PART III

Gender and LGTB Movements Online: Emerging Debates

CHAPTER 11

Digital Strategies and African LGBTI Organizing

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Internet technology and social media can shrink the distance between social movements in different world regions (Earl and Kimport 2011), allowing activists almost instantaneous access to lessons, material support, and advice from fellow activists in other countries (Van De Donk et al. 2004). Activists involved with under-resourced and unpopular social movements, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) movements, may be especially drawn to digital media as a means to mobilize constituents dispersed throughout a country and to evade unwanted public attention (Dencik and Leistert 2015). With the rise of new media, transnational advocacy networks (TANs) rely on digital media to develop a unifying vision, plan their next moves, draw attention to matters that may interest a variety of actors, and research human rights conditions in different countries (Bob 2012; Wiseberg 2001). Actors embedded in TANs invest in 'information exchange' to 'create new issues

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and categories and to persuade, pressure, and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments' (Keck and Sikkink 1998, p. 2). Digital communication and strategies 'extend the opportunities for dissent that are available to the wired citizen, and the organization and expression of voice and action against authority acquires an unprecedented scale' as activists can reach distant audiences (Mejias 2013, p. 104). Transnational movement organizations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and OutRight International, formerly the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), have favoured email alerts and press releases posted to their websites as ways to create a sense of urgency around LGBTI human rights violations in particular African countries (Thoreson 2014). Digital alerts motivate LGBTI rights supporters around the world to pressure African government leaders to take actions that respect LGBTI rights. Actions political leaders can take include decriminalizing same-sex sexual practices and refraining from engaging in political homophobia, which refers to the public disparagement of 'same-sex sexualities, non-heterosexual persons, gender variance, and gender and sexual diversity activism' (Currier 2012a, p. 442).

Despite the democratizing potential of digital strategies, they can pose problems for LGBTI organizing, when activists rely on them almost exclusively. With instantaneous transmission, digital strategies can also perpetuate the circulation of misinformation about LGBTI organizing. As Ryan Richard Thoreson's (2014) research shows, IGLHRC's reliance on digital strategies generated constraints for employees, whom Thoreson referred to as 'brokers' (p. 11). Brokers experienced difficulty making the organization's website accessible to people using mobile devices. IGLHRC employees were also unsure whether action alerts prompting people to email government officials in countries with spotty LGBTI human rights records were as effective as a 'flood of physical letters and faxes' (Thoreson 2014, p. 166). Additionally, IGLHRC employees had to confront and correct inaccurate information about LGBTI human rights violations that circulated online among LGBTI rights activists. IGLHRC worked to prevent incorrect information about Tiwonge Chimbalanga, a transgender woman, and Steven Monjeza, a cisgender man, who were on trial in Malawi in 2010 for violating the anti-sodomy law, from circulating internationally. An LGBTI rights activist 'repeatedly and publicly insisted that Monjeza had contracted malaria and was deathly ill in prison' (Thoreson 2014, p. 178). Representatives from the Centre

for the Development of People (CEDEP), a leading LGBTI rights movement organization in Malawi, visited the couple in prison and confirmed that Monjeza had received treatment for malaria and was convalescing. Misinformation about Monjeza's poor health and mistreatment in prison created 'criticism' locally that CEDEP was 'spreading lies and blowing the incident out of proportion, which they did not need as they prepared to defend Monjeza in court' (Thoreson 2014, p. 178). IGLHRC brokers worked behind the scenes to ask the activist to stop circulating bad information about Monjeza and publicly asserted that Monjeza had recovered from malaria. Although IGLHRC brokers tried to stop the harm created by the circulating online misinformation about Monjeza's health in prison, CEDEP's reputation suffered, nonetheless.

Digital media can have damaging effects on African LGBTI activism. While activists can anticipate some negative effects, others catch activists by surprise. In particular, the rapid dissemination of movement information that digital media provide can render African LGBTI activist organizations vulnerable, as activists cannot control how others, such as Northern audiences concerned by anti-queer developments in African countries, will use and interpret their messages. When reports about anti-homosexuality legislation and mobilization in countries like Nigeria and Uganda become 'viral' in the West by spreading quickly online, the resulting furore led to the labelling of entire African nations and their citizens as 'homophobic' (Epprecht 2008). Writing about tabloid journalism's role in instigating international outrage over anti-queer hostility in Uganda, Kenne Mwikya (2013, p. 145) observes how '[i]ntellectual thought and analysis . . . were muffled by the din of blogs and news sites summarily concluding that Uganda is homophobic'. In addition, when Western audiences offer sanctimonious responses to anti-homosexuality mobilization in African countries, this can silence African LGBTI rights activists who have been organizing in response to anti-LGBTI efforts (Epprecht 2008). Tavia Nyong'o (2012) characterizes these strategies as generating the 'fantasy of participation' whereby people in one part of the world can support and imagine themselves participating in LGBTI organizing elsewhere in the world (p. 46).

In this essay, we offer insights into the benefits to and drawbacks of African LGBTI movement organizations' use of digital media and strategies. We turn to three case studies involving LGBTI movement organizations' reliance on digital media and strategies to explain the consequences of digital strategies on these organizations. Because we did not focus our

empirical research on questions of digital strategies in African LGBTI organizing, we draw selectively from case studies in which digital strategies affected organizational processes and outcomes. First, we examine how digital media can fuel political homophobia targeting LGBTI activism, using the case of anti-gay harassment, vilification, and violence against Alternative-Côte d'Ivoire, an Ivoirian LGBTI movement organization. Second, we discuss the void left in the South African LGBTI movement by the closure of Behind the Mask, the first LGBTI movement organization to serve as an online information clearinghouse for African LGBTI organizing; Behind the Mask's closure due to financial problems illuminates the ephemerality and precariousness associated with using digital strategies funded by Northern donors. Third, we analyse critical LGBTI movement responses to the digital work of Luleki Sizwe, a black South African lesbian activist organization, which used an online petition to mobilize people around the world to pressure South African government officials to take action against anti-lesbian rape and violence. Original field research informs our case studies. We draw on ethnographic and interview research Currier conducted in South Africa in 2005–2006 and in Côte d'Ivoire in 2013 and on ethnographic and interview research Moreau conducted in South Africa in 2011 and 2012.

Emerging Political Homophobia in Côte d'Ivoire

The landscape for LGBTI organizing in West Africa has changed in response to local and international socio-political developments. In October 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron announced that his government would terminate aid to African governments that refused to recognize LGBTI rights. On December 6, 2011, United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton unveiled President Barack Obama's pro-LGBTI rights policy in a speech at the United Nations (UN) (Myers and Cooper 2011). Some experts interpreted Clinton's announcement as targeting particular African governments that persecuted gender and sexual minorities (Pflanz 2011). After Clinton's speech, African political leaders speculated whether this policy would mean that their countries would lose donor aid if they did not immediately recognize LGBTI rights.

Côte d'Ivoire, a nation still recovering from civil war, seems hospitable to gender and sexual minority organizing. Unlike many other African nations in which same-sex sex acts are criminalized, same-sex sexual

behaviour is illegal in only if it occurs in public (Kouassi 2011). For most of the 2000s, political and religious officials remained conspicuously silent about homosexuality and LGBTI rights, unlike their peers elsewhere on the continent. Several LGBTI movement organizations, including Alternative-Côte d'Ivoire and Lesbian Life Association Côte d'Ivoire, operate openly (Department of State 2012). However, LGBTI organizing has been difficult in the past. In 2006, the Ivorian Association for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transsexuals tried to register with the state, a request the interior minister denied (Kouassi 2009). Homophobia hampers the work of HIV/AIDS activists who work with men who have sex with men (MSM), and anti-LGBTI violence inhibits activism (Corey-Boulet 2012; Department of State 2012). In light of social homophobia, LGBTI activism in Côte d'Ivoire is concentrated mostly in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and treatment (Nguyen 2010; Thomann 2014). HIV/AIDS work has enabled NGOs like Alternative-Côte d'Ivoire (Alternative) to work with gender and sexual minorities under the auspices of a public-health mandate. Because anti-gay opponents sometimes portray LGBTI activists as corrupting and converting heterosexual people into 'homosexuals', couching LGBTI advocacy within a public-health framework allows some organizations to continue their gender and sexual diversity activism unfettered (Currier and Cruz 2014; Epprecht 2012).

Alternative's reputation as an HIV/AIDS NGO came under attack when local media learned that the French embassy was giving the organization US$50,000, resulting in anti-gay opposition directed at Alternative (Currier and Thomann 2016). Whereas some African LGBTI activist organizations experienced difficulty in obtaining funds for their campaigns, Alternative was quite successful. Although funding from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) supported much of Alternative's HIV/AIDS outreach work, Alternative managed to procure funding from other sources, including the French embassy in Abidjan, which pledged funds to support the group's LGBTI rights advocacy. Alternative celebrated this grant with a signing ceremony at the organization's office on 25 June 2013. A number of staff and volunteers at Alternative took photos of the ceremony and uploaded photos to social-media accounts. Some Ivoirian journalists downloaded these photos and used them to smear the French embassy's support for Alternative.

Local homophobia erupted in the aftermath of the French embassy's grant to Alternative. Ivoirian media claimed that the French embassy was paying Alternative to advocate for the legalization of same-sex marriage. France's legalization of same-sex marriage in May 2013 and US President Barack Obama's call for African leaders to respect LGBTI rights during his June 2013 visit to Senegal added fuel to this conspiracy theory (Nossiter 2013). These developments prompted Ivoirian President Alassane Outtara to issue a statement that same-sex marriage had no place in Côte d'Ivoire. In this sense, digital activism resulted in what Joseph Massad (2002) has called an 'incitement to discourse' around homosexuality (p. 374). Referring to transnational LGBTI movement organizations, such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association and IGLHRC as the 'gay international', he argues that these organizations' orientalist impulse (re) colonizes sexualities in the Arab and Muslim worlds (Massad 2002, p. 374). Where previously there had been little political homophobia, increased attention to same-sex sexuality prompted a governmental response that ultimately made life worse for LGBTI people locally.

Ivoirian media continued publishing unfavourable stories about Alternative. Some journalists disclosed the secret location of the organization's fundraising event, prompting leaders to postpone the event. Although local homophobia appeared to subside late in 2013, anti-gay mobilization became violent early in 2014, when vigilantes attacked the Alternative office and homes of Alternative's leaders. Fearful for the safety of the organization's staff and volunteers, Alternative's leaders pressured UN officials and the Ivoirian government to investigate these attacks, resulting in the posting of UN peacekeepers and Ivoirian military outside Alternative's office in Abidjan (Thomann 2014, pp. 183–187). These events shook defenders of gender and sexual diversity who closely monitor local political developments. The rise of political homophobia in Côte d'Ivoire can be directly linked to journalists' use of digital media to cast doubt on LGBTI organizing and the French government's intentions in giving Alternative a grant.

Behind the Mask: Linking LGBTI Activists throughout Africa

African LGBTI social movement organizations creatively use digital media to mobilize their constituents to participate in protests, to publicize new campaigns, to drum up support for victims of violence, and to forge

connections with potential funders. Increasingly, some LGBTI movement organizations have begun specializing in using digital strategies and media to advance movement goals. Movement organizations' specialization gives other organizations the opportunity to focus on specific programs for constituents, to develop effective law-reform campaigns, to stage impromptu protests quickly, and to provide infrastructure and organizational expertise to emerging activist organizations (Levitsky 2007). In some cases, organizations concentrate on providing services or running campaigns in a specific geographic area, such as a neighbourhood, town, or city. In countries like South Africa in which the LGBTI movement field contains numerous LGBTI activist organizations, organizational specialization can relieve other groups of the need to provide multiple services and run many campaigns, which can exhaust organizations' resources and tire dedicated volunteers. In addition, movement specialization can help prevent or mitigate 'turf' disputes between organizations, as activists become familiar with where other organizations work and the strategies they use (Currier 2011). Behind the Mask emerged as one such organization offering a much-needed service and strengthening a pan-African LGBTI movement's infrastructure through its online presence and transnational activist network.

Based in Johannesburg, South Africa, Behind the Mask concentrated on gathering information about LGBTI activism throughout the continent and publishing original content on its website. Bart Luirink (2000), a Dutch journalist, obtained funding from a Western donor in 2000 to create Behind the Mask as a way to facilitate internet reporting on LGBTI activism in southern Africa. Behind the Mask sponsored online meeting spaces, including a '[queer] woman's chat room', according to Sibusiso, a black lesbian woman and Behind the Mask staff member (interview with Ashley Currier, 28 November 2005, Johannesburg, South Africa).

Behind the Mask supplied information for 'African gays and lesbians, whatever class or ethnicity, or those supporting the rising GLBT-movement on the African continent. . . . [W]ith the help of the information we provide, western GLBT-movements could provide more support for African brothers and sisters' (Alexander 2002, p. 229). Jeremiah, a black gay man and Behind the Mask staff member, explained that Behind the Mask's website was a way of 'reaching people in different countries' (interview with Ashley Currier, 8 November 2005, Johannesburg, South Africa). Sibusiso echoed this notion, stating that Behind the Mask provided 'a voice for the voiceless, the homosexual community in Africa as a whole' (Currier 2012b, p. 127). In some cases, Behind the Mask's digital

strategies played an important role in the lives of ordinary LGBTI people. Ndumiso, a black lesbian woman and Behind the Mask staff member, recalled a 'case in Egypt where a gay guy was in prison, and this lawyer found out about it from [Behind the Mask's] [web]site. He actually contacted us and needed more articles on what was happening there. And we had a contact in Egypt that he could talk to. So we got him in contact with that guy, and the [arrested] guy was out of jail later because they worked together' (interview with Ashley Currier, 27 October 2005, Johannesburg, South Africa). Ndumiso believed that this unnamed Egyptian gay man might have languished in prison if an interested lawyer had not stumbled on information about this arrest on Behind the Mask's website, which prompted him to lend assistance.

Behind the Mask's digital network of African LGBTI activists uniquely positioned the organization's staff as experts on the state of gender and sexual diversity organizing in different countries. Some Northern donors prevailed on Behind the Mask staff to share their insights on fledgling activist organizations. In other words, donors asked the organization to vet 'newer organizations for donor funding. Donors occasionally asked Behind the Mask to verify the existence, reputation, and visibility of new movement organizations that applied for funding' (Currier 2012b, p. 138). However, this situation placed Behind the Mask, an organization capable of securing donor funds, 'in an unequal power relationship with new or struggling LGBT[I] movement organizations' (Currier 2012b, p. 138). Staff recognized and worked to reduce these inter-organizational disparities. Nevertheless, staff members were proud of the close working relationships they had with different donors, hoping that these relationships would benefit other African LGBTI organizations.

Although Behind the Mask successfully secured external donor funding for its work, funders eventually withdrew support from the organization, resulting in its closure. Thuli Madi, former director of Behind the Mask, stated:

> You know, the thing about Behind the Mask is that our primary product is the website and us updating the whole world, what's happening in different countries. And with the social networks, everyone is doing that. I think at the last board meeting we really had to address the question of whether Behind the Mask, you know, is complete or has actually met its purpose. Because the myth, initially in 2000, 2009 was whether homosexuality was African or not. I think we've [dispelled the myth] with the stories that we carry on our website in different countries. People are actually updating on what's

> happening in their countries (Interview with Julie Moreau, 5 March 2012, Johannesburg, South Africa).

According to Madi, social media displaced Behind the Mask as an important source of information about African LGBTI organizing and issues, resulting in donors' loss of enthusiasm for funding the organization. While Madi insisted that the organization had fulfilled its primary role, she was doubtful about its overall impact. She asserted, 'You know, there's still a need for us to actually enter into dialogue with the South African Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equality [on the issue of] hate crimes or corrective rape.' She further expressed uncertainty about the reliability of information coming from the LGBTI movement and the national government about LGBTI issues. She stated, 'It's disappointing because we do media and we do other offline projects, but we need to know, what have they done? I mean, I cannot count on the report that I read over the weekend, which is updated. They haven't really done anything, except the Western Cape you know, with their 777 campaign, hate crimes and stuff.'[1] Madi's statements suggest that digital activism is powerful when activists are well resourced and positioned to generate reliable information.

When Behind the Mask suspended its operation, the website, which contained information about LGBTI organizations in different African countries and original reporting in English and French, disappeared as well, disappointing activists and allies around the world. Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action archivists acquired some of Behind the Mask's files and are cataloguing the organization's contents in their collections. Behind the Mask's disappearance suggests that relying too much on digital strategies and media can weaken African LGBTI movement organizations. In addition, digital social media can erode the important of LGBTI movement organizations like Behind the Mask that stake their reputations on serving as online repositories for African LGBTI activism.

