in the government's neglect of Kenyan women.

Phallocentric neglect

As mentioned earlier, in the introduction to this chapter, one iteration of gendered public violence is the government's neglect of Kenyan women which can be defined as the

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[39] @KonchEZ. Twitter Post. November 16, 2016, https://twitter.com/KonchEZ/status/799141813542068224.
[40] @HamiltonConford. Twitter Post. November 23, 2016, https://twitter.com/HamiltonConford/status/801436166520246272.
[41] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.

government's inattentiveness to the social, political and economic challenges which afflict Kenyan women. As Grace Musila writes, this institutional approach emerges from a political context in which the phallus serves as the central symbol of political power. Using the enduring political rivalry between former president Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga as an example, Musila argues that the "public's fascination with constructing and contesting the two candidates' manhood's were suggestive of a certain phallic orientation of state power in the Kenyan social sphere" (Musila 2009, 40). The public's decision to focus on these political candidates' manhood, literally and figuratively serves as a reflection of the ways in which the state and the public sphere are organized around an agenda determined by men and focused on their interests.

In her article, "It's time to axe Kenya's big dick politics," Nanjala Nyabola extends Musila's argument by positing that efforts to imagine Kenya's political challenges as being solely dominated by questions of land and ethnicity, exhibit how Kenyan politics are a patriarchal contest. She argues that land and ethnicity are both patrilineal inheritances in most ethnic communities in Kenya. And given that land and ethnicity are regularly deployed as tools for leveraging political support and building political coalitions, women are effectively excluded from politics and subsequent public policy. As Nyabola puts it, Kenya's public policy is phallocentric (Nyabola 2016).

This phallocentrism results in material consequences in the everyday lives of women and their relationship to the state. During the interviews I carried out, I was keen to understand how my respondents perceived the state and its approach to contending with the challenges affecting women. Almost all of them noted that the state was not interested in "women's issues." Shalom told me,

I think the government really doesn't care, to be honest. And they don't feel like

they have to care, because as they always say, women's issues are like ....even in

the opposition it's like "let's fight corruption and we will get to your issues later".

So there's that contempt and lack of interest completely.[42]

Shalom argues that the state, and the political class distance themselves from women and "non-male" citizens by approaching these so-called "women's issues,"[43] without any sense of urgency. Here, the state makes clear that women's issues exist beyond its mandate and responsibilities, therefore abdicating its constitutional responsibility to ensure that "Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres" (Article 27(3) 2010). Ultimately, the Kenyan government's failure to "care" about women's interests, results in the exclusion of women from social, economic and political structures, what I think of as the violence of government neglect. As Nyabola argues, this violence is evident in the high rates of domestic assault and gendered political repression across all Kenya's ethnic groups, with little intervention from the state (Nyabola 2016).

In recent public memory, the 2017 nurses strike serves as an important moment to observe the violence of government neglect in action. I reference this particular strike because many of my respondents identified it as a critical direct-action event, which many of them supported as part of #weare52pc, as well as in their own personal capacities. Additionally, it offers an example of the extent to which women's wellbeing largely figures as a minor priority for the government, writ large.

On June 5th 2017, over 26,000 public sector nurses registered with the Kenya National Union of Nurses began a strike that would last five months (Capital FM). The nurses went on

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42 Shalom, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 3, 2018.
43 Shalom, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 3, 2018.

strike to protest the government's failure to sign a Collective Bargaining Agreement that had been decided on the year prior. The agreement guaranteed nurses a much-needed pay increase and promised an improvement in their working conditions, given understaffing. The strike inevitably paralyzed critical health services at public facilities throughout the country, particularly maternity and immunization services. The government's attitude toward nursing as a profession and the state-sanctioned consequences of the strike are of particular interest to this thesis and are critical to illustrating how the gendered violence of neglect unfolds.

Firstly, the government made policy decisions that were aimed at systematically denying nurses, 76% of whom are women, economic and social resources. Instead of negotiating with nurses, the Council of Governors (COG), one of the negotiating parties, threatened all strike nurses with sacking. The COG made this decision after the Employment and Labor Relations Court declared the strike illegal despite there being constitutional provisions authorizing industrial actions. Additionally, in an evaluation of public employees released by the Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC), nurses were categorized as "unskilled workers" (Nyabola 2016). These two actions speak to how women are structurally undervalued and made disposable through government policies. In a Twitter thread in September 2017 under the hashtag #nursesstrike @njokingumi argued that this policy approach was emblematic of the government's general attitude toward Kenyan women. She wrote, "We process nurses as a bunch of women (despite many male nurses) and automatically refuse to take their views on public health seriously."[44] Later, she wrote: "Nursing is feminised, so we treat them like we do Kenyan women. Stop sumbuaing.[45] Wait. Not your turn. Country first, stop selfishness. Etc."[46] Here

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[44] @njokingumi. Twitter Post. September 11, 2017, https://twitter.com/njokingumi/status/907249052986863616.
[45] "Sumbuaing" is an anglicized derivative of the Kiswahili verb "kusumbua" which translates into "to disturb."
[46] @njokingumi. Twitter Post. September 11, 2017, https://twitter.com/njokingumi/status/907254390792376320.

@njokingumi, shows how the government responds to the feminized nature of nursing by refusing to take nurses complaints seriously. Like women writ large, nurses are not treated as political agents and negotiators, instead they are threatened with dismissal.

The root of this attitude can be observed in the SRC's decision to rank nurses as "unskilled workers." Here, the government depreciates care work and renders it an innate skill – one that does not require training or professional proficiency. This occurs in spite of the particular skills, competencies and affective work that are demanded of nurses, as well as the bureaucratic processes one must go through in order to become registered as a nurse. In "Competence versus Care? Gender and Care Work Revisited," Celia Davies argues that the trivialization of care work, particularly that done by nurses, is based on a public/private divide that makes care illegible in the public sphere. Here, "masculinist visions gender the concepts of bureaucracy and profession, dichotomizing competence and care, and masking both the reality and the potential of public care work" (Davies 1995, 17). And given that care is feminized through the government's belittling attitude toward nurses, the result is that women are not legible as political agents in the masculinist public sphere, as I argued in Chapter 1.

Furthermore, the strike had gendered effects, as pregnant women were particularly affected by the absence of nurses. Whereas there were 413 reported maternal deaths in the first half of 2016, there were 857 reported maternal deaths in the first half of 2017 (CitizenTV 2017). Additionally, the exceptionally understaffed public maternity wards and the higher number of deliveries at functioning hospitals, led to a decrease in the quality of healthcare pregnant women and mothers were getting. For example, the Kenyatta National Hospital, which typically deals with between 1,200 and 1,300 births per month, was forced to deliver between 2,400 and 3,000 infants monthly despite being severely understaffed, over the duration of the strike (Mutanu

2017). At the same time that this public health crisis was unfolding, governors maintained that

the costs of satisfying the CBA – an alleged Ksh. 10 billion ($100 million) were too high (Nation

2017a). They argued that they had "other bills to take care of, not nurses and doctors alone"

(Nation 2017a). In comparison, the National Assembly, a parliamentary body of 390 individuals

has an annual budget of Ksh.15 billion for the 2018-2019 financial year, and the Senate, a body

of 57 individuals has a budget of Ksh.15 billion for the same period. Despite the growing health

crisis and the nurses resolve not to return to work until their demands were met, the government

continued its policy of inaction and maintained that it had other priorities to satisfy until the

strike was called off on November 2nd 2017.

These events lay bare the government's lack of care and urgency concerning women's

wellbeing, and their economic and social rights more broadly. They offer insight into the

institutional violence that the government uses to dispossess women in everyday life, in this case

posing a material threat to their survival.

The violence of gender activism

The last genre of violence I would like to identify as a part of the continuum of

patriarchal violence I detail in this chapter, is respectability. In her article, "African Feminism:

How should we change?" Ugandan feminist legal scholar Sylvia Tamale critiques the

institutionalization of African feminism. She argues that prior to the rise of the gender

development industry, African feminists were largely under-resourced (Tamale 2006, 39). The

result has been the depoliticization of the African women's movement, and "dangerous

diplomacy" (Tamale 2006, 39). Together, "depoliticization" and "dangerous diplomacy" account

for the respectability that has often dominated Kenya's feminist movement. The term

respectability, a state of being socially acceptable, was coined by African-American writer,

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham to describe attempts by the African-American middle class to promote conformity amongst African-Americans in order to combat racist stereotypes (Griffin 2000, 34). Here, I use the term to account for the ways in which NGO's have favored bureaucratized methods of fighting patriarchy that have led to the depoliticization of the women's movement in Kenya, through the women's empowerment agenda that has been popularized by the development industry and the government. I also use the term to critique the ways in which these organizations have largely excluded transgender and queer women from their agendas, in order to remain within the bounds of the cisheteronormative status quo that governs Kenya's public sphere. The objective of this section is not to disparage the critical work that women's rights and gender rights activists have carried out, instead it is to make clear the violent neoliberal logics and exclusion that undergird this approach.

I argue that the public recognition of gender rights and women's rights activists as *the sole* representatives of Kenyan anti-patriarchy efforts, has shrunk the public sphere's capacity for radical feminist politics that rejects respectability. As such, those who are poor, queer, trans, sex workers and non-binary are excluded from anti-patriarchy movements in the public sphere and the root causes of gendered oppression are neither acknowledged nor effectively addressed, which ultimately perpetuates the patriarchal violence that orders Kenyan life.

During our conversation, Marilyn was careful to distinguish between feminists and what she called, "gender rights and women's rights activists."[47] For Marilyn "gender rights and women's rights activists"[48] have responses that are "limited to that event and it generally doesn't move beyond that."[49] Here, Marilyn signals toward the reactionary nature of women's rights and

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[47] Marilyn, Personal Communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.
[48] Marilyn, Personal Communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.
[49] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.

gender rights activists – both their refusal to engage with the systemic causes of gendered violence and their lack of consistency. While it is difficult to locate a singular definition of gender and women's rights activism in Kenya, "women's empowerment," remains a fixture in gender and women's rights related discourse. Additionally, many women's rights and gender rights related organizations self-describe as "women's empowerment" actors. As such, I want to explore how women's empowerment exists as a source of violence in Kenya's anti-patriarchy movement.