Luleki Sizwe: Digital Media and Black South African Lesbians' Anti-rape Organizing

Digital strategies figure prominently in internal movement disputes about how South African LGBTI activist organizations should respond to anti-lesbian rape and violence. Within LGBTI movement politics, there is much debate about how to understand and present the issue of violence against LGBTI people. Some groups emphasize the importance of presenting a

unified image, insisting on a singular message about movement priorities. These activists fear that a fringe movement element will overwhelm mainstream movement messages. In social movement studies parlance, this is what some scholars term the 'negative radical flank effect', which can erode movement support, resources, membership, and audiences (Haines 1984, p. 32). Activists involved with unpopular movements may try to avoid the radical flank effect altogether by taking great care with the movement's public profile. Controlling the movement's public image and neutralizing potential dissident elements are ways that social movement organizations ensure that there is identity consistency within the movement (Currier 2010). How South African LGBTI movement organizations mobilized around anti-lesbian violence mattered immensely to activists because the material consequences of such mobilization could include re-victimizing black lesbian survivors of anti-lesbian violence. In addition, when African LGBTI movement organizations deploy digital strategies and sensationalist images of LGBTI Africans as vulnerable victims transnationally to pressure national governments to take their demands seriously, they can become unwitting participants in transnational narratives that position the entire continent of Africa as desperately 'homophobic' and Northern audiences as the 'saviours' of African LGBTI people (Wahab 2016).

Black lesbians living in South African townships faced the everyday possibility of anti-lesbian violence (Swarr 2012). Anti-lesbian violence in South Africa targeted black lesbian women for bodily injury and humiliation. This form of violence took a material form that black lesbian activists dreaded. Many black lesbians feared that strangers, acquaintances or even family members would harass, abuse or rape them. Black lesbian activists find this violence to be particularly upsetting, given the fact that South Africa has one of the world's most progressive constitutions (Gevisser 2000; Croucher 2011). Ratified in 1994, the constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Since then, lawmakers have decriminalized homosexuality and legalized same-sex marriage (Judge et al. 2008). However, no law treats violence against gender and sexual minorities as a hate crime (Wesley 2012), although law-makers were considering such a law in 2014 (Bendix 2014). We understand anti-lesbian violence as both homophobic and misogynistic violence stemming from colonial- and apartheid-era inequalities (Gqola 2007; Muholi 2004).

Mobilization against anti-lesbian violence has continued over the last few years, especially in response to the rape and murder of several black lesbians. In February 2006, Zoliswa Nkonyana was a young black lesbian woman

who was killed by a group of men in Khayelitsha, a Cape Town township, because of her sexuality. The circumstances of Nkonyana's murder mirrored the psychological and physical insecurity that many black lesbians faced daily. On 7 July 2007, Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Massooa, two black lesbian activists, were found raped and murdered in Soweto; their murders sparked the formation of the 777 campaign by LGBTI activists to stop violence against gender and sexual minorities. In April 2008, Eudy Simelane, a member of Banyana, the national women's soccer team, was murdered. On April 24, 2011, Noxolo Nogwaza, a black lesbian activist, was murdered outside Johannesburg. We enumerate the deaths of these women not to exaggerate the threat of anti-lesbian violence but to humanize the women who lost their lives to violence.

Efforts to publicize anti-lesbian violence in South Africa entered a transnational phase in 2010 when Ndumie Funda, a black lesbian woman who lives in Gugulethu, sought signatures through a Change.org website that demanded a face-to-face meeting with South African Minister of Justice Jeffrey Thamsanqa Radebe. Funda is the founder of Luleki Sizwe, whose stated mission is to provide safe haven for black lesbian survivors of anti-lesbian rape. Luleki Sizwe takes its name from the names of two black lesbian survivors of anti-lesbian rape. According to Funda, Luleki Sizwe also 'means to discipline the nation constructively.... Luleki of Luleki Sizwe means to discipline and Sizwe means nation so that is where the name came from' (interview with Julie Moreau, July 15, 2011, Cape Town, South Africa). The severe beating and rape of Millicent Gaika motivated Funda to take her campaign transnationally. After Gaika's rapist was released on bail for an equivalent sum of less than US$10, Funda wrote to Minister Radebe, asking him to declare anti-lesbian rape a hate crime. He did not respond.

Using Luleki Sizwe's name, Funda put up a petition on Change.org toward the end of 2010 (Luleki Sizwe 2010). Funda designed the petition so that for each signature the petition received, Change.org sent one email to Minister Radebe. The petition garnered 100 000 signatures from 163 countries in less than six weeks and eventually solicited 171 000 signatures from 175 countries. Funda recalled when a South African government official contacted her and pleaded, '"We can't even get our own emails. Can you stop now?" And I said, "Uh uh. We are not going to stop." We flooded their emails... their fax machines; they couldn't breathe.' Funda wanted the Ministry of Justice to take action on anti-lesbian violence. She warned government officials,

> If you are not giving me a date by January [for a meeting], we're gonna hit you [with more correspondence] . . . I am serious, because you are busy with this guy who came and plotted his wife to be killed in South Africa,[2] [instead of working on] the actual issues here in South Africa. People are not going to invest in South Africa. . . . So that is when they came to their senses.

Funda stated that government officials responded to the online petition, barrage of email and fax correspondence, and telephone calls by telling Funda, '"You might be tiny, but you are powerful." We said, "We might be tiny. We might not have the funding—being funded by one funder—but we can do the work."' The quantity of support on the petition motivated the minister to meet with Funda and pledge to take action. According to Funda, 'for the first time in our history, so to speak, the government that we voted [for] has sat down with us'.

The petition portrays black South African lesbians as facing a dire situation. It states, 'This heinous crime is prolific in South Africa, especially in the "townships". Most of the victims are tortured, grievously assaulted and sometimes murdered! They are also prone to getting HIV/AIDS from the assault, and many of them commit suicide as a result of the "corrective rape".'

The petition also provides some evidence to substantiate how urgent this request is:

- '31 lesbian women have been murdered because of their sexuality.'
- 'More than 10 lesbians a week are raped or gang raped in Cape Town alone.'
- '150 women are raped every day in South Africa.'
- 'For every 25 men accused of rape in South Africa, 24 walk free.'

In addition to using the statistics to elicit support for the campaign against anti-lesbian violence, Luleki Sizwe circulated photos of Millicent Gaika's bruised and battered body after her sexual assault. These photos confirmed the defencelessness of black lesbian women. Commenting on Luleki Sizwe's digital-media strategy, Henriette Gunkel (2013) argues that the 'petition has the effect of sensationalizing the crimes and exploiting the "victims" for the publicity value of their images. It also ignores the many organizations and activists that for decades have been working against hate crime and gender-based violence more generally' (p. 70).

Not all South African LGBTI activist organizations agreed with Luleki Sizwe's strategy to emphasize the vulnerability of black lesbians in their Change.org plea. Triangle Project, the oldest LGBTI movement

organization in South Africa, objected to how Luleki Sizwe portrayed anti-lesbian violence in the petition. In fact, activists involved with the Triangle Project decided not to sign or endorse any online petitions condemning anti-lesbian rape. Triangle Project activists claimed that using images of battered lesbians' bodies was 'unethical' and 'sensationalist'. In a press release denouncing the tactic of using battered women's bodies to generate publicity for 'corrective rape', the Triangle Project stated 'If you read carefully through the online petitions and the articles associated with these campaigns, you will find that the voices of survivors are largely absent. Once again black women in Africa are being cast as voiceless victims, as voiceless faces' (Triangle Project 2011). This statement ties the depicted vulnerability of black lesbians to the historic objectification and dehumanization of women of African descent unable to stand up for themselves. Activists with the Triangle Project sought to intervene in the misinterpretation of black lesbian women and move beyond the portrayal of black lesbians as vulnerable and unable to defend themselves.

The press release also contested the term 'corrective rape'. According to the press release: 'We need to be careful of creating a false division between the categories "lesbian" and "woman" and "anti-lesbian" and "anti-woman".' Activists with the Triangle Project thought that these distinctions segmented anti-lesbian violence from violence against women, preventing activists from responding to all forms of violence against women.

In a country in which the media and conservative political parties have demonized lesbians for allegedly corrupting young women and abusing children, black lesbian activists worry about their public representation. Repairing black lesbians' cultural reputations in South Africa was a priority for black lesbian activists. Within this framework, the Triangle Project's objections to the use of graphic photos of black lesbians' hurt bodies make sense; the digital strategy of using black women's bodies to assign political urgency to anti-lesbian rape was counterproductive because it reinforced the notion of black lesbians' vulnerability. In this case, digital strategies allowed organizations access to global Northern funds and support, but such access unfolded in the absence of accountability mechanisms regarding the funds' use and potential exploitation of survivors' faces and personal narratives of violence. Thus, while digital activism may be effective in eliciting domestic governmental action, activists may lose control over circulating movement discourses under increased domestic and transnational attention; these discourses can feed into racist characterizations of citizens of African countries as 'homophobes'.

Conclusion

Our exploration of digital strategies in African LGBTI organizing reveals that the potency of digital activism comes with potential drawbacks. First, digital activism can fuel political homophobia. Through generating increased attention to the issue of sexuality, digital strategies and transnational attention can shift political incentives and prompt governments to speak out on the issue of homosexuality. Second, while digital activism can provide organizations with access to funding and therefore redistribute funds from the global North to the global South, it can also generate a reliance on one form of activism for funding. When Northern donors decided that specialized knowledge of African LGBTI issues was no longer necessary because of new sources such as social media, they withdrew their funding for Behind the Mask, resulting in the loss of valuable information for African LGBTI people and movements. Finally, digital activism can allow one framing of an issue to gain transnational prominence, especially when this perspective taps into transnational stereotypes. In the case of anti-lesbian rape, digital activism can allow organizations to put forward a particular framing of an issue that resonates with anti-African global common sense in order to procure funds and pursue their goals. This framing not only reinforces global Northern dominance but also obscures important debate on how to eradicate anti-lesbian rape and violence against women and gender and sexual minorities.

Notes

1. LGBTI activists initiated the 07-07-07 campaign in 2007 to stop violence against gender and sexual minorities after the rapes and murders of two black lesbian activists.
2. Funda is referring to the murder of Anni Dewani, a Swedish national, on South African soil in 2011. Allegation of a murder-for-hire plot against her husband Shrien Dewani made headlines in South Africa and internationally.

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CHAPTER 12

A Resilient Unwanted Civil Society: The Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe Use of Facebook as Alternative Public Sphere in a Dominant Homophobic Society

Nhamo A. Mhiripiri and Sithandazile B. Moyo

Queer gender and sexuality is largely condemned in the mainstream heterosexual Zimbabwean media and culture. Politicians have over the years politicized queer identities and sexuality to win over what is perceived to be a homophobic majority. President Robert Mugabe is probably Africa's most articulate and virulent critic of homosexuality and queer culture. The civil society organization Gays and Lesbians Association of Zimbabwe (GALZ) represents a social movement that has struggled to put its issues into the public sphere, at times winning cases in Zimbabwean courts of law. It is a social movement for lesbian, gays, bisexual,

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transgendered, transvestite and other so-called 'queer' sexuality and identities. These are social and individual identities that challenge but still co-exist with heterosexuality. The latter is undoubtedly the dominant preferred social, sexual and gender orientation for both males and females. Even though homosexuality had been previously discussed in Zimbabwe, it gained more public discussion when Mugabe called gays and lesbians 'worse than dogs and pigs'. It is nearly unimaginable people of alternative gender and sexuality to heterosexuality can openly organize and articulate their interests in a dominant homophobic patriarchal culture such as Zimbabwe. GALZ struggles to publish its ideas in the mainstream media and is technically banned on national radio and television. New Information Communication Technologies and Facebook are nonetheless offering alternative spaces of information, debate and discussion for this marginalized group. The study focuses on how GALZ uses Facebook as an alternative platform of communication.

The GALZ subaltern civil society organization was formed in 1990 to offer a communication and advocacy platform for the Zimbabwean queer community. The group planned to organize social events of interest to its members and to provide a drop-in centre for accessing relevant videos and literature. Initially, due to the homophobic nature of the majority of Zimbabweans, the organization tried to be as discreet and secretive as possible. The year 1995, when GALZ was banned from displaying literature at the 'Human Rights and Justice' Zimbabwe International Book Fair in Harare (ZIBF), projected homosexuality in Zimbabwe to local and global media headlines (Dunton and Palmberg 1996; Shaw 2005, p. 91). Previously GALZ was involved in HIV and AIDS campaigns and challenging homophobia. When GALZ failed to publish its counselling advert with the *Daily Gazette* newspaper, and suffered from government attacks, the organization became much more daring and confrontational, hence the 1995 attempt to exhibit at the book fair. The publicity that surrounded the attacks on GALZ and President Robert Mugabe's insults drew local and international attention to the organization. In 1996 GALZ applied once again to exhibit at the ZIBF, but government imposed a ban. GALZ resorted to court action and won the right to participate. In spite of the court victory the GALZ stand was trashed by attackers. By 1997, GALZ had transformed from being a predominantly white, middle class social club to an activist organization representative of the social, class and racial mix in Zimbabwe. GALZ has tried to participate in various public fora, including the 1999 Constitution process.

The GALZ Information and Communication department produces and disseminates literature about Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual, Intersexual and Queer (LGTBIQ) life in the country and elsewhere. These include the *Gazette* (a quarterly magazine), *Whazzup* (a bi-monthly magazine), special reports, books and booklets. This department is also supposed to manage social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and the Website.

Since the late 1990s, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) sexuality—also to be referred to here as homosexual or queer sexuality—has been intermittently addressed in the Zimbabwean media. Reports intensified in the late 1990s when the late Reverend Canaan Banana—Zimbabwe's first ceremonial President when Robert Mugabe was still Prime Minister—was brought to trial on 11 counts of sodomy and indecent assault, including assault on his aide, Jefta Dube. Banana was imprisoned and the Zimbabwean media took the opportunity to condemn homosexuality and the victimization of a weaker citizen by a powerful politician. Canaan Banana died in disgrace after serving time in prison, and he remains an embarrassment to the Mugabe government.

Methodology

This chapter consists of a comprehensive literature review of how Zimbabwean media has reported on homosexuality in Zimbabwe since the 1990s when the topic became visible in the public sphere. Online archival posts and comments from 2013 to 2015 on the GALZ Facebook page were critiqued. Critical discourse analysis of the postings or lack of on the GALZ website is useful in establishing whether or not the publication of discussions and information on the GALZ Facebook page has translated to the opening of an alternative social media and communicative space. Topics for discussion are selected from the GALZ Facebook website from 2013 up to 2015, with selection based on topical issues of the day such as the castigation of homosexuality by Morgan Tsvangirai, who most in the local queer society had expected to be considerate about their situation and status. The discussion on the adoption of the new Zimbabwe constitution and the rights it confers to those belonging to queer society is another case. Interviews with members of Zimbabwean queer society are then quoted, although in most cases the names of respondents are made up to protect the individuals. This is because Zimbabwe is still largely a homophobic society and verbal persecutions of the group are common, from both ordinary heterosexual Zimbabweans and influential politicians, including the State President Robert Mugabe.

Interviews were conducted with the GALZ Director to find out the impact of Facebook in articulating queer issues in Zimbabwe. Snowballing was employed to identify Zimbabwean gays and lesbians, and questionnaires were administered to them to ascertain their attitudes towards being excluded from the mainstream media. Media student Sthandazile Bianca Moyo who has a network of gay and lesbian friends, amongst them fellow students, would first identify these friends and then invite them into participating in face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions. Some of these students also mentioned use of privately run Facebook accounts for personal communication with like-inclined people, and which they have more control over as they can 'block' undesirable communicators, especially those who are homophobic.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Since the mid 1990s Zimbabwe's state policy has projected the most articulate homophobic stance of any African state. There is some critical literature that has addressed the notion of homosexuality in Zimbabwe; this literature argues that, contrary to popular opinion, homosexuality was a 'silent', 'unspoken' sexual practice found in both traditional and pre-colonial African society, albeit confined to the 'private sphere' just like most matters of sexuality, including open exhibition of heterosexual affinities (Epprecht 1998; Shaw 2005). In an article on the representation of queer inclination in the writings of fiction writer Dambudzo Marechera and in Zimbabwean literature in general, Drew Shaw makes a brief but informative exploration and critique of how Zimbabwean print media has reported on the subject. However, there has not been any systematic extensive study of how the mainstream media represents the complex topic of homosexuality or queer genders, and this chapter does not pretend to make such an ambitious submission.

GALZ as an organization was banned from articulating its ideas on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) channels, while the same channels tolerated discussion on gay-bashing. GALZ were not extended the right of reply since they were denied interviews and appearance on phone-ins. The state-controlled ZBC operated as a virtual monopoly until two new stations were licensed in 2012. GALZ were also restricted from advertising in the national press. Most mainstream newspapers belong to the state controlled Zimpapers chain, with titles such as *The Chronicle*, *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail*.