Madina Chege, a social justice activist and writer on Fatuma's Voice, an educational social justice forum located in Nairobi, identifies the efforts to gain justice for Sharon Otieno (mentioned above), as a critical point of analysis for evaluating the differences in social justice approaches between community organizations and mainstream NGO's (the equivalent of what Marilyn is naming "gender rights and women's rights activists") (Chege 2018). The nature of the relationship between Sharon Otieno and her alleged murderer, Okoth Obado, was transactional. Obado was to Otieno what many Kenyans would refer to as a "sponsor" or a sugar daddy. As such, the responses to her murder were fraught. As Chege explains, community activists approached mainstream organizations with a proposition to protest Otieno's brutal murder. However, they refused to join community activists in their efforts at protest (Chege 2018). Chege speculates that the reason for their inaction, in such a critical national moment of spectacular misogynistic violence, was that Otieno was engaged in a "sponsor relationship," which characterized her as disrespectable in the Kenyan public imaginary, as I explain above (Chege 2018). A moment that gender activists would typically seize for purposes of highlighting anti-

gender-based violence efforts, was initially[50] ignored because Otieno was not a "perfect victim" – she was not someone they could get behind.

Here Otieno is rendered disposable many times over – the most jarring rendering being her disposability within the bureaucratized anti-patriarchy movement. In the context of Kenya's bureaucratized anti-patriarchy movement, respectability acts as social capital that mediates access to being relevant to the anti-patriarchy movement or *mattering*. I use the word *mattering* or *matter* because, as we see in the aftermath of Otieno's murder, respectability ultimately signals who matters and who does not, where mattering can be defined as being deemed important or relevant. We can therefore think of "mattering" as a lens through which to grasp the violence of erasure, as well as the violence of being deprived symbolic and material ends of justice and safety. These are types of violence that the anti-patriarchy movement positions itself against. Yet, in choosing to exclude sex workers, such as Otieno, as well as transgender women, queer women, non-binary people and other dis-respectable people from their agenda – people who typically *do not matter* in Kenya's public sphere – these bureaucratic agencies recapitulate the very same violence they aim to work against.

That these organizations negotiate mattering on the basis of respectability and reactionary politics, as Marilyn argues above, gestures toward the gap between African feminist theory and praxis that Tamale argues exists within the relationship between African feminist scholarship and gender activism (Tamale 2006). Tamale argues that gender activists lack a political agenda and are therefore depoliticized (Tamale 2006, 39). However, many of these women's organizations advocate for empowerment or women's empowerment predominantly through microenterprise development, and financial literacy. Here, I want to think of empowerment as another type of

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[50] Some NGO's later joined the march that was organized by independent activists.

epistemic and material violence produced by these organizations. In her book *Markets of Dispossession: NGO's, Economic Development and The State in Cairo,* US anthropologist Julia Elyachar offers a critical analysis of the meaning of empowerment. She describes a trend that has proliferated through the development industry that situates interventions such as increasing girls access to education and microenterprise development capital as solutions to rural-urban wealth disparities and poverty writ large (Elyachar 2005). In the context of Kenya, government agencies and NGO's alike have doubled down on the notion that "investing in women" works to correct a myriad of market inefficiencies. For example in a 2016 article she wrote, Amina Mohammed, then-Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs argued that "women's empowerment will accelerate Kenya's economic prosperity" (Mohammed 2016). One organization, Pamoja Women Development Program, describes its mission as "seek[ing] to empower women financially to run viable, competitive, and well regarded enterprises that can compete locally and internationally" (Pamoja 2017).

Elyachar argues that empowerment is both an economic and psychological neoliberal technique used to proliferate the perception of individual self-sufficiency as a source of economic development (Kanyogo 2018). In reference to the psychological logics of empowerment, Elyachar references Nikolas Rose, who argues that the empowerment ideals that undergird neoliberalism necessitate an approach to development that responds to the "sufferer as if they were the author of their own misfortune" (Elyachar 2005, 159). Here, women's rights organizations not only fail to challenge the neoliberal logics that undergird developmentalism, but they actually further engrain neoliberalism within vulnerable communities through interventions that treat women as ends to economic development programs and policies such as poverty and fertility reduction that do not necessarily benefit them (Boyd 2016, 149).

The violence of the women's empowerment agenda is present in the ways that it appropriates women's movement vocabularies and grammars for the purposes of market expansion and further capitalist exploitation. Poor women are not only tasked with emancipating themselves from systemic exploitation and oppression, but are deployed as purveyors of the very same neoliberalism that dispossesses them. Furthermore, the bureaucratic and respectability focus of women's empowerment politics and its wide reach, given that it is propagated by a diverse group of stakeholders such as the United Nations, the Kenyan government itself, and a large number of prominent local Kenyan NGO's, has hegemonized Kenya's mainstream women's movement. This works to endorse patriarchy as well as capitalism under the pretense of "equity." As Ginger Ging-Dwan Boyd argues and as I want to propose in the Kenyan context, the ultimate result is that neoliberal empowerment schemes displace feminism as frameworks for women's liberation, thus shrinking or neutralizing the public sphere's capacity for radical politics (Boyd 2016). Here, capitalism is used to remedy patriarchy, further expanding the reach and durability of gendered oppression.

Conclusion

Ultimately, I have thought through this continuum of patriarchal violence in order to illustrate the conditions and events that render the public sphere inhospitable for radical Kenyan feminists. Within the critical illustrative moments that I present to underscore my arguments, particular women and communities are directly and intimately afflicted by gendered violence. However, these moments also serve to either reinforce women's precariousness in multiple spheres of Kenyan life, or they work to normalize gendered abuse thus proliferating what Pumla Dineo Gqola theorizes as "the female fear factory." As I have made clear throughout this chapter, violence in the public and private spheres is co-constitutive, such that femicide, political

violence, government neglect and respectability are employed, sometimes simultaneously, to dispossess Kenyan women.

The work of unfolding this continuum of patriarchal violence, of laying bare the various maneuvers used to dispossess Kenyan women at multiple scales, necessitates the drawing of connections between various fraught moments in Kenyan public memory and in individuals' intimate lives. Here, an inquiry into interpersonal violence necessitates an analysis of the government negligence that enables this violence to proliferate unmitigated, as we see in the murder of Sharon Obado; here, an exploration of the dispossession caused by empowerment discourses requires an investigation into the exclusionary logics of respectability politics. And even as I make these critical links, an analysis of the full scope of gendered violence, requires further connections and an analysis of how this violence proliferates at even larger scales and is propagated by multiple actors – institutional and otherwise.

The work of unraveling this thread of violence, allows us to observe that violence permeates through multiple sectors of public and private life in ways that disrupt and order women's lives, given patriarchal and capitalist imperatives. It also makes clear how structural violence constrains the kinds of conversations that can be had about patriarchy and limits the groups of people who are included in anti-patriarchal agendas. This makes clear how patriarchal violence is not only derived from the government as a single entity, but also state agents, lay people, and non-governmental organizations that have good intentions but reproduce capitalist exploitative practices. Here, not only is violence seemingly ubiquitous, but attempts to disrupt these practices are not well received, as we observe in the backlash to Esther Passaris' attempts to defend herself against Miguna Miguna's abuse. It is an analysis of these logics and practices, and the patently masculinist public discourse that determines Kenya's political agenda that forces

Kenyan feminists to seek alternative arenas, such as the digital feminist counterpublic sphere, for

the purposes of generating more radical feminist politics and communities. In Chapter 3, I

explore the communities that are formed for feminists to both survive and heal, in the wake of

this violence, as well as develop a more rigorous radical feminist politics. Ultimately, I analyze

the strategies and events that radical Kenyan feminists employ and appropriate in order to

produce a digital feminist counterpublic sphere.

Chapter 3: Weaving a Feminist Sphere of Radical Togetherness

In describing how Kenyan feminist digital communities foment on Twitter, Stacy, then a student at the University of Nairobi, told me she saw "African feminists manifesting a kind of community building [on Twitter]"[51] where "a lot of African feminists are able to support each other and interact with each other's work."[52] Brenda a digital media consultant and researcher, shared that African feminist Twitter is a space where some "have tried to bring together the theory and praxis of feminism as it might look like in the 21st century."[53] Whilst Stacy imagines Twitter as a space in which African feminists manifest community through affective bonds and affirmation, Brenda thinks through Twitter as platform through which African feminists integrate feminist theory and organizing. Read together, these statements indicate that the digital Kenyan feminist counterpublic sphere is a space where feminist work is done through the affective labor of "support" and "interaction," as well as the liberatory work of generating "theory" and "praxis." Here, feminists offer critical analyses of their own life conditions through a feminist lens, which enables them to connect their own struggles to those of other individuals, as well as broader structures of power, from patriarchy to capitalism and cisheteronormativity.

In order to capture the continuous, everyday practices that mold this feminist community, I use the word "weaving," as invoked by a Kenyan Feminist Collective called the Weavers, formed in 2012. In the transcription of a virtual conversation between members of the collective that was published in a 2015 edition of Feminist Africa, Mshai, one of the interlocutors explains:

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[51] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.
[52] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.
[53] Brenda, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 8, 2018.