In 1996 GALZ challenged its Book Fair ban through the High Court of Zimbabwe, where they won the right to exhibit. In spite of the court victory, homophobic youths torched their literature and ransacked their stand. The police watched without making any arrests. The 'moral majority' appeared to have won for the moment, but the Zimbabwean public and government woke up in 1997 to the huge scandal and embarrassment resulting in the imprisonment of Reverend Canaan Banana. Mugabe would still castigate homosexuality at any public gathering, especially at funerals of top government and party officials. It has now become a tradition that salvoes against homosexuals increase in intensity whenever there are general elections in Zimbabwe. ZANU PF fought elections on an anti-white, anti-British and anti-homosexual platform, and interestingly, opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai had to back-pedal in 2011 after he attested on BBC's *Newsnight* with Gavin Esler that he supported gay rights. Tsvangirai was quoted as saying gay rights were 'a human right' that should be respected in Zimbabwe. 'To me, it's a human right . . . It's a very controversial subject in my part of the world. My attitude is that I hope the constitution will come out with freedom of sexual orientation, for as long as it does not interfere with anybody.' State-controlled media had a field day, reproducing Tsvangirai's pro-gay statements in order to discredit him in the eyes of a Zimbabwean population largely assumed to be conservative and homophobic. For reasons of political expediency he was later to publicly scorn and discredit homosexuality, saying it was not even a debatable issue worth inclusion in the national constitution. His ambivalence arose from a desire to satisfy both a presumably majority homophobic Zimbabwe voting constituency and a pro-gay donor European audience.

According to Drew Shaw (2005) Mugabe epitomized a 'virulent new homophobic movement within pan-Africanism', when he condemned homosexuality as 'anathema to African culture', inciting people to 'purge Zimbabwe of this foreign vice'. Mainstream media and Zimbabwean church organizations supported Mugabe's 'crusade'. Shaw observes:

> The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and national newspapers such as *The Herald, The Sunday Mail, The Chronicle* and the *Sunday News* depicted homosexuals as corrupt, immoral, un-African, deviant, and perverse. *Moto* magazine (affiliated to the Catholic Church) went further, alleging that gays were involved in satanic cults, barbaric rituals, child molestation, ritual rape, and murder. 'Perverts swell satanic ranks' and

> 'Get out of the closet so that we know who you are!' featured as articles in the September-October (1995) edition, which was almost hysterical in its homophobia (Shaw 2005, p. 92).

GALZ presented perhaps the most resilient fortress in defence of GLBTI rights in spite of deliberate vicious attempts to silence that besieged community. Queer civil society mounted a resolute local and international campaign for recognition, which included legal battles in Zimbabwean courts.

Midlands State University student, Sithandazile Bianca Moyo (2015), studied the use of Facebook by young homosexuals. This is the study on which most of the findings in this chapter are based. A recent study based on critical discourse analysis of Zimbabwean news publications from January to March 2014 reveals that there is some measure of restraint in the way local journalists write about homosexuality and queer genders in general, although this does not imply an open tolerance of these alternative gendered cultures (Mhiripiri 2014). The International Federation of Journalists African Chapter commissioned Mhiripiri to study press reports and conduct interviews with Zimbabwean journalists on their perceptions of homosexuality and queer sexualities. Some 40 male and female Zimbabwean journalists from different media stables including five freelancers reflected their own problems and difficulties in practising within an intolerant socio-cultural and political order. The journalists were randomly sampled from the state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, the Zimpapers chain, the privately owned radio station ZiFM, newspapers such as Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe's *Daily News*, Alpha Media Holding's *News Day*, and the online newspaper www.newzimbabwe.com. The study concluded that media houses do not have policies on reporting queer sexualities, and journalists often confuse terminologies and identities associated with the various queer identities.

The journalists' own responses also show that there is a lot of caution, fear of stigmatization and alienation in the case that they openly write about homosexuality in an accommodative way. The main causes of the fear and even self-censorship are cited as the cultural context, heteronormative patriarchy, tradition, religion, and political pressure from the openly homophobic central political leadership of President Mugabe and ZANU PF (Mhiripiri 2014).

Zimbabwe's new Constitution, adopted in 2013, is ambiguous about homosexuality. Different people use different sections to either recognize or

reject homosexuality and any forms of gendered queerness. 'Persons of the same sex are prohibited from marrying each other', posits Section 78(2) on marriage rights. Although it bans marriages between same-sex couples, the section is vague on the prohibition of consensual same-sex sexual relations. Theoretically, therefore, gay couples can legally engage in consensual sex outside the institution of marriage. Gay and lesbian activists paradoxically cite other sections of the same constitution to argue for their sexual orientation and gendered identities. Citable sections in the new constitution include Section 49, on the right to liberty, Section 51, on the right to human dignity, Section 57, on the right to privacy, and Section 56, on equality and non-discrimination. For example, Section 56(3) reads categorically:

> Every person has the right not to be treated in an unfairly discriminatory manner on such grounds as their nationality, race, colour, tribe, place of birth, ethnic or social origin, language, class, religious belief, political affiliation, opinion, custom, *culture, sex, gender*, marital status, age, pregnancy, disability or economic or social status, or whether they were born in or out of wedlock (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013) [Emphasis added].

Since homosexual and queer movements arguably constitute sub-cultures at least in Western countries and partly in South Africa, arguments for non-discrimination of such cultural groups have been proffered (Appiah 1994, pp. 149–164). It is arguable that the anti-gay, lesbian, transgender rhetoric associated with Zimbabwean politicians and mainstream media denies these categories recognition as gender and cultural categories. Zimbabwe is not the only African country pressed to attend to issues pertaining to GLBTIQ. While South Africa has a constitution which allows for free choice in gender and sexual orientation, it is confronted with a homophobic moral majority some of whom have taken the law into their own hands and have insulted, violently attacked, used 'corrective rape' or lynched deviants to heteronormativity. Uganda has featured in the international media in the recent past for its Anti-Homosexuality Bill which President Museveni signed into law in 2014. The repertoire of pro and anti- GLBT activists in Uganda is remarkable. Western conservative Christian churches are in alliance with Ugandan politicians and policy-makers, while critics of the Bill included local activists, international political leaders and the usually conservative denominations such as the Catholic Church (Strand 2013). The Uganda media has reported hesitantly, at times

reluctantly, 'in settings where policymakers' (homophobic) opinions and public opinion remain largely unchanged' (Strand 2013, p. 276).

Our theoretical point of departure is that identity (including gender identity), culture and tradition are socially constructed phenomena. They are transient and not neatly bounded, fixed or frozen. Likewise, identities cannot be pigeonholed, essentialized or homogenized. Identities of all sorts emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, hence they are 'more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity—an identity . . . without internal differentiation' (Hall 1996, p. 4). Narrative is central to the structuring of media stories and the realities depicted in the stories are representational. The media trade in constructed images of people and in their possible identification. Kwame Appiah notes that constructed narrative 'naturalizes' gender differences as normal but this does not ensure their permanence. In such instances histories, biologies, and cultural affinities are invented, scripted and structured by conventions of narrative even though the world never quite permanently conforms to such machination (Appiah 1992, p. 283). This is partly because selected literary images are changeable and it is up to writers and people who contest the images to redefine them in ways that they deem to be more realistic, constructive and liberating to the society in question (Grossberg 1996, p. 90).

Theories of culture and identity are relevant to the discussion of homosexuality and queer identities. It is generally accepted in critical scholarship that identities and culture are individual and social constructs, and that subjects of identity have the prerogative to define themselves in ways they best prefer, although others also can define and describe them. The programme of humanization is also central to the discourses and narratives on identity. Concepts of inter-culturalism, cross-culturalism or multiculturalism assume that there is cultural parity and self-determinism, but therein lies the problem when one group assumes some ideological or moral self-righteousness that enables them to exclude others from self-expression. Such exclusions can be predicated on ideas about the fight against cultural imperialism or cultural pollution. Some homophobic African cultures justify their suppression or exclusion of homosexual expressions on the basis of fighting against negative, corrupting, foreign cultural values. It is paradoxical when one group silences another citing protection of its own values. Culture and tradition have been used to justify the subjugation of marginal gender identities such as those of

gays, lesbians and the transgendered, and a power-knowledge discourse with corresponding representational images has also been instrumental in maintaining and reinforcing the status quo, the press and mainstream media appearing as specific examples. The construction of gender difference hence raises discursive implications with the possibility of the dominant power conveniently constructing its other as a repressed and desired difference (Grossberg 1996, p. 91). Gender difference is thus built into the overall social system of controlling 'deviant' sexualities in diverse areas such as the organization of the production of goods and services, kinship and family, emotional relationships and the minutiae of daily life. Arguments about cultural imperialism and gender deviance and intolerance can only stand in contradistinction to notions that identities are social constructs in constant change. This study is also cognizant of queer theory, and the public sphere and alternative public sphere concepts.

The Articulation of GLBT in Contemporary Zimbabwean Press Reports

Same-sex sexual relations have typically been reported on as cases of 'sodomy' which come into the public sphere when an aggrieved party to the act reports to the police. This does not mean that there are no cases of consensual homosexuality. The cases prominently reported on in the various Zimbabwean newspapers since January 2013 are on the supposed inclusion or exclusion of homosexual rights in the new Zimbabwe constitution, opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai's initial embrace and later rejection of homosexual rights, ZANU PF supporters' physical attacks of GALZ members attending GLBTIQ functions, the citizen's arrest and subsequent court case of transgender activist Ricky Nathanson, the prosecution and acquittal of GALZ leadership for operating an 'unregistered' organization; several court cases on non-consensual sodomy and President Mugabe's public support of Museveni's anti-homosexual law. At least one of these stories originally written as hard news inspired follow-up stories and opinion articles. Incidentally, most of these cases are posted on GALZ websites to encourage debate or discussion. Elsewhere Mhiripiri (2014, p. 21) has noted

> It is indeed striking that most of the stories on 'homophobia' are thrust into the public sphere and mediated after first appearing as arrests and court cases. This alone might be an indictment on Zimbabwe's tolerance of homosexuality to those who believe in gay rights as human rights.

> Alternatively, to those who believe homosexuality should be stamped out as un-African and anathema, Zimbabwe probably represents a frontier for the preservation of values and attitudes that characterize Africanness and propriety. Once again, the various stories pose difficulties in classifying what constitutes 'homosexuality' when the act and exhibition is fraught with legal and cultural complications of all manners.

The press reports were varied in their treatment of homosexuality issues, with some hard news tolerant and empathetic while most feature articles were condemnatory and intolerant. Critical Discourse Analysis permits the present authors to deduce whether the articles are framed in a homophobic or empathetic or sympathetic manner. The words that set the tone and mood whether to accept or tolerate homosexuality or to alienate and stigmatize those associated with the orientation are noted. These might appear as adjectival or adverbial terms with specific denotative or connotative meaning meant to sway the reader to a final discernible perception.

Some hard news stories used the Nathanson case as an opportunity to clarify issues, dispel misconceptions, and demand that the dignity and privacy of all individuals be recognized, thereby bringing the discourse of human rights and constitutionalism into the argument. GALZ Director Samba Chesterfield rapped the police and the Zimbabwean media for their 'ignorance' on matters of sexuality and gender. Chesterfield emphasized that Nathanson would more aptly be described as transgender rather than gay. The activist presumably insisted on this qualification since there were no obvious and strictly 'homosexual' actions in Nathanson's use of a toilet for women. He also called for the police and the media to undergo 'diversity training' in order for them to outgrow homophobic and transphobic tendencies in future policing and reporting.

In a story in apparent reference to GALZ, Mugabe was quoted:

> We want the youth to grow up knowing that they will mature and marry in the same way as Simba has done, as Omar has done. But there are these despicable groups; I understand we have a homosexual group in this country. I didn't know about it only to be told the day before yesterday about such a group, so we want to investigate who belongs to that group (Mutimukulu 2014, p. 2). (Parts of quotation translated by Mhiripiri from Shona.)

The speech was read as a direct threat to gay activists, and publications such as www.newzimbabwe.com. *The Chronicle* of 3 March went on to publicize the 'threat' in its headlines.

Pronouncements by ZANU PF leaders and ideologues often criticize Western countries for trying to force homosexuality on Zimbabweans and other developing African countries (Mhiripiri 2014). The political opposition the Movement for Democratic change is similarly presented as a purveyor of homosexual interests besides being labelled as a lackey of imperialism.

Journalists, especially those from the state-controlled media, write in support of homophobia, although there is a growing number of tolerant writers. Mhiripiri's research on reporting homophobia in the Zimbabwean media notes,

> While journalists write on homosexual activities especially when they come through as court cases spurred through some prosecution and litigation, there is general apprehension to write on homophobia. The main reasons for the self-censorship are fear of stigmatization and being labelled homosexual in a country perceived to be homophobic. The hegemonic homophobic political system further constrains journalists from freely writing about homosexuality and homophobia. Much as journalists skirt writing on homosexuality and homophobia, they ought to operate from positions of conviction rather than fear. It is also disconcerting that most Zimbabwean journalists are not familiar with the language and diction that refers to the complexities of GLBT and queer sexualities. There is widespread confusion over what homophobia means, and to many the word means the opposite of what it actually means in reality. The main arguments given in Zimbabwe about homophobia are that homosexuality is un-African, and part of Western imperialism. The main problem is when to respect the rights, perceptions and aspirations of a large majority at the expense of cultural minorities such as gays and lesbians. Cultural nationalism in this case flies in the face of the tolerance and multiculturalism liberals would want to imagine. In Zimbabwe homosexuality and queer genders remain fringe cultures and identities, considered by many as freak, taboo and shameful, and the journalists and mainstream media look very unlikely allies of the few but very vocal homosexual and queer activists mainly because the former prefer conformity and social security in a dominant homophobic culture and, again to a considerable extent, an equally homophobic media industry.

In an interview with Sithandazile Moyo, the GALZ Director Chesterfield Samba was hopeful that Facebook would be an effective alternative public sphere for communicating issues related to Gays and Lesbians . . .

> Our assessment is that Facebook has allowed us to interact with individuals in a way that does not necessarily allow for them to reveal their true identity

> thereby giving them the opportunity to express themselves freely and engage in issues that they would not otherwise engage in publicly with their identities revealed. It does provide the people we interact with some sense of security in remaining anonymous. We have thus been able to reach individuals that we cannot meet in our daily work through physical contact and impart information that is helpful to them as they see fit. We are also able to bypass bureaucracy as what plays out in other media platforms such as radio, television and print.

Given the dominance of homophobia in the mainstream media, social media seems to offer an alternative discursive space for the marginalized queer community. This might seem encouraging although the space also appears to be barricaded and intruded upon by traditional homophobic elements. However, the GALZ Facebook page, for a while, offered space for discussion and debate as shown below.

Posts on the GALZ Facebook Page:

Tsvangirai on Homosexuality and the Complexities of Wooing the Heterosexual Moral Electoral Majority

GALZ lost patience with Tsvangirai, Prime Minister in the Government of National Unity, when he repeated his attacks on homosexuals just days before the 16 March 2013 referendum on the Constitution. Miles Rutendo Tanhira's article entitled 'Zimbabwe LGBTs reject premier who turned on them', linked from 76Crime.co.zw, bases its story on condemnations made by alleged 'infuriated' members of the community 'interviewed on a social network'. There, GALZ Facebook has no substantial responses to this link or article. A lonely post by one Mazvita Ruwambara reads 'Hie my dear friends'. The unanswered greeting reads like a desperate attempt to urge discussion or debate, but in vain. There is indication the article was 'shared' by two visitors to the page, and nine others 'liked' its publication. However, within Tanhira's article those 'interviewed on a social network' acknowledge they are a minority as compared to the electoral moral majority Tsvangirai was ostensibly courting. Nonetheless that minority was now threatening to reject Tsvangirai in any future election. General elections were anticipated the same year as the adoption of the new Constitution. The 'social network' on which members were

interviewed is kept secret, perhaps as a measure to protect the discursive platform and alternative public sphere from further intrusion and possible attack from homophobic participants such as 'Felix' whose references are presented further below in this chapter. Indeed, when researcher Sthandazile Bianca Moyo interviewed GALZ Director Chesterfield Samba he disclosed that the organization uses Facebook alongside other social media platforms such as the GALZ website, Instagram and Twitter (Moyo 2015). The GALZ statement is also quoted copiously in the Tanhira article:

> We deplore the Prime Minister's statements, coming sadly on the eve of International Women's Day Celebrations and just days before Zimbabweans vote in a referendum.
>
> It is our view that political leaders in Zimbabwe continue to pander to public prejudices against LGBTI individuals through public statements that justify the exclusion and abuse of anyone suspected of being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex.
>
> GALZ shares the common desire of Zimbabweans for freedom, justice and equality, as promoted in the Preamble of the first draft of the Constitution. GALZ believes that, in recognising the diversity and rights of all people in Zimbabwe, we should also recognise that some Zimbabweans are attracted to people of the same sex.
>
> We believe that the Constitution is not the appropriate forum to give effect to the private beliefs held by some that same-sex couples should not be married.