The language of "weaving" is a foundational claim to our cultural traditions and legacies

of women working and speaking together, of collaboration and co-operation. We claim

not any one method or fabric, but the practice of weaving our labor and weaving the

imagination of women together, so as to make something new.[54]

Here, Mshai thinks of "weaving" as the collective labor of intertwining various histories,

subjectivities, political projects and practices for the purposes of generating a more just world. In

thinking about the community or sphere I am writing about, "weaving" figures as a practice of

"bring[ing] together" multiple narratives and analyses through the acts of tweeting, retweeting or

liking. "Weaving" transforms mundane digital technologies into political technologies of

"ululation." The Weavers theorize ululation as an act which "creates a central point for a sonic

navigation of a community of those within hearing, or those who present themselves in the

present" (Weavers 2015, 87). As The Weavers tell us, ululation – its wide sonic reach – is a

political action which does the work of gathering individuals together in order to shape what they

call "a workable past and livable future" (Weavers 2015, 87).

I want to think of the ways that Kenyan feminists use social media technologies of

tweeting/retweeting/liking to do the work of gathering feminists together to fight misogyny and

cultivate a more radical feminist politics. Using this framework, we can imagine feminists'

appropriation of digital technologies such as tweets and retweets for purposes of creating

feminist community as generative of a kind of ululation. Though the virtual reach of their

ululation is mediated by algorithmic technologies, these tools circulate feminist narratives and

theories amongst online Kenyan feminists and African feminists more broadly, in ways that

allow them to break silences, resist respectability politics, generate critical discourse, engage in

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[54] The Weavers. 2015. "In Conversation: Weaving Pan Africanism at the Scene of Gathering, The Weaving Kenya Women's Collective." Feminist Africa (20): 86

transnational feminist solidarities and cultivate care (Weavers 2015, 87). These acts of tweeting/retweeting/liking, what I call digital ululations, allow Kenyan feminists to lament patriarchal violence *together,* refuse and resist *together*, learn *together*, fail *together*, archive *together* and care *together*. In many ways these digital ululations weave a radical *togetherness* across spatial and temporal boundaries that I explore and imagine as generative of a Kenyan digital feminist counterpublic.

Earlier, I defined a digital feminist counterpublic sphere as a discursive space that facilitates and sustains discourse that challenges quotidian and spectacular patriarchal violence and generates radical feminist politics. This radical feminism is a feminism that is centered around the narratives of the most marginalized women such as trans, queer, and poor women, and works to generate rigorous political discourse and cultivate community through affective bonds. This definition emerges from the work of US scholars Nancy Fraser and Marc Lamont Hill. Fraser theorizes a "subaltern counterpublics" in order to contest the theoretical hegemony of the Habermasian public sphere. Here, "members of the subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser 1990, 67). Much like Fraser's "subaltern counterpublics," the digital feminist counterpublic I theorize in this chapter is a digital sphere in which theories and analyses are generated by members of marginalized groups to address their needs and political concerns. However, Fraser theorizes the "subaltern counterpublic sphere" in particular reference to the networks through which U.S feminist discourse circulates in the 20th century, where the term "sphere" describes bookstores, journals and publishing companies. As such, the networks that constitute Fraser's sphere are different from the digital networks I think about in this thesis (Fraser 1990, 67), and therefore I take up Marc Lamont Hill's concept of

"digital counterpublics" which is useful for locating the counterpublic sphere in a digital arena, specifically Twitter.

In theorizing "Black Twitter", Lamont Hill defines digital counterpublics as "any virtual, online or otherwise digitally networked community in which members actively resist hegemonic power, contest majoritarian narratives, engage in critical dialogues, or negotiate oppositional identities" (Hill 2018, 287). Both Fraser and Lamont Hill think through a counterpublic sphere as a space where the concerns of marginalized individuals are prioritized and the "protocols of style and decorum" (Fraser 1990, 63) that are central to the main stream public sphere are substituted with what I have called new languages and vernaculars that articulate neglected grievances and identities. As Wanini, a university student, told me, even as people dismiss social media as "not real life," Twitter Feminism has given them both "a place in the world" and tools for resistance.[55] In this way, the digital feminist counterpublic sphere is a space where feminism is a "felt experience," just as much as it is a space where radical politics and feminist narratives emerge. I borrow the term "felt experience" (Nash 2019, 3) from US Black feminist scholar Jennifer Nash who, in her book *Black Feminism Reimagined,* defines Black feminism as "an affective project—a felt experience—as much as it is an intellectual, theoretical, creative, political, and spiritual tradition" (Nash 2019, 3). Imagining Black feminism as a "felt experience" captures the affective practices of care and anger that structure the feminist community I write about in this chapter.

My analysis of the Kenyan digital feminist counterpublic sphere is guided by the experiences and narratives that my respondents provided me with, as well as the tweets that circulate amongst Kenyan feminists and other African feminists – the tweets that constitute the

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[55] Wanini, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 20, 2018.

digital infrastructure of this community. In contemplating the trajectory of this chapter, Native American feminist scholar Kim Tallbear's methodological reflections in "Standing with and Speaking as Faith: A Feminist-Indigenous Approach to Inquiry" were critical to mediating the sometimes divergent concerns of generating a research focus that shares community building objectives with my respondents, whilst also remaining in conversation with critical scholarship (Tallbear 2014, 1-2). As such, I take seriously my respondents' investments in digital feminist community, as well as their belief in its ability to provide useful, critical tools for feminist praxis, whilst engaging with critical African and Black feminist scholarship that articulates the nuances of feminist community.

With reference to online feminist movements including #menaretrash, #mydressmychoice and #weare52pc, I argue that Kenyan feminists use disrespectability, care, cross-border solidarities and archival practices to weave together radical feminist communities. Their practices of disrespectability generate a political agenda guided by the concerns of trans, queer and poor people. Similarly, these radical feminists use practices of care to create communities where redress and healing are accessible beyond the state's oversight. Kenyan feminists also appropriate digital tools to both archive their work and generate cross-border solidarities that ensure the longevity and reinforcement of their political project. Lastly, I argue that feminists use the digital counterpublic sphere to document and archive their work, where archival space for feminist work is scarce elsewhere. Ultimately, radical Kenyan feminists use these four practices to weave the communities – the digital feminist counterpublics – that enable the survival of their robust feminist politics, as well as that of their own subjectivities in the wake of patriarchal violence.

As I write this thesis various academic and mainstream critiques continue to circulate about the utility of "digital activism", some of which are important given how several activists have appropriated digital spaces to generate large followings and fame, particularly with the emergence of Black Lives Matter and the Trump regime. However, some of these critiques ignore the exclusionary practices of NGOs "on the ground" and in various digital spheres that reproduce respectability, cisheteronormativity and classism, and reify a neoliberal political approach that aims to recruit women into neoliberal and patriarchal orders, instead of working to destabilize the systems which dispossess them in the first place. The critiques that trivialize the digital sphere ignore the fact that these communities ultimately emerge out of a necessity to generate radical critiques of government apparatuses and oppressive social structures for the purposes of foregrounding the concerns of some of Kenya's most vulnerable and excluded, including trans and queer people, sex workers, the youth and poor women. Ultimately, radical feminists are using digital space to generate political communities in which they can set the terms and modes of discourse and center the concerns of vulnerable communities which are otherwise disremembered in public discourse, as I argued in Chapter 2.

In writing about how radical feminists weave community I want to contribute to a series of works that reimagine the criteria for "real Kenyan politics" beyond the spectacular phallocentric politics that South Africa-based literary scholar Grace Musila has identified as "Kenyan phallocracy" (Musila 2009)[56] and Kenyan author Nanjala Nyabola has called "big dick politics" (Nyabola 2016).[57] I seek to draw attention to the alternative radical feminist politics

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[56] Grace Musila uses the term phallocracy in her critical paper "Phallocracies and Gynocratic Transgressions: Gender, State power and Kenyan public life" in order to articulate how Kenyan politics has been dominated by patriarchal interests, male actors and militaristic masculinities. Musila, Grace. 2009. "Phallocracies and gyncratic transgressions: Gender, State Power and Kenyan Public Life." *Africa Insight* 39 (1).

[57] Nanjala Nyabola puts forth the term "big dick politics" in her article "It's time to axe Kenya's big dick politics" which featured on the website "African Arguments." She uses the term to describe how male-centered political concerns, particularly those centered around ethnicity, dominate Kenyan public discourse, therefore "crowding out any other concerns. Nyabola, Nanjala.

being generated within a hostile, conservative political and social environment and make clear that the everyday work of building feminist communities constitutes "real Kenyan politics." However, my intention is not to imagine feminist community as a utopia, after all my respondents' narratives do not reflect this. Instead, I write about these communities in order to make clear that everyday mundane engagements and actions often form the infrastructures of our liberation movements and to demonstrate that political potency is weaved into the everyday, the ongoing, in addition to the spectacular. In doing this I offer a model for how digital feminist acts of disrespectability, care, solidarity and documentation can figure as important practices of resistance and freedom.

"Men are Trash": The Politics of Disrespectability

Men Are Trash radicalized my politics, radicalized my urgency, my

prioritizing of black women's lives, my feminism – Men Are Trash

radicalized me because it made me very aware that these people will kill you

and then demand that you apologize to them for being sad that you're dead.[58]

~ Stacy

In speaking about what feminism has looked like in Kenya's public sphere, Marilyn, a lawyer and writer, told me that "If you looked at what was happening before, even in the 90s, even in the early 2000s, the gender and women's rights activists owned this space and they owned it in red. They controlled access, they were total gatekeepers."[59] Marilyn speaks about how the politics of empowerment and equality hegemonized the Kenyan women's movement and determined its agenda, as well as its participants and leaders. As I argued in Chapter 2, the

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2016. "It's time to axe Kenya's big dick politics." *African Arguments*. https://africanarguments.org/2016/03/01/its-time-to-axe-kenyas-big-dick-politics/.

[58] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.
[59] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.

Kenyan women's movement has largely been spearheaded by NGOs and government bureaucrats. Many of these actors adhere to respectability politics because the women's movement agenda has been limited to objectives of "women's empowerment" and "gender equality," and the methods used to achieve those goals have been largely bureaucratic and civil. Given the neoliberal politics of many of these activists, queer, trans, anti-capitalist concerns have never been central to Kenya's mainstream women's movement. Radical politics are relegated to the periphery of the movement and are often met with hostility and rejection by "gender and women's rights activists," state actors and the broader Kenyan public.

In the digital feminist counterpublics I explore, disrespectability is a critical practice: activists dis-identify with hegemonic sexual and gender politics, and openly call out repressive practices in the Twitter-sphere. I use the term "disrespectability" to refer to the ways in which feminists refuse to adhere to standards of decorum that are used to maintain the heteronormative, misogynistic, classist status quo (Davis 2018, 2). The term was coined by US Black feminist scholar Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, who describes the politics of respectability as a means of enforcing social conformity amongst African-Americans in order to combat racist stereotypes (Griffin 2000, 34). In her analysis of Black hashtag feminism in the United States, communications scholar Shardé Davis further elaborates on Higginbotham's definition, arguing that respectability polices the behavior of Black women according to hegemonic norms including heteronormativity, whiteness and maleness that render Black women always already non-conformist (Davis 2018, 15).

Similarly, according to scholars studying African contexts, respectability emerges as a means of enforcing racial class divisions between the colonized and the colonizers, as well as between lower classes and the aristocracy (Stoler 1989, 649). In many colonial African contexts,

including colonial Kenya, colonial European women would use European norms of womanhood to police African and Indian women's performances of womanhood within European colonies, as a strategy for racial and colonial survival. This policing was often undergirded by racialized and gendered subtexts that ultimately worked to exclude African women from normative definitions of womanhood (Stoler 1989, 643).

Multiple scholars have theorized respectability in contemporary African contexts as a means of regulating African women's desires, agency and sexualities. In the anthology *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa,* anthropologist Liv Haram explores how sex workers in Northern Tanzania negotiate autonomy and new identities as "modern" women upon choosing not to marry (Haram 2004, 212). Respectability or heshima in Kiswahili is accessed through motherhood and heterosexual partnership (Haram 2004, 212, 225, 222, 226) and a refusal to participate in those institutions renders many of these women precarious. In the same anthology, Malian sociologist Assitan Diallo explores female sexuality in Mali, particularly amongst the Magnonmaka and Bolokoli-kela communities. She finds that respectability is sutured to two social constructs – girls' virginities and elderliness (Diallo 2004). As such, respectability across the diaspora is reflected in how bodies are policed to adhere to "protocols of style and decorum," that are ultimately constructed to further marginalize vulnerable people (Fraser 1990, 63). This type of policing pushes Black women and Kenyan feminists to form their own counterpublics where they can develop alternative discourses centered around the narratives of marginalized communities (Davis 2018, 17-18).

Within Kenyan feminist spaces, respectability often works to exclude poor, queer and/or trans women, therefore replicating the colonial era "protocols of style and decorum" that are calibrated to uphold normative gender performances (Stoler 1989, 643), whilst excluding those

who do not and cannot adhere to these gendered and sexual norms. One Twitter feminist @bintiM tweeted, "To bring in marginalized and vulnerable people into these conversations and these rooms, we need to remove respectability from these rooms ~@stacykirui."[60] @bintiM tells us that spaces that are ordered by decorum and normativity generate an exclusive feminism that negates the participation of the most marginalized people. Like @bintiM, many Kenyan feminists are interested in creating political communities that mobilize around the struggles of the most marginalized Kenyans. Wanini, a JKUAT student,[61] told me that radical politics are invested in "the freedom of autonomy, the freedom to be queer, the freedom to have reproductive rights."[62] For Wanini, radical politics revolve around the freedom to exist and live in ways that go beyond the normative order – beyond norms of heteronormativity and gender performance. For them, disrespectability is a means of not only bringing marginalized and vulnerable people into feminist spaces, but also ensuring that their experiences and narratives guide the interventions that Kenyan feminists make. Those who are not categorized as human in the public sphere are often at the center of the digital feminist counterpublic sphere. Here transness, queerness, and sex work are often pressing feminist issues.

As such, for Kenyan feminists, disrespectability is embodied as well as practiced. Part of the subversiveness of the Kenyan feminist counterpublic sphere is embodied in the disrespectable methods used to articulate disaffection with the patriarchal status quo, as well as within the disrespectable causes Kenyan feminists choose to mobilize around. I have been careful to use the word "often" in order to avoid idealizing African feminists' disrespectability

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[60] @bintiM. Twitter Post. July 3, 2018, https://twitter.com/bintiM/status/1014061575630712832.
[61] JKUAT is an acronym for Jomo Kenyatta University for Agriculture and Technology, a public university in Nairobi, Kenya.
[62] Wanini, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 20, 2018.

politics. As my respondents made clear, classism and ageism frequently emerge in these communities. Many of them identified older, well off, heterosexual, educated women as those who "take up space" in online feminist communities. For example, Shalom, a student at the University of Nairobi, told me, "a lot of the time, it's cisgender, classed women or wealthy women, educated, and they have well-paying jobs and all that, which is not that surprising especially the way our country is set up."[63] Sophie, one of my respondents referenced in chapter two, told me, "I feel like one of the problems that I'm having at the moment with African feminism is this whole issue of class has really started affecting accessibility and recognition and definition of what African feminism is, so essentially if you can't be able to theorize it and communicate it clearly."[64] Here, Shalom and Sophie ask why online Kenyan feminist space is exclusionary. For Shalom it is due to the fact that wealthier, educated women hegemonize African feminist space. At the same time, for Sophie, the exclusionary logics of online Kenyan feminism are embodied in the niche vocabularies that Kenyan feminists use to theorize and communicate feminism – the result of a political disposition, both online and offline, dominated by wealthier Kenyan women. As such, even as feminists engage with disrespectable topics in very disrespectable ways, the people who dominate Kenyan feminist discourse ensure that the space is always undergirded by classist exclusion – an iteration of respectability. In this way, disrespectability is not a rigid politic, it is not permanently woven into the Kenyan feminist digital counterpublic sphere. In fact, often it is interwoven with discourses that run counter to feminist ideals and occur in spaces that reify the logics of respectability.

In order to illustrate the disrespectable strategies that Kenyan feminists have used to generate a more radical feminist politics, I turn to #menaretrash. As I mentioned in the

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[63] Shalom, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 3, 2018.
[64] Sophie, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 15, 2018.

introduction, #menaretrash was a movement that emerged in South Africa to express outrage at

the high rates of murder experienced by South African women and African women more

broadly. The movement was triggered in mid-2017 by the murder of Karabo Mokoena, a 22-year

old South African woman, who was stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend Sandile Mantsoe. He

later burned her body and disposed of it in a shallow ditch near a highway in Johannesburg (BBC

2018b). This event triggered a great deal of anger amongst African feminists who proceeded to

post narratives of gender-based violence under the hashtag #menaretrash. Whilst the hashtag

originated in South Africa, it proliferated across digital space to Kenyan feminist networks,

amongst other African feminist networks and provided them with the impetus to generate critical

analyses of the high rates of gender-based violence in Kenya, given the shocking statistic that

over 39% of women in Kenya aged 15-49 years old have experienced physical and/or sexual

intimate partner violence in their lifetimes (UNWomen 2016).

    Kenyan feminists have used the hashtag menaretrash or the phrase "men are trash" to

articulate a disrespectable feminist politics. This hashtag is disrespectable in two ways: firstly, it

publicly insults or shames men and secondly it openly names men as perpetrators and

benefactors of patriarchal violence, approaches I further explore later in this chapter. Both of

these strategies are unusual given that they take seriously men's roles in perpetrating and

enabling violence – an element of rape culture that is typically absent from Kenyan public

discourse. Often, mainstream media circulates images and accounts of, for example, women with

severed limbs or women in hospital beds, clearly disoriented and scared following a sexually

violent encounter. Beyond the proliferation of violence that occurs in reproducing these images,

the result is a Kenyan public that is cognizant of the specter of gendered violence, but inattentive

to or unaware of the structures and people that produce this violence. As my respondents told me

and multiple Twitter feminists made clear, #menaretrash exposes the structures and people that enable this violence in ways that the media frequently fails to do.

> @Stacykirui: Listen. Our mothers were taught silence. Our grandmothers were taught silence. Heck, WE were taught silence. #MenAreTrash does not offend you because you're a "good man" or "know good men." It offends you because women ain't taking shit anymore.[65]

> @jojoswitz: The tag," All men are trash" has everything to do with do with patriarchy and its ills. Your dads/ uncles/ male cousins are beneficiaries anymore.[66]

As @stacykirui and @jojoswitz tweets above suggest, many male Twitter users take issue with the way in which #menaretrash has generalized all men as aggressors, even generating the hashtag #notallmen to counter this perceived narrative. However, many online feminists maintain that these social media users' decisions to focus on the diction of the hashtag instead of its message is a distraction tactic. Instead, as @jojoswitz argues, #menaretrash is a critique of patriarchy – a system that all men, including "dads/uncles/male cousins," have benefitted from. It is critical to note that while anti gender-based violence efforts focus on victims who usually emerge in public discourse sans an aggressor, #menaretrash recognizes the narratives of survivors but also identifies the perpetrators of gender-based violence as well as passive bystanders – the individuals who make their violence possible. African feminists' insistence that *all* men proliferate this violence by virtue of being the primary benefactors of patriarchy, instead of simply arguing that these tragic events are the result of the misogynistic actions of *individual* men, has offended and threatened many male Twitter users who express dismay at the hashtag, a

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[65] @Stacykirui. Twitter Post. May 31, 2017, https://twitter.com/stacykirui/status/869974408349265920.
[66] @jojoswitz. Twitter Post. November 7, 2016, https://twitter.com/jojoswitz/status/795635252744060928.

sentiment I return to later in this chapter. As Stacy tells us, it has been clear that "women aren't taking shit anymore."[67]

Feminists' use of the insult "trash" to describe men who have perpetuated patriarchal violence also figures as a performance of disrespectability. In the context of #menaretrash the word "trash" communicates that an individual is reprehensible and that their behavior evokes feelings of disgust. The word "trash" works as an epithet and insult that embarrasses men and forces them to publicly face the consequences of their violence or passivity in the face of violence against women, much in line with South African feminist scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola's calls to "expose, disown and hold accountable these men who act violently to women and children" (Gqola 2015, 76) in her book *Rape: A South African Nightmare.* Gqola advocates for a community-centered form of accountability upon an analysis of how institutional forms of redress, such as legal recourse and police intervention, not only fail to effectively address sexual violence, but also perpetuate it. Here, I think of the insult that #menaretrash employs through the word "trash" as one such form of accountability.