One correspondent called Felix seems to have been removed and blocked after posting offensive insults. The reader can deduce that Felix posted insults by reading other contributors' references to him. It seems the GALZ Facebook administrator has deleted the offensive material as he comments: Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ); 'Felix you must be gay otherwise whats your problem with gay people'. The GALZ administrator psychoanalytically concludes Felix practices gay-bashing as a way of suppressing his own homosexual orientation. In fact, Felix appears notorious and a pest to the GALZ Facebook page since he is continuously censured, admonished or rebuked by the administrator. For example in a discussion following another leading story from 2013 entitled 'Zimbabwe smear campaign targets alleged gay students' the administrator chides, 'Felix get a hobby'.

Constitutional Debates on the GALZ Facebook page

Another vibrant discussion involving about 29 comments was triggered by a shared link to an article written by Sebastian Mhofu entitled 'Zimbabwe Parliament receives draft Constitution' sourced from VOA.com. The GALZ administrator initiated discussion on 5 February 2013, asking, 'Zimbabwean LGBTI people, friends and allies what are your thoughts on the prohibition of same sex marriages, sharing is caring . . . ' The GALZ administrator assumes the role of a moderator in the debate, occasionally posing questions prompting for further clarification. One Yvonne Vonnie Rue Chademana observes she supports gay rights but not marriage. She takes a conservative position insisting 'marriage is a sacred thing meant for a man and a woman', and formal marriage is about 'a little paper anyway to two people in love who wanna spend the rest of their lives together'. Lobbying for constitutional support of gay marriage would be 'just taking it too far'. Radical commentators believe the gay community must fight for full rights, including those on marriage. They charge that 'Victory is certain'. Ntokozo Ray Dube argues 'Marriage is between two people who love one another; it can be between a man & woman, two women or two men. So everyone deserves to marry the person they love. This (is) a battle we have to win; we fighting for what rightfully belongs to us.' Tinoashira Peter Govinda Chikuni assumes a fairly postmodern and legalistic approach noting;

> All for it! The various arguments against same-sex marriages always end up reaching a blank wall when put to a test of simple logic. As for whether it should be done in Church, that argument is moot. No one can and should ever force a religious group into doing something against its tenets. So no forcing churches to carry out same-sex weddings!

Chikuni further argues for the prioritization of recognition of gay identities first before championing gay marriage rights. He says,

> The right to marriage is inter-linked to a whole bunch of other rights, but it can't exist on its own. The recognition of same-sex and alternate gender identities has to take place first, both legally and socially, before we even begin to attempt to advocate for marriage rights . . . My learned advice is fight let's fight for the expansion of the anti-discimination clause in the Constitution . . . I think our best option in light of the final draft of the Constitution is to argue that all the laws that criminalize same-sex relations

> and gender non-conformity infringe on human dignity and equality (the rights to privacy and freedom have been thoroughly shot down by the Supreme Court already as grounds for the recognition of LGBTIA rights). The non-discrimination clauses in the Constitution are not strong enough for us to offer a successful argument. Once those laws are out of the way, it would be relatively easy to petition for the Constitution to be amended to permit same-sex marriage/unions. But I reiterate the words that have been spoken by many on this post, this change will only happen once our community is united, self-empowered, and only when our fellow countrymen have a better understanding of what it truly means to be LGBTIA.

Another contributor who takes an informed legalistic approach is Tonderai Calvin Mukudu, who incidentally qualifies his sexuality as follows: 'For the avoidance of doubt guys, I am very much gay.' He makes his views clear:

> I think there is a misconception, the constitution has not criminalised homosexuality but rather it excludes the right to marry for gay pple. The only document that criminalises homosexuality is the Crimina Law (Codification and Reform) Act, while the S.A constitution is not the yardstick for democracy it is way better than ours in guaranteeing fundamental freedoms. U may never be lucky to get the Constitution amended to include gay marriages but pple r likely to accept a broader non-discrimination clause which encampasses freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. Once discrimination is outlawed it will mean the Marriages Act (Chapter 5.11) will be ultra vires the constitution in as far as it excludes gay marriages. For me civil unions r a good compromise, and they work okay

Ed Manny implodes the argument for gay marriage through his submission that criticizes some poly-amorous homosexuals. He writes,

> focus on helping gay zimbos accept themselves and live productive live not chasing after the next person they will sleep with. most gay people are not ready to commit to one person so i don't think we as the gay community should be fighting for something we are not prepared to even do. i agree with Yvonne. and im speaking as a gay man who know too many gays who are going around town unemployed at 30 looking for boyfriends. tell them being gay shouldn't define you and they should make something out of their lives.

Interestingly, besides the rather mild moralism of Yvonne Vonnie Rue Chademana, there are no hecklers or offensive insults from homophobic commentators. The only submission which appears discordant is that of Cammillious Mugwara who is appealing for introduction to others of his ilk. He or she writes, 'Please galz can you connect me to other gays bcz i m really like this.' Notwithstanding the diversion, debates on the constitution in relation to gay rights are amongst the most vibrant that took place on the GALZ Facebook pages.

The 'Social' Capacity of GALZ Facebook

The page owners of the GALZ Facebook page use this platform to organize events such as dinner parties and meetings. The gays and lesbians mostly use this page to find sexual partners through exchange of numbers and email addresses. However most posts found on this page from January 2015 to April 2015 are insignificant and trivial, so much so that there is no rational debate and the only information being exchanged is about having sexual intercourse. Homophobic people also tended to abuse the site, posting outright insults or other dehumanizing or denigrating material. Some comments are sarcastic and distasteful.

Hate Language and the Collapse of an Alternative Subaltern Public Sphere

Due to abusive language and hate speech that has led practising GLBTI into retreat or hiding, the GALZ Facebook is a lost opportunity. It was ostensibly made to link up LGBTI members, although it was also working as an interface between that community and those of heterosexual or even asexual orientation. There is a level at which the Facebook space functioned as an attempt to reach out to the dominant majority and appeal for acceptance, compassion and understanding. This might have backfired, judging from the way the Facebook page has neglected updating its posts and other publications in the post-2013 period. Researcher Sithandazile Bianca Moyo (2015) has concluded that between January and December 2015 the site was publishing 'insignificant' materials, operating more like a dating site. The dating itself is even critiqued as sarcastic and gross, since those who are asking for partners seem to be heterosexuals poking fun, or the merely voyeuristic who will not be proposing sincerely or with any

meaningful emotional attachment and respect for sex. Rational discussion and debate was possible but it was easily usurped by shrill moralistic and condemnatory or outright abusive voices. This was attested through insightful exchanges on the constitutional provisions of homosexual rights, the denigratory statements from top Zimbabwean politicians such as Tsvangirai or Robert Mugabe, and the attacks and ostracization of members of their community. However self-righteous and moralistic or hurtful and hateful statements intruded on the posts. This resulted in GALZ finding yet more secretive alternative public space for their members. The GALZ Facebook page looks like a derelict abandoned garrison with its crusading army in strategic retreat or repositioning. The LGBTI confess that they are generally afraid to publish their identities or their personal concerns and aspirations on this platform. None of the ten queer students Sthandazile Moyo interviewed was still willing to publish their personal identity on the GALZ site for fear of recrimination or physical attacks. Hounded from the GALZ Facebook page, Zimbabwe's LGBTI community seems to have strategically relocated to other communicative spaces, as shown in the secretive and concealed social media sites mentioned above. They therefore remain resilient in constructing their subaltern public sphere in spite of both state and cultural restrictions on their full participation as full dignified citizens.

The Challenges of Using the GALZ Facebook amongst Midlands State University Homosexuals

One post on the GALZ Facebook page is a link to an article reporting how homosexual students at the Midlands State University were being harassed with threats of exposure through another homophobic Facebook account. MSU is arguably the largest university in Zimbabwe, with more than 22,000 students. Due to the fact that MSU received such attention on the GALZ Facebook, it was reasonably justifiable for the researchers to conduct interviews and focus group discussions with both heterosexual and homosexual students at MSU. Sithandazile Moyo a member of the student community was better placed to conduct snowballing to identify participants and engage them. The researcher conducted focus group discussion with five gays and one lesbian and four heterosexual students at Midlands State University in Gweru. The researcher knew one person who is homosexual who then referred the researcher to the others through a process called snowballing. Group discussions were used to find out how

effective Facebook has been for the homosexual community in articulating their issues. In their responses, several queer respondents from the Midlands State University student community tended to confuse the use of their personal Facebook accounts with that of the GALZ Facebook account. For instance, Respondent A acknowledges Facebook is an easy and effective way to converse with 'close ones'. However, if homophobic people make negative comments Respondent A says, 'I try and ignore them and those that happen to inbox me with negative comments, I block them.' The conflation of use of a purely personal Facebook account and the GALZ account is problematic, and in our reading of responses we deduced the respondents preferred to talk about their personal accounts more than the GALZ account, where they thought they were more vulnerable from homophobic attacks.

A male gay (Respondent B) said,

> I'm a member of the GALZ Facebook page. I just liked the page but I will be lying if l say I have ever posted anything nor like any post because I am scared to be exposed. The page is open for public therefore anyone who views it can see my comments or posts. We all know how the Zimbabwean government is so against us therefore I will never risk my life and come out as long I am residing in Zimbabwe . . .

Despite noting the terror, abuse and isolation that homosexuals face when they visit the GALZ Facebook, he was nostalgic that the platform initially provided a space for healthy interaction and compassionate company before it was invaded by undesirable homophobic people. He intimated that it was even possible to find love partners (see Moyo 2015).

One lesbian Thoko Moyo explained how Facebook is not reliable and safe,

> I used to follow the Facebook page in its infant stages. The administrators used to post significant information about Gays and Lesbians. It was more like a private group. I was happy and felt safe up until one day I received a threatening phone call from an anonymous person threatening to kill me if I participated on the page. The caller told me that he had all the information about me including the address where I reside and I must bear in mind that even if I was murdered no law would (be used to) arrest him because homosexuality is not allowed in Zimbabwe. I could not report the matter to the police in fear of being arrested too for being Lesbian but had no choice but unlike the page . . .

This again reveals how Facebook cannot be regarded as a liberator of Gays and Lesbians, as most users feel unsafe. Information gathered from a focus group discussion with heterosexuals revealed that even those who do not practice homosexuality can participate on the GALZ Facebook page in a bid to continue with the criticism. In the discussion one heterosexual participant remarked that homophobic visitors to the GALZ Facebook page can just insult gays on the page:

> Facebook can... be accessed by someone who is literate; one needs a smartphone with internet connection or a computer again with internet connection. So anyone, regardless of their sexuality, is free to say what they want on the Facebook page, thus they cannot run away from the negative criticism from mainstream media coz it's there even on their page. Therefore I disagree that Facebook has liberated this subaltern group by giving them a space for articulating the issues related to them.

These selected responses capture the general insecurity the GLBTI community, who initially thought had found in the GALZ Facebook a liberated alternative public sphere, now experience. This has led them to opting to use other social media channels that they can control and manage on their own, including private Facebook accounts, Twitter, etc.

Conclusion

Queer sexuality remains a contentious issue in Zimbabwe, which is undoubtedly a very homophobic country as evidenced by the attestations of the country's leading politicians both in government and in opposition. Zimbabwe remains a morally conservative closed society, too entrenched in the homophobic majority's perspective. Tolerance of homosexuality requires a radical revolution in the political and cultural set-up if one believes GLBT tendencies and homosexuality deserve space and expression in the Zimbabwean public sphere. Those who believe in gay and lesbian rights must therefore wage a struggle as other disadvantaged or marginalized groups have done over the years. However, the odds they face will be immense, since they are a minority trying to assert their free will while facing a hostile majority.

A vigorous debate has not yet been initiated in the Zimbabwean public sphere where sensitive matters ought to undergo rational discussion. Traditional African culture restricted discussion of sexual matters to

specific spheres, and the new turn of events, a consequence of the inception of the HIV and AIDS scourge, has thrust gender and sexuality into the public sphere. GALZ has been known to place advertorials and supplements in mainly privately owned newspapers. Such actions have gone without much recrimination in the past. Nonetheless, with President's Mugabe's recent pronouncements against the organization, GALZ might find they have a hard road to travel in their publicity efforts. They risk physical violence. Protection of human life is prudent, especially in situations where the dominant heterosexual culture is comfortable with the repression and concealment of other types of sexuality. Such dominant culture often takes the cosy view that what one does not see does not exist. Going back to basics and thinking about what is right or wrong and what is good or bad for human kind is paramount at this time. Some people argue we are in a highly rational, scientific and amoral world. Free choice, as long as it does not do harm to any other person or to society at large, is therefore acceptable. Logical and rational articulations of decisions ought to be respected, especially with regards to same-sex consensual relations and transgender decisions. However, since human beings are also emotional and subjective entities it is unthinkable to totally exclude personal tastes and preferences. We cannot dictate how people feel, even though we may try to influence them. For instance, the scientific falsity of racial superiority can be asserted but this does not make even the most informed persons desist from racist inclinations and perceptions. What is immoral, moral and amoral needs to be rethought and re-debated, suspending emotions and biases, while being reflexive so that others understand the same said biases.

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CHAPTER 13

Blogging, Feminism and the Politics of Participation: The Case of *Her Zimbabwe*

Shepherd Mpofu

Introduction

The proliferation of the internet has shown promises and 'potentials' of empowering women in ways that are unimaginable in most patriarchal societies. Politics, activism and engagements through technology seem to have been gendered spaces as evidenced by research in the developing world (Anita 2008; Keller 2012; Morahan-Martin 2000). This chapter attempts to demystify this 'silent' myth, especially prevalent in the African context, that the internet, technological activism and political domains are meant for men. It will discuss activism in support of women's issues in Zimbabwe through a single case study approach. The website 'Her Zimbabwe' attempts to empower women as citizens, giving them a platform to speak on issues otherwise ignored in mainstream media or frowned upon by society, using material from citizen journalists, that is bloggers and readers who comment under blog stories which compose an alternative public sphere to the mainstream and, to a certain extent officialized, public

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sphere dominated by mainstream media. 'Her Zimbabwe', as the name suggests, focuses entirely on women's issues giving women, as citizens, a platform to speak and articulate the issues which seem to be ignored by society, industry, policy-makers and the media. The site has a lot of content on women's issues especially from 'feminist' bloggers.

Methodologically this study will use purposive sampling to select material that speaks to issues of women's activism since 2012 and these will be subjected to critical discourse analysis, an analytic approach that critiques power, its distribution and imbalances. Theoretically the chapter is anchored on the issue of the voice in counter-digital public spheres.

There are two main developments that have influenced the way Zimbabweans have addressed the evolution of the socio-economic and political spheres and, in the process, managed to partly disrupt the status quo. Even though the status quo has not been dismantled, the fact that issues that could hitherto not be addressed in public or even in private are now on the menu for public discourses and consumption speaks volumes about this evolution. These two developments, besides education of course, are migration and technology. This chapter explores how the internet has empowered women to discuss and advance a 'feminist' agenda in a setting that has for a long time been favourable to patriarchal configurations where politics, activism and engagements in the technological era have continually been gendered and imagined as male spaces (Harris 2008) This is prevalent especially where technological use and activism are structured by gender. Moreover, this chapter argues that technological advancements and access have opened new vistas for women to advance issues of their collective interest. It is important to add here that there has not been any research on how issues regarding women empowerment, feminism etc. are discussed online especially in the context of Zimbabwe. Most research focuses on the crisis, politics and, if online activism is the area of study, political engagement and the diaspora (D. Moyo 2009; L. Moyo 2009; Mpofu 2013, 2014a, b, 2016). In addition, research from the developed world also helps to cast light on how, at its nascent stages, the internet has predominantly been a male domain (Morahan-Martin 2000; Anita 2008; Keller 2012) and when women have been 'let in' their participation has had different value attached to it (Anita 2008).

Scholars such as Newsom and Lengel (2012, p. 31) have looked at how Arab women have used the internet to advance their cause and realized that 'gendered messages are constructed, essentialized, reconstructed, and made invisible by the consumer media system'. The current set-up of

media in Zimbabwe does not advance women's interests. Men dominate in the news, both as staffers producing the news and as news sources. There are few female editors in most media houses in Zimbabwe. There are few senior-ranking editorial appointments for females such as Victoria Ruzvidzo who is Zimpapers (a government-controlled stable of newspapers) managing editor, Elizabeth Mushonga who is the general manager of the provincial Zimpapers title *Manica Post* and Susan Makore is the Chief Executive Officer of a private radio station, ZIFM Stereo. Otherwise most women are employed as journalists, sub-editors or desk editors, features or supplements editors without much influence on final news content. This has an influence on the coverage and angling of stories pertaining to women's concerns.

The major problem in this research is that traditional or mainstream public spheres disempower women through (mis)representation, in that the agenda is set and management mostly done by men.

'Her Zimbabwe' is the brainchild of Fungai Machirori who started it in 2012 after graduation from the University of Reading in the UK. She argues that 'Her Zimbabwe' has an important space to occupy in agenda-setting while noticing that women's positive representation 'remains perilously low with women still occupying scant positions of authority in newsrooms and news media organisations. At the same time as we see a sharp rise in political alarmism in the mainstream media, we also [notice] the rise in hypersexualized and sexist content which is derisive towards women' (Interview, 23 February 2016). Thus the voices and issues of women are not only silenced or delegitimized through such coverages but there is a lack of gender sensitivity in Zimbabwe's male-dominated newsrooms.

As Harris (2008) suggests, women's activism is policed and supervised by men who are in power and this usually excludes women from voicing their issues 'outside formal politics' from which they are also disempowered. Of course, in Zimbabwe, for example, there has been an 'improvement' in advancing women politically (we have seen an increase in the number of female legislators for instance) but there has not been an inspiring deployment and employment of women in positions of influence in parastatals, industry, army, media, academy and the like. In January and February 2016, for example, the government-owned mainstream daily newspapers *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* respectively ran a story and a cartoon that spoke to issues of gender, sexuality and identity which could be an illustration of the dangers to women's representation in male-dominated media spaces.

Fig. 13.1 From *The Herald* 30 January 2016

In the first instance, shown in Fig. 13.1, *The Herald*, in reference to a hoax story emanating from a Kenyan newspaper suggesting that all men in Eritrea were being required by government to marry more than one woman, ran a picture of what appeared to Eritrean women with a caption reading thus: 'No argument there, the Eritrean girls look good. Even the worst looking would definitely be a beauty queen here in Zimbabwe, (no offence to our bleached, weaved and over-painted sisters' (*The Herald*, 30 January 2016). Fig. 13.2, a cartoon from The Chronicle of 4 February 2016 by Wellington Musapenda, who was subsequently suspended for breaching protocol by not running it through his editorial team, shows a pornographic depiction of tribalism and sexism all entangled together with two supposedly isiNdebele-speaking women reacting to the low academic performance by their regional high schools. There has always been an age-old stereotypical, pejorative and demeaning perception that Ndebele-speaking people are dull and all their women are good for is prostitution.

Fig. 13.2 From *The Chronicle* 4 February 2016

These issues were raised and debated on social media but their discussion in mainstream media remained narrow, most probably because of gender and ethnic biases that characterize newsrooms or a preoccupation with Zimbabwe's unfolding political drama playing itself out in the shaky ruling party.

At the pith of this research is the argument that it is time we noticed the important role technology-enabled conversations play to those powerless or voiceless and, in most cases, majority members of society. These techno-voices and conversations 'represent new directions in activism, the construction of new participatory communities (and cultures), and the development of new kinds of public selves' (Harris 2008, p. 482). Anita Harris, who was writing on young women's participation on political issues using the internet in the American context, noticed that in most cases it is challenging especially for women to construct 'public selves at a time when young female citizenship is operationalized through consumption and display rather than political agency' (2008, p. 483) and intellectual engagement with issues of the day and those that affect women especially.

Research Design, Method

In this chapter I use a single case study approach. Robert Yin, the foremost proponent of this approach, defines it as a scientific inquiry that 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (2003, p. 13). A case study is essential in this research as it helps us understand, holistically, cultural systems *in situ*. It is helpful in satisfying three pillars of any research: understanding, describing and explaining a phenomenon.

The Case

Fungai Machirori says the 'Her Zimbabwe' website (hereafter HZ) sprang from 'an idea from my Masters dissertation which explored Zimbabwean women's movement building across different geographical spaces . . . As one of my recommendations, I suggested that new media could play a role in a more robust movement building across space. And this is the recommendation I implemented . . . ' (Interview, 23 February 2016). Zimbabwe has a number of women-centric organisations such as Musasa, which works towards eradicating gender-based violence, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association, which seeks to create a legal environment that empowers women and children, Women's Action Group, which advances women and girl child's rights, and a network of women's rights activists called Women Action Group, among others. These have been dormant and not vocal about issues bedevilling Zimbabwean women on a daily basis owing to political threats, lack of funding and in some cases narrow avenues to engage society leaders. HZ's innovative use of the internet to amplify women's concerns is ground-breaking.

HZ, just like many other sites born in the diaspora that have attempted to advance democratic deliberations (Mpofu 2014a, 2015a), attempts to empower women as citizens, giving them a platform to speak on issues otherwise ignored in male-dominated mainstream media and newsrooms or frowned upon by society. Machirori argues that her website's exclusion of men is not necessarily '. . . segregation against men because the mainstream media, and so much [media coverage] focuses on men or areas that are traditionally perceived to be the preserves of men. It can't be a segregation "against" if the group that is being omitted . . . holds a special position and privilege in society' (Interview, 23 February 2016). The site

uses material from citizen journalists that is, bloggers and reader input. Citizen journalism is a form of 'storytelling which moves from seeing journalism as a lecture but as a conversation where everyday people assume power and take charge and be influential in telling their stories from their own perspectives, through blogs, reader comments, email list-servs etc.' (Mpofu 2015b, p. 87). Most bloggers are young, university-educated, urban women. HZ's characterization as an alternative counter-public sphere to the mainstream draws from Fraser's (1992, p. 116) conceptualization of different types of alternative public spheres—'counter-publics' which are parallel arenas for discourse contesting the historically 'exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behaviour and alternative norms of public speech'. HZ gives women, as citizens, a platform to debate, challenge patriarchy and amplify their issues of concern which are ignored by political or traditional leaders, society, industry, policy-makers and the media. But the critical question is, bearing in mind that most non-governmental organisations in Zimbabwe are reliant on donor funding, *amplifying for who and to what effect*? The site's content is largely from 'feminist' bloggers to satisfy what Machirori says is a 'particular deficiency in documenting Zimbabwean women's history. So this is why "*Her* Zimbabwe", and not "Our Zimbabwe" or "His Zimbabwe"' (Interview, 23 February 2016). It makes it clear, however, that men are 'secondary audiences'. The administration of the site includes three women and a man who is a finance officer.

HZ's aim is to harness:

> ...the potential of digital media to share and tell Zimbabwean women's stories, as well as nurture young women's digital activism. Her Zimbabwe's primary target audience is Zimbabwean women aged 20–35, although participation and contributions are accepted from women of all ages. Understanding that outcomes for women are increased by improving outcomes for society, Her Zimbabwe also targets men as a secondary audience. As women's issues cannot be separated from those of the men with whom they co-exist as partners, relatives, friends, work colleagues, the Her Zimbabwe website features a 'His Zimbabwe' section which allows men to express their viewpoints and stances on issues to with gender and equity.

The above suggests the site is exclusionary of the mostly disconnected and offline 0–19 and 36+ age-groups, delivering us into a debate of ethical dilemma on representation and speaking on behalf of those considered

'others' in one's community. This is to suggest that while it is welcome to speak for 'others' this could best be done within the confines of ethical representation and involvement without reproducing the same 'hierarchies of oppression and privileged ontological positions' (Hinterberger 2007, p. 74) characteristic of patriarchal settings that feminist movements are challenging for instance. Even my writing of this chapter needs to be tempered by an awareness that I may not fully grasp the 'others' whose struggles and creative ways of challenging patriarchy I am pontificating on. HZ's activities include:

Amplifying women's voices online: HZ's mainstay is its website through which the sharing of personal narratives, social commentary and perspectives on gender has been promoted. The website is supported by robust conversation and interaction via HZ's social media channels.

Stimulating conversation: Understanding the need to also promote discussion in the offline realm, HZ hosts a series of talks termed 'Critical Conversations' as a means to bring together bloggers, journalists, opinion leaders and activists to discuss issues that pertain to the media and technology environment, both locally and internationally. These speaks (sic) convene influential media and technology leaders, and the general public, to discuss, debate and critique issue of relevance to the sectors they represent.

Promoting literacy in digital storytelling and security: Another of the gaps HZ is filling is to bridge the digital access divide through building and strengthening women's online content production skills.

Despite targeting women, evidence from this research suggests men also contribute to the website and their men's contributions do not represent the 'mainstream' patriarchal views on feminism. They, just like women writers, attempt to dismantle patriarchy and the status quo they argue suppresses women.

Method and Questions

Methodologically this study will use purposive sampling to select material that speaks to issues of women activism since 2012 and these will be subjected to critical discourse analysis, an analytic approach that looks at power, its distribution and imbalances. Friker (2008, p. 200) defines purposive sampling as a 'type of convenience sampling which the researcher selects the sample based on his or her judgement' while Kripendorff

(2004, p. 119) furthers adds that 'relevance sampling... aims at selecting all textual units that contribute to answering given research questions... [since] the resulting sample is defined by the analytical problem at hand'. Purposive sampling is flexible as it can be used in 'even less structured ways without the application of any random sampling' (Friker 2008, p. 200).

This research follows questions around the first of these three core activities. It questions the viability of a gendered space in 'fighting' against a system that is oppressive to women. Does this call for the 'oppressors' exclusion or for a conversation and what parameters should be set for the conversation to obtain? Again, the research questions the ethics and use of an alternative digital public sphere that is elitist in a country ravaged by poverty where the mostly affected women are the poor, illiterate, in the rural areas, have no social capital, technological know-how and economic access to arenas of debate and, even if they had to have access, their dimensions of social experience would bring with them the burden of values attached to modes of participation in society (Anita 2008). The risk often becomes the transference of offline and often patriarchal social and political practices into the new domain. Further, the research gauges the effectiveness of such a website through the levels and intensity of debates on blogs. Lastly, what issues affect women and how are these raised and debated in HZ?

Theory: Technology, Voice and Changing Paradigms of Participatory Practices

Where women's voices are constrained, the internet has given them a voice, that is, an online voice where internet-based platforms are used to freely 'explore contemporary feminism and articulate their own perspectives' (Keller 2012, p. 430). In so doing they assert themselves into a space where they make arguments to be seen as equal and serious socio-political actors and agential citizens. The concept of the voice as articulated by Mitra empowers those marginalized members of the community into gaining a 'heteroglossic and hyperconnected' voice (2001, p. 29) that could be used to 'voice the unspeakable stories and eventually construct powerful connections that can be labelled as "cyber communities"', (2001, p. 30) with other people sharing similar interests. Mitra (2001, p. 30) further asserts that 'it is far more crucial to understand how the internet can, (1) open up the possibility of having a voice, (2) produce alliances (aka cyber communities) with unique characteristics, and (3) how the combination of voice and cyber community can help to renegotiate

identities in a structured social system'. For a long time, most women, especially in developing contexts with subordinate/dominant structurations, find themselves in the category of the marginalized, subordinate and disempowered members in society without a voice on matters affecting them. Instead of speaking up for themselves these subordinate and marginalized women are spoken for and the systems that have made this possible continuously neglect questioning such structures of representation as the media. However one has to question if indeed having a voice on issues that affect women in HZ debates is actually considered as having a place 'at the table and utilizing that place to be heard and acknowledged' (Mitra 2001, p. 31) in the broader society. Women have succeeded at problematizing the centres of power in society through using new technologies whose immediacy and interconnectivity disrupt the 'traditional' flow and ordering of things.

This 'traditional' flow and ordering of things has upheld a culture where women occupy a position where they could only be seen and not heard and—to draw from Keller's assessment of how young girls communicate online—are 'encouraged to be political in appropriate' and patriarchally approved and supervised ways, 'while being excluded from formal [socio-] political arena due to (gender) based exclusions and patriarchal constructions of activism that privilege formal [male-dominated] political activities' (2012, p. 435). Women's communicative spaces, then, therefore become alternative to the mainstream and they then occupy a subaltern status as a counter-public. Writing about subaltern public spheres Squires (2002) argues that there are three formats they take; counter-public, enclave and satellite. I position HZ in the counter-public because, while it addresses issues related to women, it remains open and accessible to those it is not intended for—men. It operates on the sidelines of traditional public spheres manned and dominated by men that deny women a voice.

New media technologies have not only given women a voice but have helped alter our traditional understandings and configurations of space and time while also creating a community of counter-publics that may share, to a certain extent, some commonalities entering the communicative space as empowered and agential citizens. But which women are we speaking about? The suburban and connected or rural and disempowered ones? Machirori dismisses the notion of HZ being an elitist project thus:

> We have never presumed to represent all women's voices. Being an online platform in a country with limited access to online tools, this would be a

> gross overestimation of our capacity. It's a reductive argument that believes that someone is 'elite' merely by the fact of their access to online tools and spaces. Would we instantly identify an unemployed young graduate who spends the little money they get from their parents (or by selling second hand clothes at a market) to buy data bundles as an elite? Being online is becoming more of a necessity nowadays as it links us to opportunity and widens our communication base. As such, being online cannot be narrowly constructed as a pursuit of the elite alone. Conversely, to assume that the so-called elite women do not have issues that require redress is another myth that needs debunking. (Interview, 23 February 2016).

Despite this limited scope, new media activism has allowed us to 'productively rethink of [women] as active agents, cultural producers and citizens rather than passive victims and cultural dupes in the online world' (Keller 2012, p. 440). However, it is not my argument here that by being agential subaltern counter-publics women are 'binarized' with and against the mainstream. Admittedly women are empowered differently and cannot be taken as homogeneous collective affected by patriarchy in uniform ways. Most problematically is the targeted population by *Her Zimbabwe* if one was to engage with the meaning and significance of 'Zimbabwe' in the name. The website targets women between the ages of 20–35 those deemed, in a way, ungovernable. It seems this age-group has the means to access and interact online such as an education, hardware and economic means to 'purchase' their entry online. As one blogger, Vimbai Chinembiri, says 'the writers are drawn from upper middle class. This is probably by virtue of level of education and not necessarily because of background as content shows...' (E-mail communication, 5 May 2016). This brings us to the discussion on the effects of structural inequalities on online participatory practices. Watkins (2009) argues that access to technologies or 'digital gates' permits or restricts access to maintain disparities between race and class power relations online for example.

Digital divide or the opening of these 'digital gates' is informed by the location, class and techno-literacy of the women. Zimbabwe's current economic status does not positively influence people into prioritising informational needs when there are bread and butter issues to worry about. In addition, government interference into ordinary people's online communications has, to a certain extent, hindered participation. Access to the internet stood at 34 % in Zimbabwe, whose population is believed to

be around 15 million (Mhlanga and Mpofu 2014). Growth in access has been influenced by the importation of 'cheap Chinese mobile gadgets, a recent reduction in mobile telephony rates and the expansion of the network by the country's three mobile operators' (Mpofu 2015b, p. 8). It should also be noted that in as much as the internet opens up vistas of communication and empowerment for women it can also be a landmine. Moraha-Martin (2000, p. 68) argues that 'the impact of the internet for women is not all positive. The internet also has created and amplified problems for women. Women have been targets of online oppression, harassment, and some have become real life victims because of their online participation.' The following section engages with HZ's discussions in blogs casting light on one of its main objectives of amplifying women's voices.

An Analysis of *Her Zimbabwe* Blogs and the Politics of Gender

My main focus here is to engage with the objective that the website sets for itself, that of amplifying the voices of women online. There are two suggestions raised by this objective. Firstly, women are speaking but their voices are not loud or prominent enough to be heard. Secondly, it could be deduced from the statement that very few of them are speaking and not heard or if heard are ignored. This analysis is done in tandem with the considerations of networked spaces, mostly dominated by men, as arena for fighting for freedom and the exclusionary nature not of the spaces alone but of the focus of the website in dealing with women's issues in Zimbabwe. The main assumption and contention in this section, which also forms the core of this chapter is that a speaking or writing subject on issues of feminism in HZ assumes a posture and occupies a space of power and authority 'which requires a commitment to an ethical involvement in the representation of "others"' (Hinterberger 2007, p. 74). To highlight this, one of the bloggers, Vimbai Chinembiri, observes that most of the bloggers 'have an above average level of education compared to most women in Africa or the women who are the subject of most of the writings' (E-mail Communication, 5 May 2016).

The current chapter uses 51 purposely sampled articles from the inception of the website until February 2016. These address a variety of issues regarding women's issues like sexuality, women's rights, child marriages, sport, violence and equality. Most blogs were contributed by women and very few have reader comments under them. This could mean two things:

that readers do not critically engage with issues raised or they do so on the website's *Facebook* page which replicates and updates stories as they are uploaded on the website.