The digital reach of the hashtag menaretrash has hyperbolized and amplified the insult, forcing men to engage with feminist critiques and anger in ways they have previously avoided. The lack of respectability with which feminists have proliferated the hashtag, embodied in their cussing, ranting and refusal to engage with misogynistic responses calmly, has offended many men. The brashness of the hashtag makes clear that radical African feminists are not concerned with creating accountability using respectable, bureaucratic processes – methods that have failed many of them. Instead, they have transformed their anger into a kind of digital spectacle through

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[67] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

which they make clear that they are prioritizing the lives of women, non-binary people and gender non-conforming people over decorum and hegemonic discourse.

When we spoke, Stacy told me that #menaretrash has "radicalized" her.[68] #menaretrash has given her urgency and the impetus to prioritize the lives of Black women in her feminist politics. Stacy's words make clear the importance of disrespectability to Kenyan feminist politics. For her, like many other Kenyan feminists, disrespectability provides political direction, in terms of which bodies and struggles to prioritize, as well as the transgressive strategies employed to contest patriarchal social order. Using disrespectability, Kenyan feminists disobey normative rules of discourse that prioritize civility over the lives of marginalized people, in order to practice feminist politics that center vulnerable women and non-binary individuals.

#WeAre52pc: Weaving a space of care

In observing Kenyan feminist engagements online and in speaking to Kenyan feminists about their online communities, the themes of feminist "care" and "friendship" were particularly salient. In our conversation about the origins of #weare52pc Marilyn told me that after "ranting and raving online about the 2/3s gender rule"[69] without much of an audience or even collaborators, Professor Wambui Mwangi, "reached out to [her] and she was like…I hear you on this, I get it….umm but I think we need to do something more on this."[70] This initial interaction, which would lead to the formation of the feminist collective that would generate and proliferate #weare52pc, was imbued with care. Marilyn was "speaking into the void,"[71] as she put it, and Wambui responds to these efforts with reassurance and affirmation. In using the pronoun "we,"

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[68] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.
[69] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.
[70] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.
[71] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.

Wambui positions herself as Marilyn's collaborator and fellow organizer, therefore indicating a shared responsibility in holding the government to account. Care is a practice of comfort and solidarity.

#WeAre52pc and Jikoni were formed in response to the government's failure to implement the two-thirds gender principle. Given that the movement first emerged on Twitter, a large part of the organizing work that Jikoni's members engaged in was educational. Jikoni organized online events such as "Twitter Townhalls" where members of Jikoni, in collaboration with some civil society organizations, such as the Katiba Institute, would educate Kenyans on their rights and the government's responsibilities, and suggest tactics to keep the government accountable in regards to the two-thirds gender rule. Additionally, Jikoni created and circulated a petition to contest the illegitimacy of Parliament, which had failed to adhere to the two-thirds rule following the 2017 general election. The petition was addressed to the Chief Justice, citing Article 261(7) which stipulated that the Chief Justice would "advise the President to dissolve Parliament and the President shall dissolve Parliament," (Article 261(7) 2010) if parliament failed to enact legislation to fulfill the two-thirds gender rule. On October 8, 2017, Jikoni also organized a silent protest at the historic "Freedom Corner" in Uhuru Park, Nairobi. A diverse group of women congregated with colorful cloths called Kangas, which they wore on their heads and around their waists and necks as symbols of Kenyan womanhood. They also held up signs with the hashtag weare52pc, as well as posters stating women's various constitutional rights.[72]

Whilst some online Kenyans were receptive to #weare52pc, many times even engaging in the conversation and retweeting Jikoni's political education material, others responded with anger. Shalom told me that these detractors, mostly men, reacted using a range of tactics:

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[72] @WeAre52pc. Twitter Post. October 8, 2017, https://twitter.com/WeAre52pc/status/917091352055369729.

I think there were those who were gaslighting us – it's not a big deal. Then there were

those who basically were saying that if these women are not voted for it's because they

are not competent or people don't believe in them. Basically they were telling us that

weare52pc is undemocratic, it is going against the will of the people….. And then of

course, though this is not specific to We Are 52 Pc, but the vitriol from people like

Cyprian Nyakundi and whoever else who thinks they are a boy child activist.[73]

In this excerpt from our conversation, Shalom differentiates between three categories of

backlash. Firstly, she identifies the men who denied the importance of the two-thirds rule,

therefore downplaying the concerns of the feminist activists who were challenging the state's

gendered failure to implement the law. One man, @chiefnjoroge, tweeted, "women r their own

enemies, even if 1000 laws are passed for them to lead, majority of women on the ground

won't support the move."[74] @chiefnjoroge attempts to delegitimize #weare52pc by arguing

that women inhibit the implementation of the law through their collective failure to support

each other. He reinforces patriarchal stereotypes that contest the utility of women's rights

based on the well-worn myth that women are always already antagonistic toward each other.

In this narrative, Kenyan women are at fault for the lack of equal representation in

parliament, not the government, because they sabotage their own opportunities to assume

leadership positions. This type of "gaslighting,"[75] as Shalom put it, shifts the responsibility

of enforcing the law to Kenyan women, whilst implicitly vindicating the government of its

constitutional responsibilities.

Secondly, Shalom identifies a group of disparagers who argued that #weare52pc was

"undemocratic" in spite of its constitutionality. These individuals attempted to disrupt

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[73] Shalom, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 3, 2018.
[74] @chiefnjoroge. Twitter Post. August 21, 2017, https://twitter.com/chiefnjoroge/status/899597738001747968.
[75] Shalom, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 3, 2018.

feminist discourse by situating women's rights in opposition to those of men, framing feminism as a political ideology predicated on male failure and regression. In this way, they reframed #weare52pc as a fight for male devaluation, therefore ignoring its stated purpose as a movement for the realization of Kenyan women's rights.

Lastly, Shalom characterizes the third group of detractors as "boy child" activists or "people, like Cyprian Nyakundi."[76] Within Kenyan political discourse, the "boy child" – cisgendered boys – is imagined as the neglected victim of various efforts to empower Kenyan girls. Here, a fictive narrative is generated that portrays feminists and women empowerment activists as the source of Kenya's "crisis of masculinity," instead of institutional policies such as the systemic criminalization of young poor men, or the state's failure to provide sufficient jobs for Kenyans writ large, amongst other failures. Within these narratives, feminists including those who support #weare52pc are "toxic," even "a cartel," as some Twitter users have put it.

This backlash exposes the porousness and contentiousness of the digital feminist counterpublic sphere. Even as feminists organize themselves to do critical feminist work, they encounter iterations of the same public sphere patriarchal violence they distance themselves from through the digital counterpublic sphere. Whilst this may be suggestive of the unsuitability of Twitter as a space for doing feminist work, feminists have always incurred backlash in offline and online spaces. As such, I am interested in understanding what feminists do to recuperate after fighting such patriarchal violence. How do digital Kenyan feminists care for each other?

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[76] Cyprian Nyakundi is a popular, misogynistic Kenyan blogger who has, in part, been responsible for popularizing "boy child" discourse.

Many members of Jikoni labor to counter this backlash in order to protect both themselves and their cause. For Stacy, this labor creates what Kari Norgaard calls a "double reality" in her book *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions and Everyday Life.* Norgaard uses the term to account for the dissonance in how Norwegians collectively construct a normal sense of everyday in one reality and exist with the knowledge of impending environmental crisis in the other (Norgaard 2011). I borrow the term to account for how members of Jikoni engage in bold activism online, and retreat to community spaces off Twitter, such as private WhatsApp groups and people's homes, to redress the hurt and damage incurred from online activism. Stacy explained:

> And I think interacting and engaging through love and through care and through community is a time that…..that's broad but so are our realities and they're complex. And I think a lot of us center communal care, especially because a lot of African feminists who exist on the internet…you know they experience the same things in response to them "activisting" on the internet – you know the same backlash, the same misogynistic responses. And so, coming together, sharing in feel good, cathartic interactions and I guess through various ways – through meme culture, through music, through writing and through art. And that is a really important way that I interact.[77]

Here, Stacy articulates the "complexity" of online political life for Jikoni members. Whilst Twitter becomes a space where Kenyan feminists exist as a "bold force of social reform," it is concurrently a space in which they incur routine backlash and misogyny. However, within their own online and offline spaces, Kenyan feminists and Jikoni members "come together," as Stacy articulates, and share in "feel good, cathartic interactions"; they share in "meme culture," "music," "writing" and "art". Jikoni feminists create psychic distance between online spaces

[77] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

where they engage in political education and organizing work, and those digital and physical spaces in which they commune and heal with each other. For Stacy, "sharing" in these distanced spaces figures as a type of care work which makes clear the sense of intimacy and communal belonging that is generated amongst feminists when they commune away from patriarchal gaze. This distance from patriarchal oversight is critical for developing strong feminist community, given that within the public sphere feminist mental and emotional labor is constantly called upon to resist patriarchal violence. Here, labor is expended outwards and little is used to foster the critical feminist networks, intimacy and attentiveness that are necessary for developing strong feminist communities and movements. As such, creating distance between feminists and patriarchal gaze is not only cathartic, but necessary for generating cohesive feminist communities.

In "Homing with My Mother / How Women in My Family Married Women," Kenyan feminist scholar Neo Sinoxolo Musangi theorizes care work practiced between women as "shared work and as shared affect rather than as an economically or legally binding practicality" (Musangi 2018, 410). Through Musangi's theorization of care in respects to women in women-to-women marriages, we can imagine care practiced amongst Jikoni members in feminist space as a kind of care work. Additionally, Musangi theorizes in the context of the home, and is therefore adamant that these practices of care are necessary. The urgency with which they theorize these engagements, is useful for imagining digital feminist spaces as entangled with pressing political commitments and responsibilities. Feminists exchange "music," "writing" and "art" – they share work – as a means of generating critical affective connections and engaging in care work, often following misogynistic attacks in online and offline spaces. In Jikoni, as in Musangi's home, feminists engage in care work as an important means of survival against the

continuum of patriarchal violence[78] that threatens their wellbeing, and radical feminist community building.

When I asked Stacy if she could point out any other moments when she saw feminists congregating on the internet, she told me, "I can think of…two moments stand out for me and I think it's when you know these various African feminists are sharing in love and community and sisterhood/siblinghood, including trans and gender non-conforming feminists."[79] For Stacy, even as feminist togetherness is cultivated in the wake of misogynistic backlash, it concurrently emerges in order to generate "love" and "community." We can think of feminist love and community using Jennifer Nash's concept of "Black Feminist Love Politics" which she theorizes in "Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post Intersectionality." For Nash "Black Feminist love-politics" are "a significant call for ordering the self and transcending the self, a strategy for remaking the self and for moving beyond the limitations of selfhood" (Nash 2011, 3). Nash thinks through Black feminist love-politics as a method of forming feminist communities by both orienting the self toward feminist objectives and embracing others across difference. In this analysis, it is not identity politics that produces Black feminist community, instead Nash posits that "affective politics" are generative of these communities. For Nash, affective politics describes "how bodies are organized around intensities, longings, desires, temporalities, repulsions, curiosities, fatigues, optimism, and how these affects produce political movements" (Nash 2011, 3). Within Nash's schema, feminists embrace difference instead of identity politics as an organizing norm, whilst also cultivating affective connections that are generative of Black feminist community.

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[78] I further explore this concept in Chapter 2. I use the concept of a continuum of patriarchal violence to think through how public and private patriarchal violence are mutually enabling, intertwined and *always already* being mobilized simultaneously to threaten and obstruct Kenyan women's abilities to participate in the public sphere. In particular I use femicide, political violence, government neglect and respectability to illustrate this concept.

[79] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

Within the context of Jikoni, we can think of feminist love-politics as a means of generating community across difference in spite of state violence. Stacy told me that Jikoni feminists would retreat to spaces in which "they were women who loved women, women who loved men, hurt women, women who have experienced loss; women who, you know, like smoking weed, women who like alcohol, women who can't dance, very complex women existing with each other as a practice of liberation and care and healing."[80] Stacy describes Jikoni as a feminist community where difference is laid bare and then mobilized as an organizing tool. As such, the concept of a "love-politics" can be used to describe the ways in which Jikoni feminists come together to both engage and share in desire, grief, craving and joy as a critical means of forming political movement. That these affective connections are formed in service of what Stacy refers to as "liberation and care and healing," where healing occurs in the aftermath of violence, indicates that Jikoni feminists have incurred injury, but are also necessarily congregating to work towards liberation.

Stacy further elaborated on this notion of Jikoni as a "space of healing" by telling me that it allows feminists to feel a "lot less lonely and a lot less crazy" relative to Kenya's public sphere. She continued: "it was exhilarating to commune with other women and trans/GNC people who have the same vision and goals that you do. It was, it made me feel hopeful….it made me want to invest myself in feminist work."[81] Stacy makes clear how shared liberatory objectives become foundational to forming movements in the presence of difference. Furthermore, she expresses that these shared feminist goals – this feminist love-politics – provide "hope" and excitement, as well as a deeper investment in feminist work. As such we can think of a Kenyan Feminist counterpublic sphere as a site of feminist redress and remedy from patriarchal

[80] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.
[81] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

violence. Here the counterpublic sphere is shaped around an amalgamation of pain, love and community; a desire to fight patriarchal violence, as well as a utopic vision of liberation (Nash 2011, 15). That this redress occurs in a counterpublic sphere, away from the oversight and jurisdiction of the state, indicates an acknowledgement of the state's limitations as a site of safety for feminists and others harmed by patriarchal violence (Nash 2011, 15). Therefore, even as Jikoni feminists organize the #weare52pc campaign in order to seek formal redress from the state, there is a recognition that there are injuries that cannot be healed using institutional tools.

In thinking about how Jikoni feminists wage a political movement and create sites of healing, we gain some sense of the expansiveness of the digitial feminist counterpublic sphere I have theorized. Jikoni feminists labor and rest; incur injury and find healing; fight and imagine freedom and liberation. Care works as a thread that weaves these experiences together, therefore forming the infrastructures of this digital feminist counterpublic sphere. The extensive labor many of these feminists perform to petition the government is born out of a recognition that "the government really doesn't care to be honest. And they don't feel like they have to care,"[82] as Shalom put it. As such care is not trivial. Instead, as Musangi posits (Musangi 2018, 410), affective labor is a necessity and entangled with responsibility and commitments – it becomes a remedy to contempt given lack of government intervention. It is present in the affective labor these Jikoni feminists engage in order to form their political community.

However, Kenyan feminist spaces are not only or always about care, let alone full inclusion of feminist difference. Even as Marilyn praised Jikoni as an "intergenerational" space devoid of "hierarchy,"[83] Stacy said that it was sometimes a space where her "feminism [felt] seen

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[82] Shalom, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 3, 2018.
[83] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.

and on the other hand [her] queerness [felt] disregarded."[84] This indicates that care is sometimes mediated on the basis of sameness, in ways that exclude queer, trans and non-binary people in particular. This makes apparent that even as feminists form communities to counter violence and create progressive movements, they sometimes fail each other. As Nash argues, in order to practice a radical ethic of care, there needs to be an acknowledgement that injury is not always shared (Nash 2011, 15), given that feminists experience injury differentially based on their positionality. As such, for Stacy, even as Jikoni figures as a site for "healing", "love," "community" and "care", these connections are scarce when one is queer, trans and/or non-binary.

Cross-Border Solidarities

While a lot has been written about transnational African feminist discourse facilitated by NGOs and other institutions, little has been said about how radical African feminists engage in solidarity work beyond institutional frameworks. I argue that the digital feminist counterpublic sphere facilitates African feminist discourses and solidarities across borders that are difficult to generate outside of a digital platform.

A few of the feminists I spoke to referenced moments of transnational solidarity with other African feminist movements as formative digital feminist moments. Referencing #womensmarchUG, Marilyn and Stacy told me that African feminist solidarity online facilitates cross-border accountability and feminist affirmation. On Saturday June 30th 2018, Ugandan women and their allies marched in Kampala, Uganda's capital, to protest a string of brutal kidnappings and murders of forty-three Ugandan women and girls, and the government's failure to take these murders seriously due to factors such as gender, class, ability, sexuality and age.

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[84] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

Ugandan feminists created the hashtag womensmarchUG to create awareness about the murders

and generate momentum for the protest. As Marilyn and Stacy told me, many feminists across

the continent, particularly Kenyan feminists, "changed their [display pictures]"[85] to images

created by the march organizers. They also retweeted and tweeted about the march and the issue

of femicide. Marilyn interpreted these digital actions as ways of telling Ugandan feminists that

they "were able to hear [Ugandan feminist] voices across borders."[86] Marilyn, then told me:

> We had a whole bunch of women across the continent who were retweeting and saying
>
> you know, "look pay attention to the rape and murder in Uganda." And that…..was a
>
> really powerful thing and it was powerful because when your own government won't
>
> listen to you people outside are listening. And maybe it's a shame, but there's a sense in
>
> which women are using the online space to say that "you cannot ignore us….we refuse to
>
> be ignored." What feminists are doing is they're saying that we will echo our sisters
>
> wherever they are and I think that's really powerful.[87]

For Marilyn the digital feminist counterpublic sphere shrinks distance between feminist

organizers and allies, thus generating a virtual proximity between Ugandan feminist organizers

and feminist allies across the continent. This virtual proximity enables them to practice feminist

solidarity, which takes the form of listening to Ugandan feminists, amplifying Ugandan voices,

and noisemaking on their behalf. Therefore, even as these technologies shrink distance, they also

expand feminist space and feminist possibilities, such that feminists are able to counter

patriarchal violence in a particular context from their multiple locations. We can think of this as

a type of border crossing.

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[85] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.
[86] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.
[87] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.

In Stacy's account this digital feminist solidarity is forged through affective modes. Here feminists across the continent express anger, grief, rage, care, kindness, love and togetherness through digital engagements and conversations. Citing an Audre Lorde quote from a 1981 keynote address, "The Uses of Anger: Women responding to Racism," Stacy stated that "everything is useful except what is wasteful."[88] Stacy thinks of these affective modes of solidarity as useful for "contributing to broader [feminist work],"[89] and critical for weaving feminist communities that are "invested in futures and freedoms that are not divided by borders, that are not divided by regions,"[90] as she put it. She also told me that these moments of solidarity were useful for informing feminists of the growth and reach of African feminism, and for reaffirming African feminist efforts. As such for Stacy, a shared recognition of the precarious "state of African womanhood"[91] on the continent serves as a critical affective practice for expressing African feminist solidarity.