It is possible that most women rights activists in Zimbabwe aim to dismantle the oppressive cultures that suppress women. Hence, the blog post from 'Pretty Chavango', 'Gender roles run deep', is critical as it speaks to the need for women to 'learn to traverse timidity, gender insensitivity and reality in order to break free from social norms and find success' (HZ, 9 July 2015). She further observes that societal power configurations favour boys and men more than they do women and girls. To illustrate this she claims that

> This society taught its sons that you need not worry about satisfying your women; they can do with little sex if at all. The *biggest mistake* my society made is that they told their boys that they can have sex with whoever they want whenever they want... go home and forget to satisfy their wives. Women have had to live with that kind of suffering for a very long time... When a woman sees a wrongly and provocatively dressed man she is moved, but she looks aside. When you move around with your chest bare and your shorts too tight as a man, know that you are offending some women somewhere. Just that they were taught to pretend it's not happening. Just as much as you are moved by a wrongly dressed woman or a provocatively dressed one, women actually do feel things... The same way you do. Just that our fathers taught our mothers to teach us to look aside. (Emphasis in the original)

Societies that are patriarchal have presented women through 'long established cultural stereotypes' (Wood 2007, p. 259) of what it means to be women and feminine as demonstrated by *The Herald* story and picture above. These feminine ideals are, as suggested in the quotation above, cultural expectations of women to be sex objects, submissive and passive whereas men are expected to be aggressive, macho and exude a sense of power. The 'acculturation' of women into passivity, silence and submissiveness is succinctly exposed in a comment to Chivango's blog by 'Rue', who summarizes society in her perceptions thus:

> Its funny that no matter how much you try to involve women in activities that will enhance them still they choose to be reserved and not participate. The reason being the society has taught our women to be content with what they have, that's why you find many women in abusive marriages still stay in

> them because they have been taught be content and strive on. But at times its not about striving on but about your happiness and success. If more women would only realise how much potential they have and stand for themselves and by so doing stand for others. Our society has over-emphasized the importance of men and yet forgetting that without the women men would not exist and most probably would not have the lives they have. After all men succeed to impress us!!! [sic] (HZ, 9 July 2015).

The above suggests the taken-for-grantedness the gendered roles and positions society has allocated to different sexes. Reference could be made to the hoax Eritrean story referred to above. Anthea Taderera's blog 'On Eritrea: When we make a "joke" of forced marriage' captures salient issues regarding women's commodification, 'thingification'—that is, being made into things of not much value, objectification and evils of forced marriages that tend to be overlooked as:

> Zimbabweans took to social media to discuss the 'news,' shared links to Eritrean visa offices as well as screenshots/images of fake partially completed visa applications, 'jokingly' checked into Eritrean airports on 'national duty,' engaged in casual collective misogynoir, downplayed the horror of forced marriage and commodified women . . . This callous response was particularly disappointing given the conversations around marriage, particularly the importance of being able to *consent* to marriage that we've been having as a result of the continued fight against child 'marriage'. (Taderera, 11 February 2016, emphasis in the original)

Activities online are viewed as negative because it seems those who participated in the fun did not think deeply about the story and what it means to women's rights and their treatment in a continent where they are treated as second class citizens. Women, as a semiotic reading of most reactions on social media and mainstream media suggests, are meant to be attractive sex objects, be there to satisfy men and always subordinate. In terms of physical looks there is a perception that most African settings encourage women to be 'curvy' and, as Chamunorwa Mufaro (2015) argues in her blog post entitled *Not curvy, not beautiful?* (5 October 2015):

> Africa has always appreciated the curvy woman with the full figure associated with fertility, health and affluence . . . just take a look at the language that our own African literary discourse uses to describe a beautiful African woman . . . (In) Ngugi wa Thiong'o's 1964 classic 'Weep Not Child' . . . Ngotho's idea

> of a good wife is a 'fleshy, black body with sweat.' In Chimamanda Adichie's... 'Half of a Yellow Sun'... lead character, Olanna, is painted with a sensually stimulating edibility... (with a) 'curvy fleshy body' that is like 'a yellow cashew, shapely and ripe.' Her beauty is in the arch of her hips, the lusciousness of her bosom, the plumpness of her derriere and the thickness of her thighs.

This contrasts with Vimbai Midzi's arguments in her 'Sex and the City: respectability, womanhood and decency' (23 June 2015) blog '[W]omen are therefore held to standards of expressing sexuality within the confines of what men like, expect and will tolerate. Sex (note that this only applies to women) is seen as a sacrosanct gift from God. Our bodies are not seen as our own.' It is common cause that in most patriarchal African settings, Zimbabwe included, women have to express their sexuality within the confines of what men—through patriarchal configurations of sexuality—like, expect, decree and tolerate. Social media activities and some celebrities for instance advance self-sexualized images where the body parts of females are given more prominence than other capabilities they might have. This is the currency of beauty some society give prominence. Mufaro further observes, through experience and conversations in her (narrow) family setting that all this assumed beauty in an African woman is not meant for her, but for the consumption of the male species both as gazers and consumers as 'boys like a little more booty to hold at night' (Mufaro 2015). In relation to the Eritrean story, Taderera further accentuates this objectification while also debunking the 'thick' woman myth as a homogeneous expectation of all African men thus:

> The attractiveness of Eritrean women soon became the main topic of discussion. Men came out of the woodworks to tell us they wouldn't mind two wives *who looked like that*. One skit circulating on whatsapp called Zimbabwean women cows, as opposed to the 'objectively' desirable Eritrean women who were presented as a homogenous group of caramel skinned women with long straight flowing hair, thin but sufficiently... This framing is appalling as it ignores the diversity of black peoples... Eurocentric beauty norms are being applied... There is, therefore, no room for a multiplicity of beauty, or for challenging the idea that there is a single beauty standard that women must achieve or attempt to adhere to in order to validate our gender identities. Further there was the continuous implication that any form of beauty ritual was for the benefit for the male gaze and not perhaps because women found personal pleasure in their

> adornment . . . Women are thought of as things. A wife is apparently a thing . . . The entire conversation was quite telling, as not once even in passing was women's emotional and domestic labour in traditional heterosexual relationships mentioned. All that work continued to go unnoticed, expected as a given and yet still devalued. It was a very clear indication that for all our claims to be fairly progressive in the area of marriage we continue to look at interpersonal relationships with an uncritical eye and are comfortable following patriarchy's entrenched norms.

Of course this cannot be a universal conversation but it touches some experiences of Zimbabwean women and societies. The media and society have equally attempted and in some cases managed to create two binary images of women, the good and the bad. Those women that are virgins at the time of marriage are mostly considered good compared to those who are not or have children outside wedlock. Bloggers, to some could be bad girls. Chinembiri observes that sometimes ideas some bloggers especially 'mostly single women tend to clash with those of married women who often contribute through comments although there is a general consensus on some issues' (E-mail Communication, 5 May 2016) and in some cases men 'confront' bloggers accusing them of misleading other women. The bloggers debate and are not agreed on the commoditization of women through *lobola*. This is demonstrated by Mufaro's (2015) blog where she speaks about her aunts when they '. . . beam with anticipation at the prospects of charging high *lobola* (bride price) for my cousins who are well endowed with "assets" . . . As for me, I weigh a little below 50 kgs and I have a petite frame. My aunts "console" me by telling me that at least I am educated and intelligent.' The concept of *lobola* has been differently dealt with by some feminist bloggers on HZ. One argument is that women are taken as property to be auctioned where men sit and decide how much a woman who is about to get married is worth.

In '*Lobola*: to pay or not to pay?' Keith Mundangepfupfu (9 July 2015) a male blogger, argues that the *lobola* practice oppresses and commodifies women giving men undue power. Some reader comments under the blog are critical, presenting the need to maintain those cultures labelled backward in this modern world. These are highlighted below:

> *Tadzoka*: I think it is important to note the difference between the bastardization of *lobola*, and *lobola* proper. The author did briefly highlight the distinction, however, the argument sweepingly blamed the

> institution of *lobola* for its abuse. Would it be fair for us to blame religion for terrorism? Indeed, not. We should blame the people who abuse the institution. *Lobola* is meant to be an exchange creating a family bond.
>
> *Morris M*: I think the argument is very faulty. Just because some men view their wives as their possessions thru paying *Lobola*, there are many others who respect and consult their wives in all important decisions they make. And its a token of appreciation, everyone who believes is marrying a good wife MUST pay *lobola*. [sic]

In response to Mundangepfupfu, Vimbai Chinembiri's (2015) *Why I want lobola as part of my marriage* blog argues that *lobola* is important to her as:

> being the self-assured feminist that I am, I am certain that the kind of man who should marry me would be the kind who has respect and love for me, and the family I come from ... I want him and his family to send a *munyayi* (negotiator) to my family to ask for '*sadza*' (asking for mealie thick porridge, that is my hand in marriage). I want him to adhere to the grocery list that my family will draft for the marriage ceremony. I want the visitors to *pfunya chisero* (bending their knees like females and sitting on the goat-skin mat in a way they would do while addressing a chief to whom respect is due) on a nice mat while my family lounges on the couches. They should call me and ask me if I know 'these people'. I want to enjoy being identified among my sisters as the young woman they have come to marry, and my parents should be blessed with *zvireverere zva Mai na Baba* (portions for *lobola* that go directly to the bride's parents). (9 October 2015)

This suggests something deeper, in terms of relationships, than the 'cosmetic' arguments on commercialisation and commoditisation of women. She suggests that it is about creation of family bonds and commitment between families. Also, this shows that the bloggers in HZ are not of the same mind. Their views of and on feminism are not narrow and straight-jacketed fitting all. It is crucial also to say that even though there are disagreements in some instances, there is general consensus in some issues. The editorial team, however, wields power in as far as gatekeeping is concerned. For example Chinembeiri recalls how her blog was rejected 'because it sort of made excuses for wife beaters. However my intention was to look at abuse from the perspective of the abuser' (E-mail Communication, 5 May 2016).

Issues of power, class, law and sex are also tackled by the website as advocacy for women and girl-children's rights. In a blog post '"Fast girls",

Tomana and the age of consent' (2 July 2015) Taderera contends with the court-set age of consent of 12 years and the controversial remarks by Zimbabwe's Prosecutor-General Johannes Tomana to the effect that 'let the children get married, because they're poor and what are they doing with their lives anyway?!' Further, Taderera observes that instead of condemning Tomana's reckless statement and the practice of child marriage, society condemns young girls caught up in child marriages or under age sexual intercourses as 'fast girls'. Taderera suggests that society sees these 'fast girls' as responsible for trapping men into sexual relationships. She argues:

> What has been particularly disheartening for me in the past few weeks is seeing the extent to which the myth of the 'fast girl' who goes around waylaying innocent *adult* men, forcing them to have sex with her is ingrained in the psyches of many. *Men who have sex with children are being presented as hapless victims of feminine wiles as opposed to the predators that they are.* (Emphasis supplied)

In most cases society lays the burden of blame on women when they are raped and most often than not victim-blaming borders on issues of their sexually enticing dressing to being in spaces where they 'know' full well they are not supposed to be. Sex, it seems, is not something women have to negotiate on rather men are left with all the power to interpret and decide whether or not to engage in any form of sexual relationship with a woman: be it consensual or rape. The argument by Tomana above that girls have to be married at a tender age because of poverty brings into play issues of class. Middle class and well-off families that can afford to send their girl-children to school and cater for them are safe. The poor can get married to escape poverty and this perpetuates the cycle of poverty and abuse of those considered poor. Taderera rightly points out that '[W]e are callously content to leave certain segments of society behind', and there is need for legislative transformation for the sake of all citizens. The intervention made by Tsitsi Chivango (2015) on *Gender equality: an important tool for sustainable development* (30 July 2015) is revealing (Chivango 2015) particularly the conclusion that despite Zimbabwe '... being a signatory to gender-sensitive instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the famous Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (which people like quoting but know very little about), the African Charter on Human and

Peoples' Rights and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, our road to equality is still a long way ahead'.

Most bloggers do not only mourn about the oppressive nature of society without offering any solutions for what they see as problems. For instance, Midzi ends her blog posting thus,

> [T]he stereotypes and gender roles we have allowed to flourish in our society inhibit the ability of women to be full, rights-bearing citizens. We have allowed culture and religious beliefs to supersede the protection of our girls' rights... allowed the male gaze to determine how women's sexuality should be expressed. Our lawmakers must be made aware of the weaknesses of the law, and the extent to which these laws are harmful to women and girls. Beyond that, our society needs to change. We need to teach our girls that marriage does not add intrinsic value to their lives. (Midzi 2015)

In a blog entitled 'Why can men sex freely, but women can't?' Lazurus Sauti concludes by offering the following as solutions 'Therefore, communities need intervention programmes that change the attitudes of men, women and society at large... there must be educational programmes for young men and women that dispel unhealthy and unequal representations of women... there must be space for young men, in particular, to learn about sex, sexuality and healthy relationships in an open way and at a young age' (25 November 2015).

The themes raised above demonstrate the differences between western and African feminisms. This could be informed by the fact that their struggles are different. Chinembiri puts it this way: 'writers (African bloggers) struggle with different issues that are not entirely big issues in the western world... education for young girls, *lobola* debates, sanitary wear provision, harassment in public places...'.

Concluding Remarks

While it could be argued that in most Zimbabwean societies power distribution favours men more than it does women and that 'women worldwide have been last to come online' (Morahan-Martin 2000, p. 683) there seems to be potential of creating and starting conversations about issues pertinent to women. While some stories and blogs are analytical and largely informed by information and statistics released by such

reliable agencies of the United Nations, African Union, World Bank etc., most of the bloggers rely on rather narrow familial or generalized take on societal issues to construct arguments. This creates ethical issues in and of representation in that familial surroundings and experiences are taken for granted as experiences of most societies in Zimbabwe. The issues around *lobola* and marriage or the preferred size of women by African men for instance, suffice as highlights of this problematic. Morahan-Martin (2000) then suggests that '[C]ritical thinking abilities are essential for internet users . . . [they] need to learn to evaluate the information they find online.' Not only do readers need to be critical, but those who compose the content too. However this does not preclude the positive impact of the fact that women 'are starting' to speak online. Online communication has democratized the way we have known communication in patriarchal settings where women are meant to be silent and where their issues are involved they have minimal input and the larger part of decisions are made by men. Thus online communication frees society from the tyrannies of face to face (f2f) communication leading to people conversing as equals outside the boundaries set by f2f communication which pay attention to race, gender, sex, class, social status and the like. On the flip side this does not diminish the digital divide between the techno-haves and the techno-poor, continuations of f2f communicative patterns online, occupational hazards and inequalities of online agitation in Zimbabwe. Rather, it amplifies these disparities pointing to the fact that power resides; more often than not, with men. The fact that policy makers are excluded from online conversations acts as a drawback too.

Again, the fact that the website attempts to present the voices of the youthful and urban women leads to the exclusion of other women who some of the bloggers and news reports attempt to speak for in generalized ways. For instance, issues of the poor children being given out for marriage as an attempt at poverty alleviation by their parents, guardians or communities remain silenced while men (officials) and bloggers (women with access to the internet) speak on their behalf or for them. While the practice is retrogressive, there is need for thorough research and to give prominence to these marginalized people's voices whose rights and agenda is foregrounded by such platforms as HZ. Of course this would be a difficult feat considering the strains placed on the HZ by funders in a context where political and economic decline and donor fatigue have made it difficult for independent media organisations to cover issues affecting especially those in remote areas of the country. While the

bloggers challenge the operations of society under patriarchal dominance, they help to reinforce 'contemporary notions of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality and power' (Devoss 2000, p. 835) in some instances. For instance Vimbai Chinembiri's post on *lobola* clearly demarcates and takes for granted the role men and women play in determining the future of the woman who is about to get married. Another aspect ignored in the discussions on the blogs is that of same-sex marriages and relationships are considered taboo in Zimbabwe. Chinembiri argues that this is so because of the differences between African and western feminisms. She responded to e-mailed interview questions thus: '[F]eminism beliefs by most writers are situated in the Zimbabwean context where there is little room for extremism. I would call it grounded feminism informed by a cultural background.' The question is what is lost or gained by silences around this issue?

HZ promises to play a pivotal role in advancing women's issues and amplifying those faint or solitary voices that shed light on the plight of women through off-line programmes. In 2014 the organisation started what they call 'critical conversation' after observing that, according to Machirori, 'Zimbabwe... has, for a long time, been closed off from a lot of issues and conversations—as a result of our politics—[and this gives us an opportunity] to... interact with different ideas, views and opinions... [While] online space facilitates conversation brilliantly, the face to face encounters are still just as valid, if not even more, as they allow space for collective introspection, follow up and more elaborate explanation]' (Jena 2014). The realities of poverty and digital divide seem neglected by Jena who seems to take internet accessibility for granted in country like Zimbabwe when she says '[B]esides being an easy to penetrate platform, the internet also permits certain liberties that are generally not available in other forms of media. For example, one just needs internet access, some technological knowhow and a gadget to start an online conversation.' The tools to access the internet, that is computers and modems, skills to manipulate the soft- and hardware come at a cost in a country whose economic environment propel every citizen who happens to be lucky to get a dollar to 'invest' on bread and butter than informational and activist needs and projects.