Obioma Nnaemeka's theory of "nego-feminism" is useful for thinking about the implications of these mutual exchanges and solidarities. Nnaemeka describes "nego-feminism" as a framework that imagines "feminism as negotiation" (Nnaemeka 2004, 377) where African feminists do feminism in tandem with "shared values" of "give and take, compromise, and balance" (Nnaemeka 2004, 378). Nnaemeka thinks through "nego-feminism" as a way of doing feminism in community, and as a means of imagining feminism as a mutually beneficial practice. As we can observe through #weare52pc, though Kenyan feminists organize in solidarity with Ugandan feminists due to a recognition of shared fate, they recognize that they are centering Ugandan women in their solidarity practices, they are "listening" to Ugandan women, in

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[88] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.
[89] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.
[90] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.
[91] Stacy, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 9, 2018.

particular, across borders. As such, connectivity allows African feminists to flatten borders in ways that enable them to fight and feel together whilst remaining attentive to the specificities of context. Though mutually beneficial, this type of solidarity requires implicit negotiation and compromise – "giving," as Nnaemeka puts it (Nnaemeka 2004, 378) – where Kenyan feminists direct their energies to protecting Ugandan feminists even though they are not the direct beneficiaries of that organizing. At the same time, digital Kenyan feminists also "take" – they also gain a wider community, as well as affirmation for their feminist work. This "give and take" dynamic that Nnaemeka puts forth therefore figures as a useful framework for thinking about transnational African feminist engagements and solidarities.

I also borrow from feminist scholars who have theorized (Bardwell-Jones 2017, 155-156, 170-171) transnational feminism, particularly women of color, to emphasize that African feminist solidarities are not essential or uniform. They are plural and dynamic. Much like the transnational feminist coalitions that US feminist scholar Celia T. Bardwell-Jones theorizes, African feminist solidarities require intentionality, effort and a disruption of normality. Kenyan feminists organize across cultural and political difference in order to make connections with feminist communities beyond their own.

A critical element of the transnational solidarities created in the digital feminist counterpublic sphere is the merging of theory and praxis. Multiple Kenyan feminists such as Marilyn and Brenda participated in the march in Kampala, whilst others amplified Ugandan feminist voices and politics in online spaces. For Nnaemeka, African feminism is a continental politics that unfolds in what she calls a "third space of engagement" (Nnaemeka 2004, 360) through the interplay of various tactics, feminist commitments, and resistances (Nnaemeka 2004, 377). The third space of engagement is "the both/and space where borderless territory and free

movement authorize the capacity to simultaneously theorize practice, practice theory, and allow the mediation of policy" (Nnaemeka 2004, 360). The third space facilitates a feminist practice that both collapses borders and generates a movement using an array of tactics. The digital feminist counterpublic figures as a kind of third space, where digital Kenyan feminists theorize, noise-make, petition their governments and practice care and encouragement with the active recognition that their fates are conjoined with those of feminists across the region. They theorize and practice feminism on issues directly affecting them, such as #weare52pc, and those that affect feminists elsewhere, as exhibited through #womensmarchUG. In this way solidarity is practiced by crossing several discursive and material borders and simultaneously imagining connections between feminists in different locations.

Archival work as community work

Many of the feminists I spoke to also signaled toward the archival potential of Kenyan feminist Twitter. During our conversation Brenda provided a helpful explanation of the potency of feminist hashtags. She said:

> So to see the stories….what [hashtags] enabled us to do was for people to understand that this is not a one off thing, and that these women are not angry…because there is a way in which people infantilize the anger of women. So it's just like yeah they're just emotional, they were angry over little things but for people to see that these things are widespread, and that's why hashtags are extremely important in this context, because when you click it there are hundreds if not thousands of stories echoing the same thing and it's hard to fight with these stories…… And to allow the cataloging, of course barring people like who delete accounts – but a lot of the information will still be there, so the memorializing of the information and the writing it into history. Another thing about the journalistic

process now is because a hashtag will happen, then someone will write an article about it.

It becomes really hard to erase women and to erase our experiences.[92]

Brenda explains how in proliferating narratives of gendered violence hashtags enable Kenyan women to both understand and convey the notion that these encounters with misogynistic violence are not exceptional but systemic. For Brenda hashtags provide what she calls a "vantage point" where the visual uptake of such a high frequency of misogynistic violence transforms feminist narratives of systemic and structural violence from metaphors into accounts of lived experiences. In this same excerpt, Brenda mentions the archival potential of social media. Brenda told me that the media often reports gendered violence in dehumanizing and impersonal ways or it fails to report it at all. In her analysis, hashtags such as #weare52pc and #mydressmychoice work against the logics of erasure that undergird Kenya's mainstream media's approach to women's trauma by centering their narratives and analyses of their life conditions. Like Brenda, Marilyn also imagines Kenyan Feminist Twitter as an archival space. In speaking about the motivation behind her "ranting and raving" prior to the instigation of the #weare52pc campaign, she told me that she was "trying to make sure that they[93] couldn't recreate a narrative by being annoying and persistent on this one issue[94]."[95] Marilyn was tweeting with the intention of documenting a critical feminist movement. As such, from both Brenda and Marilyn's explanations, we can imagine the practice of weaving community in the digital counterpublic sphere as simultaneously a practice of archival documentation, or "memorializing" and "cataloguing" as Brenda articulated it.

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[92] Brenda, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 8 2018.
[93] Here, Marilyn uses "they" to refer to the government and its officials.
[94] The "one issue" Marilyn is referring to is the two-thirds gender rule.
[95] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, August 7, 2018.

In "Archives and Collective Memories: Searching for African women in the pan-African imaginary," Kenyan scholars Anne Lutomia and Brenda Sanya define the archive as a "location for women to document their lived experiences" (Sanya 2015, 70). They also argue that "archiving has great potential to build more inclusive records, histories, and also futures, bringing the margin to the center" (Sanya 2015, 70). As such given their conjecture that the archives documenting feminism in Kenya are scarce (Sanya 2015, 69), conversations between Kenyan Twitter feminists become an intervention into this reality by generating an alternative space within which to not only memorialize Kenyan women's experiences, but also document their own analyses of their lived experiences.

In a tweet, @keguro_ writes: "perhaps I am being ungenerous. I have been reading Kenyan Feminists and queers describing the quotidian harm they experience #onhere and elsewhere for several years — the archives expand every moment."[96] Like Lutomia and Sanya, @keguro_ further argues that Kenyan feminists and queer people in the digital feminist counterpublic sphere or what he refers to as #onhere, work to document queer and feminist narratives of harm, grief and complaint. Imagining the digital counterpublic sphere as an archive situates the practices of care, sharing, Black love-politics, activism and disrespectability as necessary for the sustenance of Kenyan feminist community in the present and simultaneously critical for the longevity of Kenyan feminism. @keguro_ also uses the temporal signifiers "quotidian" and "every moment" to describe the temporality of feminist and queer archival work. @keguro_'s framing enables us to think of Twitter as a space in which every day queer and feminist pain, anger, labor, and frustration, life on the margins, figure as archivable work. Such an analysis makes clear that in this sphere what is valuable to the archive – from the everyday to

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[96] @keguro_. Twitter Post. July 24, 2018, https://twitter.com/keguro_/status/1021848529105575936.

the spectacular – is determined by many individuals with varied experiences, interests and identities, and is freed of state oversight (Sanya 2015, 70-71).

Hashtags, retweets, and likes proliferate the archive, making feminist work visible to those seeking to learn from and engage with Kenyan feminism as well as those seeking to study it, as I am doing in this thesis. As such, where feminist archival space has shrunk institutionally, feminist memory becomes a collective project within Kenyan feminist Twitter, the digital feminist counterpublic. Furthermore, imagining the digital counterpublic sphere as an archive situates the practices of care, sharing, Black love-politics, activism and disrespectability that enable the sustenance of Kenyan feminist community in the present, as simultaneously critical for the longevity of Kenyan feminism.

At the same time, in observing the transformative potential of the digital counterpublic as a space to document Kenyan feminist work and living, it is critical to confront and account for the ephemerality of digital media, as @natalieisonline, a British feminist Twitter user, wrote.[97] Even as feminists appropriate Twitter for community building, archival work, the freedom and longevity it offers for Kenyan feminist movement making can be tampered with and is always under threat of obliteration from both government agencies and corporations. As such online Kenyan feminist work can be fleeting and temporary.

Conclusion

I have explored how Kenyan feminists weave together feminist communities using disrespectability, care, cross-border solidarities and archival practice – practices I have imagined as digital ululations that ultimately generate the digital Kenyan feminist counterpublic sphere I define throughout this thesis. Using the online conversations that emerged as a result of the

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[97] @natalieisonline. Twitter Post. January 13, 2019, https://twitter.com/natalieisonline/status/1084429927401877505.

hashtag menaretrash, as well as Stacy's account of the broader themes that emerged from the hashtag, I argue that disrespectability is used to generate more radical Kenyan feminist politics that are attentive to the particular harms that queer people, sex workers and poor women encounter. Furthermore, I argue that care, sharing and a Black-feminist love-politics are central to the connections and friendships within Jikoni, a Kenyan feminist collective. Lastly, I think through how feminist solidarities emerge through a give and take interaction that sees Kenyan feminists' noisemaking amplifying other African feminist causes, therefore gaining wider feminist communities and affirmation for their feminist work. Feminists commune in this digital feminist counterpublic sphere in the wake of misogynistic violence in online and offline spaces. In this way the feminist counterpublic is both a space of redress and mobilization away from patriarchal and institutional gazes, as well as one in which to generate friendships, Black feminist love-politics, and cross-border solidarities.

Together, these everyday practices and events offer insight into the value of everyday feminist practice and togetherness, as well as its difficulty. Here we observe that even as radical Kenyan feminists offer a model of how digital spaces can be appropriated for everyday liberatory practices and community building that ultimately contest the phallocentric substance and practice of Kenya's public sphere politics, these digital spaces are sometimes used to replicate the same oppressive logics radical Kenyan feminists position themselves against and distance themselves from. For example, even as Kenyan feminists weave this online community, their weaving takes place using tools and resources "enmeshed with commodity capitalism," as South Africa-based feminist researchers Desiree Lewis, Tigist Hussen, and Monique van Vuuren argue (D. Lewis, Tigist Hussen, and Monique van Vuuren 2013, 58). The ways in which technology firms, including Twitter, often co-opt messages and efforts of feminist activists to expand their market

reach, are evidence of how the same tools that feminists use for political ends emerge from corporate structures that are fueling the dispossession of millions (D. Lewis, Tigist Hussen, and Monique van Vuuren 2013, 58).

In his book, *Tweeting and the Street*, Paulo Gerbaudo cautions us against imagining these social networking sites as being inherently endowed with the capacity to generate radical movements. For him such optimism obscures the neoliberal politics that undergird these platforms and makes us inattentive to the ways in which these platforms can also generate harm for the activists that utilize them for radical ends (Gerbaudo 2012, 8-9). As Stacy told me, often the catharsis of digital rage and solidarity is not enough. Feminists are frequently the targets of misogynistic attacks that leave them feeling lonely and unsafe, therefore making clear the contentiousness and complexity of this counterpublic sphere and its limits as a space for feminist work. But activists realize these problems and use the platforms anyway.

Even as I assert the radical potency of this counterpublic, I recognize that it often reproduces the same exclusionary logics it opposes. In part, this exclusion arises because of the inaccessibility of Twitter. Most Kenyans do not have access to the Internet, as such those who are poor and/or live in rural areas are excluded from online political discourse and movement making. Other times non-normative people – particularly those who are non-binary, transgender, queer, poor, young – are excluded from Kenyan feminist online space as I explained earlier. As such, even as I suggested that algorithms mediate the virtual reach of digital ululation, I also argue that exclusionary logics limit the strength of digital ululation and the stability of the digital feminist counterpublic sphere. But even as the problematics of Twitter are an everyday impediment, Gerbaudo argues that choosing to dismiss these technologies reproduces a techno-deterministic logic that presupposes any online action as always already compromised by

neoliberalism (Gerbaudo 2012, 9). Instead, Gerbaudo is concerned with "what activists actually do with [these technologies]" (Gerbaudo 2012, 9).

As I have suggested throughout my analysis, it is critical to be just as attentive to the malpractices of Kenyan feminists on Twitter as one is to the radical discourses they generate in this community. Both these genres of practice are intertwined to form this "difficult formation" (D. Lewis, Tigist Hussen, and Monique van Vuuren 2013, 44) of a counterpublic, which is as fraught as it is radical.

Conclusion: Digital Feminist Counterpublic as a Liberatory Tool

I keep saying that for me frankly…it kept me sane…it keeps me sane because it's really isolating to be a feminist and to try and live a feminist life and to do so in isolation. It really feels like you're just fighting 98% of the time. And so this shared community the first thing it did was make me feel not crazy…I wasn't so alone anymore.[98]

~Marilyn

Throughout my research for this thesis, questions pertaining to the efficacy of the digital feminist counterpublic have emerged frequently. Whilst an evaluation of the utility of online feminism is not part of my project (indeed, the concept of utility or value is fraught in itself), as I write the conclusion to this thesis, Kenyan feminists are reflecting on the #womensmarchKE which was held on International Women's Day (March 8 2019) to protest the high rates of gendered violence in Kenya or femicide as many of them have called it. As such the role of social media in Kenyan feminist struggle is always in question.

Though feminists used hashtags and online conversations to create interest and support for this march, they ultimately protested on the streets – appropriating public space with their bodies to contest patriarchal violence. In particular reference to the #mydressmychoice protest in 2014, which was organized to express outrage at several incidents where women were stripped publicly, Brenda, one of my respondents, referred to direct action as the "language of bodies."[99] For Brenda, the "language of bodies," as it was used in #mydressmychoice and

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[98] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.
[99] Brenda, personal communication with the author, WhatsApp, July 8, 2018.

#womensmarchKE alike, worked to generate a visceral, corporeal display of outrage that publicly confronted patriarchal violence, and demanded the government's attention. Brenda was clear that whilst virtual engagement can be useful, the language of bodies is mediated through physical encounter, it is not negotiated virtually.

As such, whilst I initially intended to write about how Kenyan feminists reproduce spectacle in online and offline spaces, as well as the rise of what many have called "hashtag feminism" in Kenya, Brenda's assertion forced me to reconsider my project. It helped me think more critically and intentionally about the particular value of the digital feminist counterpublic sphere, and its role in the larger feminist struggle to resist patriarchal violence. Whilst academic inquiry into the role of social media in social movements, particularly in the face of the Arab Spring, has largely focused on social media as a mobilizing and organizing tool for offline protest (Gerbaudo 2012, 3), I looked for meaning in the everyday violence and quotidian survival tactics my respondents spoke about. I looked beyond the mobilizing potential of Twitter, and toward the ways that online Kenyan feminists have utilized these tools to resist, and care for each other routinely within community. Here, I answered questions such as: When do feminist communities form – under which conditions? How do feminist communities form? How do they work within the quotidian? What practices do feminists employ to sustain their communities? By answering these questions and more, my project has largely become about the "meantime" and the "afterwards" of feminist struggle – the time before and after challenging various kinds of patriarchal violence, when feminists are generating the networks and the connections required to confront these very same patriarchal conditions and heal from the upheavals that some of those encounters generate.

As I have made clear throughout this thesis, many of the feminists I have spoken to are grateful for the togetherness and solidarity that online feminist community offers. For Marilyn, for example, as evidenced in the quote at the beginning of the conclusion, it has been a space in which she has found sanity amidst the work she does to counter the lack of women's representation in parliament. In this digital space, the "void" which I have described as being constituted by noise and anti-feminist disdain, can be disrupted in order to contest the patriarchal status quo. Here, Marilyn has been able to live a "feminist life"[100] beyond the isolation that living a feminist life can sometimes mean. Here, she has found community and affirmation for her politics, against a continuum of patriarchal violence that makes the public sphere inhospitable for radical feminist politics. This continuum of patriarchal violence is constituted by sexual violence, phallocentrism, state neglect of issues affecting women and empowerment discourse; it is perpetrated by multiple individuals and institutions from government officials to non-governmental organizations alike. In the wake of this violence, Kenyan feminists such as Marilyn, Stacy, Muthoni, Wanini, Shalom, Brenda and Sophie, weave together community through modes of care, solidarity, disrespectability and archival practice for purposes of resistance as well as redress. Furthermore, the digital counterpublic sphere has been a space in which Kenyan feminists have been able to further radical feminist ideals and discourses that would be difficult to facilitate elsewhere. Radical Kenyan feminists are able to both contest oppressive conditions in disrespectable ways and embody disrespectability as queer people, young people and poor women, even as they engage in serious feminist discourse.

However, even as my respondents helped me explore the processes that generate radical Kenyan feminist communities, they also made clear the challenges and the harms that are

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[100] Marilyn, personal communication with the author, Skype, August 7, 2018.

generated as these communities foment. Shalom, a university student, told me about the class politics that make these spaces frequently inaccessible to poor Kenyan women, whilst Wanini and Stacy, both university students, emphasized the ways cisheteronormativity proliferates through Kenyan feminist spaces, therefore making them inaccessible to queer and trans people. As such even as the digital counterpublic sphere makes feminist theory and discourse accessible to many Kenyans, as both Brenda and Muthoni told me, many times feminist spaces are inhospitable and *in*accessible for poor, queer and trans Kenyans.

Even as the digital feminist counterpublic sphere offers critical insights into community building, we can imagine it as a liberatory *tool*, as opposed to a liberatory *objective* in itself. Such a perspective, enables us to move away from evaluations that imagine online organizing as a substitute for offline organizing. Instead, the digital feminist counterpublic sphere is a space that can be used to foster community, more cross border solidarities and regional political actions; it enables us to imagine the counterpublic as a means of forming stronger, more radical African feminist communities that confront patriarchal violence using multiple strategies, particularly offline organizing. The 2018 #TotalShutdown marches in Southern Africa in which Southern African feminists organized marches in several Southern African cities to protest increasing rates of femicide across the region, offer a critical example of this dynamic. Feminists gathered online in order to generate momentum for their direct actions and then gathered offline, on the streets, in order to leverage spectacle to protest violent misogyny. African feminists elsewhere, have approached the #Totalshutdown as an example of collective action that feminists can use to protest femicide, as evidenced through the #TotalshutdownKE, a march mentioned above. This pedagogical dynamic which is facilitated by the visibility and circulation of online feminist campaigns amongst African feminists, underscores the potency of the digital feminist

counterpublic sphere as a space in which to archive and learn from past feminist work, where otherwise feminist critical practices are erased from public consciousness.

However, further consideration of the uses of this tool as a community building device is required. Even as I have explored how feminists respond to misogynists who disrupt feminist dialogue, I have not answered questions pertaining to how feminists respond when corporate and government institutions disrupt the digital feminist counterpublic sphere through surveillance, and censorship. Such questions potentially expose the ephemerality of the digital counterpublic therefore generating challenges for its capacity to serve as an archive. Furthermore, whilst I have explored the exclusionary logics of the feminist digital counterpublic, and their affective and structural implications, the implications of this exclusion for organizing requires study. This would allow us to imagine the digital feminist counterpublic as plural and further complicate our understanding of radical Kenyan feminist politics. Lastly, given the forms of exclusion that proliferate within these spaces, we must ask where else these feminist counterpublics are being cultivated beyond the digital sphere.

Ultimately, here in the digital feminist counterpublic sphere, feminists resist and learn; archive and theorize both across and within borders. They form communities that contest patriarchal conditions and generate possible strategies to both recover from and dismantle these very same conditions. They do some of the everyday work of making the communities and networks that form the infrastructures of the Kenyan feminist movement. This pondering and exploration of the "meantime" and the "afterwards" – the digital feminist counterpublic sphere – offers a moment within which to account for how liberation is intertwined within daily feminist engagement and the ways in which these encounters sometimes reproduce the status quo they resist. The digital feminist counterpublic sphere offers feminists a tool with which to theorize

and reimagine everyday mundane (digital) practices and engagements as potent sources of

resistance and community building.

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