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CHAPTER 14

Gender and Media Representations of Land Based Reforms in Zimbabwe

Patience Mutopo

Introduction

Land has always been (since 1930 and the enactment of the Land Apportioning Act), and continues to be, a non-contestable debate and a critical resource for the well-being of Zimbabwe and most former colonial states. Latent and manifest conflicts began as black Zimbabweans were dispossessed of their land by the British colonizers. After independence, the Zimbabwean government implemented land and agrarian reforms meant to improve the livelihoods of the majority. However media representations of the land-reform programme have been varied, with the local media presenting factual analysis based on the unfolding of events, but with biased assertions from the state-centred media such as the *Herald* newspaper and national television, with independent media projecting a dismal land-reform process that has ignored the plight of women, (Mutopo 2014). The gender issues have mainly been presented by the national newspapers in Zimbabwe, thus the *Sunday Mail* and the *Herald* which have carried out analysis of women's role in the land-reform programme and how they have used the land in the process of enhancing

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farming and livelihoods. (Chari 2013) points out that framing involves ignoring certain aspects of an issue, creating an artificial balance, exaggeration, lack of analysis of events and the use of a narrow selection of experts. In the *Sunday Mail* of 15 March 2015, an exposé of women's access to land in Zimbabwe was provided by Jeanette Manjengwa, giving explicit details of how women have participated in the fast-track programme of land reform and accessed land, hence improving rural livelihoods. This does not chime with reports from the *Sunday Mail* series of March–June 2015, in which various stories of fast-track farmers were presented with a focus on men, detailing the outcomes of the tobacco revolution, ignoring the fact that women are the critical actors in farming as the providers of labour, in as much as they do not hold usufruct rights to the land.

Reform was carried out in three phases, with the last one, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) being the thrust of this case. The FTLRP ran under two models for resettlement: model A1 (decongestion) aimed to resettle 160,000 communal people, based on subsistence farming. Model A2 aimed to create a force of 51,000 small-, medium- and large-scale black commercial farmers, (Murisa 2007), Table 1). Many scholars have considered the nature of this programme, however, no authority has done a desk review and analysis of gender and land reform. This study analysed the FTLRP at Mwenezi resettlement in Masvingo Province. Table 14.1 provides evidence of the landownership patterns by gender in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, rights to land were vested in the hands of the headman. Under this scenario women had rights and access to a minimum area of land on which they grew women crops such as groundnuts. The advent of the colonial regime undermined the rights of women, viewing them as minors in dire need of a male representative. Disparities amongst women themselves emerged as the unmarried women and those in a polygamous marriage were literally outcasts in land access. Their married counterparts were little better, as their husbands could gain access but they were not even considered. The divorced and widowed gained access only if they had custody of children. The emergence of the FTLRP saw the resettlement of people, emergence of new institutions and a certain gender ideology towards food production. Aspects of the FTLRP appealed most to men, who are generally mobile as no customary law requires them to stay at the homestead; they can venture outside in search of a living for their family (Nyawo 2016). In as much as single, divorced or

Table 14.1 Land ownership by province, model and gender: The Zimbabwe fast-track land-reform programme

Province	*Model A1*				*Model A2*			
	No. of males	*%*	*No. of females*	*%*	*No. of males*	*%*	*No. of females*	*%*
Midlands	14,800	82	3,198	18	338	95	17	5
Masvingo	19,026	84	3,644	16	709	92	64	8
Mash Central	12,989	88	1,770	12	1,469	87	215	13
Mash West	21,782	81	5,270	19	1,777	89	226	11
Mash East	12,976	76	3,992	24	–	–	–	21
Mat South	7,754	87	1,169	13	215	79	56	17
Mat North	7,919	84	1,490	16	574	83	121	–
Manicaland	9,574	82	2,190	18	961	91	97	9
Total	**106,986**	**82**	**22,723**	**18**	**6,043**	**88**	**796**	**12**

Adopted from Utete Report 2003

widowed women (unmarried women hereafter) were disadvantaged in the initial land-reform process by the state and traditional leaders, the FTLRP created strategic opportunities which improved their access to large arable fields.

With access to land for the married being a given using the household model,[1] it was necessary to get a piece of land from the husband's plot. However, responses from the women in the Rutenga resettled farms highlighted that it was not a limiting factor, as they were satisfied. They reported an improvement in their capacity to grow crops and to get yields that could sustain their family. The unmarried women managed to capitalize by being involved in political warfare (*jambanja*) and use of social networks to gain power which won them recognition and the right to acquire land in the A1 scheme (Scoones et al. 2010; Mazhawidza and Manjengwa 2011). Married women tended to be much more disadvantaged by their marital status. They were obliged to stay in the communal areas and tend to the family whilst the unmarried women were more opportunistic and less risk-averse. Relatively few women that have gained access to land; this can be attributed to patriarchal Zimbabwean customary practices and norms, viewing women as submissive, with men's primacy defining asset accumulation, for example (Mutopo 2015). These power dynamics leave women subdued and prevent them from accessing land.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on a gendered approach to land reform, (Moser 2005; Mutopo 2011; Berhman et al. 2012; Mutopo et al. 2015). It aims to examine gender disparities in a documented era in Zimbabwe; the FTLRP. This approach takes women as the starting-point in the processes of land acquisition and analyses the role that women play in land utilisation. It takes into account that women operate in male-sanctioned environments. Attitudes of patriarchy emanated from the pre-colonial regime where men dominated the household. Due to the racial discrimination that was prominent in the colonial era, the patriarchal issue had to be addressed; land reform was no exception. Socially constructed attitudes are usually unequal in terms of power, decision-making, and freedom of action and not the biology of the sexes. Media representations of how women emerge as a social movement in the process of land utilization are an important factor in understanding how truth is constructed and projected into the world. This is enhanced by discourse analysis, since the power of the word resonates with the identity of the author and transmitter of information to the audience. Therefore, defining the success of the land reform process becomes gendered, because women are still 18 % of those who gained land, (Utete Report 2003) which also demonstrates the gender perspectives that are created during the reporting processes by different media actors, a process rooted in variation in media house policies.

This study dwells on this line of thought as its thrust is on lobbying for a change in the structuring of gender and access to land resources, with great attention paid to the importance of media projections and interpretations of gendered approaches to land reform. This aids in understanding how media influences can glorify masculinities in land at the expense of feminine notions that exist empirically. The ultimate goal is the emergence of a scenario in which decision-making and benefits of development are distributed on a basis of gender neutrality. There is a need for serious action to be taken towards how gender discrepancy is to be addressed in resource allocation, power dynamics and in customary law, rules and norms. This may be done within the land-reform context and in a democratic media environment, where reporting structures of the news are geared towards meeting and explaining livelihood-based approaches of societies.

Methodological Approach

This work utilizes an ethnographic methodological approach in which data and focus is derived from a case study of fast-track women farmers in Mwenezi district since 2009, the various land-reform documents, and published work. The methodology employs documents already in existence to highlight issues of FTLRP and gender. Some of the reports and quotes are based on documented data from case studies on the farms in Rutenga, Mwenezi district by the author. Benefiting from the vastness of the information source on FTLRP, documented sources used span the period from the programme's inception to date in a bid to thoroughly track changes in outcomes. Desk research uses published books, documents, newspaper articles, magazines and scholarly articles in order to delve into the nature and context of the case under discussion. Ethnographic methodology triangulated with the other methods helps in understanding the women-centred approaches of land-based livelihoods and the different agricultural systems the women employed. This is a key issue with regard to gender and media representation because anthropological techniques are important in laying out how people engage with the environment and how the information is decoded and brought out by the different media forms, such as newspapers, and the radio talk shows. The way people live and improve themselves in agricultural-based societies becomes critical for media dissemination, since it also influences different local and international policy agencies.

Gender and Land Reforms in Zimbabwe

The colonial regime had land policies like the Land Appointment Act of 1930 and the Land Tenure Act of 1969 which alienated the native black Zimbabweans from much of the productive land, pushing them into marginal areas of the country, creating a racially differentiated land-tenure system (Gaidzanwa 1991; Utete 2003; Ruswa 2007). The need for land inspired a liberation struggle; land was without a doubt, the single most important motive for the liberation struggle. After Independence, people expected a change, with women (86 %) (Scoones et al. 2010) working on the land expecting a lot, especially after being a stronghold of the struggle. In post-independence Africa, the land question has been non-debatable, but dominant and constant in the discourses and practices

of development. As a way to address these inequities, the Zimbabwean government embarked on a land-reform programme and the first set of resettled families were in place in the early 1980s. Questions were raised regarding the addressing of historical racial imbalances in land ownership by land reform in Zimbabwe and whether it had attempted to address the issue of gender inequalities in its endeavours (ibid.). The Zimbabwean FTLRP presented an appealing prospect of a sustainable livelihood for many women, an opportunity that had never presented itself in the country's history of land invasions (Mutopo 2011). The FTLRP promised many more women gaining access to land, unlike preceding resettlement programmes soon after independence which did not recognize a woman as an independent entity but always subordinate to a male figure.

Women's Access to Land under the FTLRP

Under the two resettlement models (A1 and A2), there were differences in land acquisition. A1 applicants were resettled by the District Administrator (DA) who got lists of people from village heads. The A2 model applicants had to formally apply to the Ministry of Lands, Land Reform and Resettlement who would make awards depending on the resource base of the applicant, as this model had minimal to no government support. To date, even with the benefit of the 2004 National Gender Policy and the 2013 Zimbabwean Constitution, a sound gender and asset policy has not been structured. The percentage of women who acquired land under the two models ranged between 18 and 20 % nationwide (Chingarande 2003; Mutopo 2015). Even when allocated land (including through inheritance), women did not always remain in control.[2] In some cases, the son actually took over the mother's land entitlement and exercised control of the land and its production systems (Jirira and Halimana 2008; Mutopo 2014).

In Masvingo Province, there is a diverse pattern of how women have adopted and been affected by the FTLRP. Benefits from land reform were mainly evident in the communally marginalized women, especially the unmarried who realized independence with the coming of the resettlement scheme. In male-headed households women also gained some economic independence, which tended to shift gender roles and relations. Data analysed from cases in Goromonzi and Mazowe show that the FTLRP was widely viewed as 'masculine' favouring men over women, with women being mostly responsible for the small crops used for

household consumption, whose market value in the event of a surplus comes far behind a man's agricultural income. Box 14.1, illustrates the extent to which women are affected by the ideology of the FTLRP.

Box 14.1 Local Villager Interview
The household setup is not fair as men have full control of cash crops and as women, are responsible for crops that are mainly for family consumption for example groundnuts. The unfair part of it is, even if as women, we sell surplus (women crops), men's hands will be seen when money gets on the table. That is the reason why we also engage ourselves in other non-agricultural generating activities in a bid to widen our income base.
Source: Adapted from Mutopo (2014, p. 75)

When the resettlement era began, customary law was non-existent. Benefits to women were realized in this period until Chiefs and Headmen began administering authoritative powers which undermined women's role in the land-reform initiative and their subsequent socio-economic transformation. The A1 permits, unlike the A2, which were an open-access exercise dependent on the resources one had, viewed women as spouses. There was a great disparity in gender treatment in the FTLRP—it was largely insensitive to the land needs and rights of women, albeit the A1 women landholders benefited and gained a livelihood. A disheartening response was given by one government official responding to the question of how and why women had been left out of land reform and the gaining of rights to land. His response deferred to the existence of tradition and culture (customary law) by saying,

> ... because I would have had my head cut off if I gave women land. Men would turn against the government, and it is not the government that calls on men to come and apply for land but it's set at household level; hence the outcome is inevitable.

This strongly implies that women can only get land in their own right in a world devoid of men.

With the regional range of studies done on land reform and gender, a basis for comparison and trend setting can be established. In Africa, it is

realized that women tend to use their negotiation skills in accessing land. The Zimbabwean women employ the 'right' language to speak to their husbands and doing so at the 'right' time, usually in the bedroom (Mutopo 2011). Access to land especially by the married people conforms to creation of bargaining power. These bargains made by women frequently include sexual connotations in the accessing of land. In that regard, it validates the assertion that for women to access land, there has to be some sort of relationship tied to men and even the land that women might personally possess, e.g.. water gardens, are reported to be controlled by men too.

Utilization of Land by Women Entrepreneurs

If women have access to and control over land, household livelihoods and patterns improve and can be sustained. Since they are natural caretakers, they have proved to have better management policies regarding farm produce, its marketing exchange, and the subsequent use of the income earned (Mutopo 2015). Most land accessed by women through the FTLRP was being used for production of food crops, mainly for household consumption, with few women contributing to the trade in urban food networks or contributing to national food security or to export. This was attributed to the women's inability to access resources, especially financial credit facilities. The same phenomenon has been observed for other African countries as credit facilities often need a husband's signature and collateral of fixed assets, which the women normally do not have (Murisa 2007; Mutopo et al. 2015).

New research has argued that land reform has indeed opened up opportunities for women as new livelihoods are realized and pursued, leading to some gaining greater economic independence (Mutopo 2014; Mutopo et al. 2014). The findings in the Rutenga resettled farms include the role of women in the creation of new trading enterprises. Livelihoods were able to be sustained through creation of socio-economic linkages. The same case study, validated by others, revealed several cases in which women were accumulating land collectively in their own right and using the proceeds to invest in various developmental aspects of their lives e.g. taking children to school. Whilst the women advanced and created market networks, the men were left to do the domestic chores which normally would have been solely a woman's job.

Given the aforementioned gender gist that is associated with the FTLRP, the women in this programme managed to develop farmer-induced

institutions intended to increase agricultural produce and aid its value chains. From similar observations, an earlier study pointed out the creation of an active agricultural rural civil society which developed to become a local farmer movement (Matondi et al. 2013). This creation of a movement enabled the women post-FTLRP to gain entitlement through their women-initiated developments, giving rise to entrepreneurship. This also concurs with the statistical fact that 80 % of Zimbabwe's agricultural production in the fast-track farms lay in the capable hands of women, playing a vital role in agro-business and entrepreneurship (ibid.).

Women's involvement in accessing land and cropping activities, with some even crossing borders to South Africa for trade purposes, has epitomized the way that women have progressed and learnt how to deal with an entrepreneurship environment. This phenomenon demonstrates how social relations are shaped and understood, devising ways of coping with life, even under the most difficult circumstances. Women, in this regard act as agents in the land-reform process, devising strategies and means of attaining and sustaining a livelihood for themselves (Mutopo et al. 2014) in a difficult environment. The work of, for example Jacobs (2010), Makura-Paradza (2010) and, Mutopo (2011) demonstrate the way in which women have assumed a powerful position in managing farms and earnings such that they emerge as independent financial accumulators. These studies nationwide can be prone to criticism as they derive a case study conclusion which cannot be generalized for the country as a whole. What can be done from the case study-based results is to acknowledge that women have, due to the FTLRP, assumed an upper hand in financial acquisition especially for day-to-day use, a scenario that was never dreamt of pre-FTLRP (Makura-Paradza 2010; Mazhawidza and Manjengwa 2011).

Marketing Strategies Employed by Women

Women have played a vital role in employment creation. In the event that they acquire land, they are said to employ workers whereas men usually rely on their spouses as labourers (Chiweshe et al. 2014).The study demonstrates one prominent marketing strategy that seems to be employed by the 'victorious' women under the A1 resettlement scheme in Zimbabwe. They created trade routes and strong marketing networks reaching as far as Johannesburg, South Africa. They would sell the produce deemed 'women crops' (vegetables and all sorts of nuts),

managing to come back with enough income to uplift the household, even from one trip. This illustrates the risk-embracing nature of women as they are able to take a leap of faith and step out of poverty. Since women capacitated themselves through access to land they have managed to engage in regional trade, and have hence attained much independence. The women managed to make use of land reform and have reaped visible results from their access to land and the subsequent establishment of agri-businesses. Empirical validation of the viability of the FTLRP on uplifting and redefining rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe can also be confirmed from work done across all the different agro-ecological regions in Zimbabwe by various researchers, including but not restricted to, Murisa (2009), Scoones et al. (2010), Mutopo, 2011, Moyo (2011), Hanlon et al. (2013, p. 4) and Nyawo (2016). Field evidence given below demonstrates the different marketing strategies that women have employed in South Africa, which the media has not really zeroed in on yet; they show processes of agency and resilience by women in fast-track farms. The case of Mrs Maidei Chigushe (56 years) gives an indication of the kinds of entrepreneurial strategies carried out by women from Mwenezi farms.

Crossing the Border to Sell in South Africa

Mrs Chimbindi is from Merrivale resettlement area, Mwenezi. She and her husband acquired an A1 plot and practise subsistence farming and animal husbandry; they mainly grow sugar cane, maize, groundnuts and sorghum, since their plot is in Natural Region IV. She also goes to Dick Farm, where the A2 newly resettled farmers have irrigation and so they have plentiful vegetables year round, to buy and order more vegetables. She began a marketing enterprise in 2005, and travels to Johannesburg weekly to sell her produce in Berea Street.

Media Projections and Gendered Realities

Based on the author `s engagement with local women fast-track farmers it can be seen that they exist on a different, higher, economic and social plane than what the local independent media and the international media report on the role of women in land access and utilization after fast-track land reform. What I have observed in the past seven years based on ethnographic accounts is that women have accessed land and are utilizing it for different

agricultural activities, (Mutopo 2015). As a consequence, media representation of the land reform in Zimbabwe has been a terrain for the contesting of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourse. The challenges faced by the media in representing the multi-layered conflicts and complex elements of this issue has been alluded to by various scholars who acknowledge that the centrality of the land question is intricately linked to the race question (Mamdani 2008; Muzondidya 2011; Chari 2013; Li Ping 2003). Mkodzongi (2010) clearly states this thesis when he points out that both academics and journalists have exhibited a tendency to engage in emotive debates that centre on personalities rather than issues, thereby missing opportunities to critically evaluate Zimbabwe's radical land-reform programme. The reality on the ground in the case study demonstrates that the women are not passive agents of the process of agrarian and land reform but rather they have emerged as strategic actors who have been able to create and shape new livelihoods in the process of improving their status as women.

Policy Imperatives

Zimbabwe's National Gender Policy of 2004 undoubtedly demonstrates that the original Constitution failed to realize the primary role of women, rural women essentially, in accessing land and in agricultural production. The Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013, although stating that that land distribution should have gender balance, has no clear-cut gender-specific policy regarding land access to women, only a statement of women's basic rights. This is a great move in the right path and should be commended. The lack of gender mainstreaming, paying particular attention to women's effects the economy through their potential role in the economic recovery of the country via agro-business and entrepreneurship, is suppressed. Concerning agro-business, the policy does not take a stand on addressing entrepreneurship issues, hence women's ventures in the agricultural sector are hampered. Zimbabwe needs a gender policy that is all-encompassing of women's issues (practical gender mainstreaming). This will enable women to be visible and recognized and even benefit from government policy. Statutory and customary law are parallel to each other when issues of gender and asset inheritance come up. If this parity is to be addressed, there is need for a nexus to be established between what the statutory law says about gender and what the customary law also says. The two cannot over-ride each other. It will not make sense to give women rights to land that can then be invalidated by customary laws.

There is need for a media policy that takes cognisance of the gender-based facets of land reform processes. This will help in the crafting nationally based gender policies that enhance rural women's livelihoods. A media policy that is in harmony with women's needs will also serve as springboard for women to read and appreciate media outputs, particularly if the news appreciates their livelihood pathways.

Conclusion

Public and private media projections of women's movements in land-reform processes are influenced by the political, economic and social history of a nation. This has been evidenced by the case study presented here and also the different state and non-state newspapers that report on gendered processes of land reform. This demonstrates that a gendered approach to land reform should bring attention and appreciation to bear on the different livelihood pathways that Zimbabwean women engage in in the aftermath of the land-reform process. Based on the author's ethnographic engagements with the communities for more than seven years, the evidence from the field demonstrates that women have accessed land and are engaged in various agro-based activities which the media has not focused on much. Rather they report on the negativities outweighing true case-based evidence. This therefore leads to the notion that media representations of gender-based land-reform programmes should take into account the role that women play in the agricultural sector based on field evidence and not helicopter-based fieldwork of one day's duration. Such unorthodox field experiences lead to malice on the part of the women who have benefitted from the land-reform programme. Women face discriminatory tendencies both in the public and private spheres, hence the adoption of the new Constitution of Zimbabwe should lead to media changes in the way women are portrayed in agro-based activities. Hence their control on land and its produce would be less likely to be compromised. There is need for a deliberate effort to recruit and recognize women as key players in building the national productivity base as they constitute more than half of the Zimbabwean population. It is against this background that the case study recommends that priority be given to women especially when allocating resources like land. This capacitates them and helps them sustain their households. It also enables them to access agricultural inputs such as seed, fertilizer and also opens access to credit facilities.

Notes

1. The family farm or household model means the land is given to the family or household not individuals within these institutions.
2. A legal court case of *Magaya v Magaya*. Venia could not access her father's land by virtue of being a woman. The ruling concluded that customary law in Zimbabwe supersedes statutory law in inheritance issues. In that regard, the male child is viewed as the suitable inheritor of the parents' property.

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CHAPTER 15

Global Activism or Media Spectacle? An exploration of 'Bring Back Our Girls Campaign'

Dorothy Njoroge

Introduction

In April 2014 over 270 girls were abducted from their school in Chibok Nigeria by a militant Islamist group, Boko Haram. This led to an outpouring of condemnation and the #bringbackourgirls campaign was born. For the last several years, Nigeria has battled the terrorist menace posed by this group whose handiwork includes decapitation of citizens, burning of buildings, bombings of public places, shooting of worshippers in churches as well as the killing of moderate Muslim clerics among other horrors, all in an effort to create an Islamic Caliphate in Nigeria. The United Nations envoy to the area, Toby Lanzer, reported that over 1,000 schools have been destroyed in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger, according to the *Daily Mail* of 16 November 2015.

Boko Haram, which roughly translates to Boko (Western education) is haram (forbidden) in the Hausa language, has been a shadowy Islamist group operating in north-eastern Nigeria but was thrust into international

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limelight following the #Bringbackourgirls campaign. Formed in 2002, the insurgency outfit has grown in strength, taking over territory from the Nigerian army and becoming a major headache for the Nigerian government. Since the new Nigerian president Mohamed Buhari was elected in 2015, the army has scored a number of success against the group but it has not by any means been vanquished. Two years after the abduction, the girls remain missing.

These atrocities committed by this group largely remained in the margins of global public discourse. But the capture of young women in a boarding school changed all that catching the collective imaginary of the global public lending support to the 'bring back our girls' campaign which quickly acquired visibility on social media. The #BringBackOurGirls was created by parents and activists in Nigerian who were frustrated by the seeming inaction of the Nigerian government following the abductions, to complement protests in cities across the country.

In the streets of Nigeria, parents dressed in red bore placards reading 'Bring Back Our Girls', while a coordinated campaign on social media had celebrities around the world appealing for the release of the girls carrying a '#BringBackOurGirls' sign in a symbol of global solidarity. The Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) campaign was an online sensation, attracting global attention that garnered more than five million tweets.[1] BBOG was a local campaign aiming to expand globally and, as parents protested in the Nigerian seat of government in Abuja, similar protests were taking place in Washington DC, Los Angeles, London, and other cities across Europe and North America.

Opposition to girls' education has been waged by Jihadist Islamist groups ranging from the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan to Boko Haram in Nigeria among other places on the globe. The BBOG case represents the experiences of girls and women around the whose educational endeavours are terminated or curtailed by groups adhering to ideologies that are inimical to women's progress with discourses steeped in patriarchy supported by misapplied cultural and religious systems. The viral campaign lifted the lid on the perils of girls' education in Nigeria that had escaped widespread public scrutiny.

Women have made tremendous strides as a result of women's movements around the world resulting in increased access to education, employment and self-efficacy for millions of women who can now live independent lives. While these gains are less visible in Africa, statistics still show an incremental jump in school enrolments at all levels, with the most

impressive gains being made at lower levels of school, according to the Brookings Institute (Winthrop and McGivney 2014). Moreover, gender has become an important component in public policy and national planning further strengthening the advancement of women in various countries. A few women who have attained high political or corporate offices have given visibility to women in public spaces, leading to the conclusion, among some, that gender equity has been achieved or nearly so (Gqola 2007). Correspondingly, there has been an unease among large swathes of younger women in the West as well as African women in identifying with the feminist project for divergent reasons. Younger women, or the so-called Third Wave feminists in the West, find feminism distasteful and have embraced a commercialized 'empowerment' Lazar 2006.

This and other neo-liberal factors have resulted in the moment of post-feminism where it is assumed all is well and all women need to do is take advantage of all the opportunities availed to them so they can be on the same level playing field with their male counterparts. McRobbie (2007) posits that feminist discourse has been marginalized in the media and replaced by post-feminism. D-I-Y feminism eschewing earlier forms of collective organizing, lobbying and dissent is the essence of post-feminism. The post-feminist script, especially in entertainment depicts first 'feminism as an individualistic activity; second, portrays feminism as unnecessary for individual women; third, embroils feminism in consumerism; and fourth, demonstrates that men have already attained feminist enlightenment' (Kornfield 2012, p. 448). It posits that post-feminist women have overcome most of the disadvantages women suffered and can compete with men on an equal pane. Writing from Singapore, Lazar (2006) argues that post-feminism has become a global discourse circulated by international advertising firms and popular culture.

Post-feminism discourse in the West and cosmopolitan capitals around the world cloaks the real struggles women in many parts of world still face. It has served to obscure the dangers to human progress represented in the cases of Malala in Pakistan and the Chibok girls in Nigeria, for example, by movements such as Taliban and Boko Haram which violently oppose the education of girls. This assault, coupled with other insidious cultural practices that inhibit the education of girls and women, demonstrates the urgent need to re-invigorate and galvanize women's movements for the purpose of safeguarding girls' right to education, self-determination and even life itself.

Hence, a case like this lifts the lid on these underlying inequities that post-feminism discourse papers over. In addressing this issue, one of

Nigeria's and Africa's leading lights in the feminist movement, Amina Mama asserts that 'it is entirely outrageous to suggest that "we have done the gender thing and now we can move beyond it"' and observes that 'African societies are so clearly demarcated by gender divisions that it would be strategically suicidal to deny this and pretend that gender does not exist, or worse still, that gender struggles are a thing of the past' (Salo 2001, p. 63). Vibrant African and other third-world feminisms are needed to vigorously expose the inequities and translate these to policies that support and nurture women's education and other basic rights.

Generally, African women feel alienated from the western brand of feminism, with its history, demands and theorizing (Kolawole 2002; Guy-Sheftall 2003). Abortion rights and to a large extent rights to same-sex relationships do not resonate with African women, many of whom are still grappling with basic issues of survival in a highly gendered context. Women in advanced economies are not there yet, but have made significant strides in overcoming some of these hurdles. Nevertheless, as Susan Arndt (2002) points out, African feminism is an unsettled concept, at least in terms of nomenclature. It is variously known by Chikwenye Ogunyemi's term African womanism, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism, Hudson-Weem's Africana Womanism, Catherine Achonulu's Motherism and African feminism, among other monikers. But Amina Mama argues that critiques of third-world feminists have sufficiently informed feminist theorizing globally so it is not necessary to cede the term feminism to others. Thus the term African feminism will be the umbrella term in this chapter (even though the author recognizes that there are various shades of feminisms in Africa as well). But whatever the label, 'it is evident, however, that womanism, like feminism, strives for the total liberation of women from religious and socio-cultural institutions that relegate women to the periphery of existence' (Nkealah 2006, p. 138).

Despite shared values, several differences exist between African feminism and western feminism. In the main, African feminism addresses various challenges and integrates the struggle for gender equity 'with liberation from other forms of oppression, namely slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, racism, poverty, illiteracy, and disease' (Guy-Sheftall 2003, p. 31). In essence, it is a 'pluralist struggle against all forms of oppression' (Kolawole 2002, p. 95). It seeks to address the 'history of interlocking oppressions in the burdens we carry' (Gqola 2001, p. 12). Amina Mama says feminism in the African context, 'signals a refusal of oppression, and a commitment to struggling for women's liberation from

all forms of oppression internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical' (Salo 2001, p. 59). She further states that gender politics should take a three-pronged approach—transformation of women's subjectivity, of their personal lives and the political economy. Thus, women's liberation requires addressing gender injustice all the way from micro- to the macro-political level. In sum,

> African feminisms critique and reject dominant narratives that generalise and essentialise the condition of African women, men and children and seek awareness of specific contexts, cultures and peoples. Such an approach requires describing particular national or regional trends, while simultaneously raising awareness of contextual variations within broader trends. African feminisms in addition emphasise the power and agency of African women in particular to theorise from their cultures and lived experiences to produce knowledge that is contextually relevant, builds relationships, heals the self, the community and the larger socio-cultural context (Chilisa and Ntseane, 2010, pp. 618–619).

African feminism is also an expansive territory geographically and expands to accommodate continental and diasporan feminists who theorize and advocate for women in a myriad of contexts. Actually, the term Africana womanism was coined to reflect this reality. Globalization, employment pressures and inhospitable political environments in Africa have occasionally served to eject intellectuals and political activists and scatter them all over the world. In those new locales, African women continue to grapple with issues of identity and belongingness. In a campaign like this, such voices were able to unite giving a transnational complexion to the campaign.

Due to the parallels in the woman condition across the world, there is need for an overarching transnational, feminist perspective that takes into account experiences, concerns and locations of women around the world. Since Western feminism with its universalizing tropes is not a proper fit for gender analysis in the Third World, gender theory has expanded and continues to expand to incorporate other perspectives. Hedge calls for a "fusion of a global feminist worldview with postmodern and postcolonial influences' (Hedge 1998, p. 284). This global reconceptualization of feminist theory would produce multiple knowledges to combat the universalism of one perspective, she further argues. Post-colonialism provides the analytical tools that can be used to explore the gendered conditions in the rest of the world focusing on the hybrid nature of human

experience thus dismantling the essentializing notions inherent in dominant outlooks (Hedge 1998). While important work has been done in this direction, it is not at all clear if such a gender globalist view exists. Nonetheless, African feminisms as previously mentioned, are transnational in nature due to the forced or willing migration of African peoples.

Ideological and geographical diversity of African feminisms cause tensions but also provide opportunities for an engaged transnational push for gender transformation. As Kuumba (2003) puts it, 'the sun never sets on African feminisms' due to its geographical spread through migration, resulting in 'global African feminisms'. Joy James (2013) classifies black feminism in categories of liberal/cultural feminism and radical/revolutionary feminism. Liberal feminism adopts accommodationist politics and seeks to work state and corporate power to improve the lot of women—men are identified as the obstacle to female advance. Radical approaches identify state and corporate systems as barriers to women's progress and seek to do away with institutionalized state and corporate structures of control as these are considered complicit in systems of patriarchy and capitalism that produce gender oppression.

Buiten (2013) on the other hand, classifies feminism thought within the South African context into two broad categories. The liberal inclusionary feminism approach 'characterised by an emphasis on women and their involvement in the so-called "public sphere", with a strong focus on equal participation; the representation of women's voices in legal, political, institutional and cultural roles; and legislative and policy reforms' (2013, p. 58). Both Women in Development (WID) and Women and Development (WAD) have promoted policies that encouraged equality in terms of quantitative increase of women in schools, leadership positions and so on (Chilisa and Ntseana 2010). But this reformist approach, while useful, is not sufficient as it focuses in increasing women's participation through institutionalized formal mechanisms while other salient issues, such as gendered power relations and discourse are given short shrift (Buiten 2013, p. 59).

Conversely, progressive feminist approaches, an umbrella term for post-colonial and similar approaches, focus on 'gendered social meanings and their relationship to power' (Buiten, 2013, p. 60). This approach does not seek to simply create more opportunities for women within the existing structures but to bring about social transformation based on equitable principles by dismantling the extant social order (Nkealah 2006, p. 135). It represents of a change in tack from advocating changes in laws and policies to improve equality to working to dismantle inequity

not just in the public sphere but also in the private sphere (Buiten 2013, p. 60). This approach interrogates difference and constructions of feminisms as well as masculinities. Ultimately, it seeks to address 'the structural, social and cultural underpinnings of gender inequality at all levels, not merely at the level of public participation' (Buiten 2013, p. 61).

One strategy for bringing about this transformation is by using personal stories of experiences with injustice to speak to the hearts and appeal to the emotions, not just the minds, of those sustaining misconceptions in creative ways which are evident in African women's literature that details the negative consequences of patriarchy on female characters (Nkealah 2006). This approach fits in with Hedge's call 'for more local and specific understandings of personhood as being constituted within overlapping global discourses' (Hedge 1998, p. 288).

The Bring Back our Girls campaign represents a site where the specific local situation overlaps with globality as campaigners share snapshots of their activities as well as thoughts and feelings regarding the kidnapped Chibok girls. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the feminist content of the campaign messages. To what extent is it framed as a social justice issue? To what extent are gender lens used to analyse the problem and/or solutions? But before delving into the details of these questions, the next section briefly outlines feminist discourse in African contexts.

Feminist Discourse in Africa

Feminist discourses in Africa are characterized by constraints in addressing the gender question as mostly a policy issue without the attendant social transformation. It characterized by a paradox of the discourse of empowerment co-existing with daily injustices. For example, in South Africa, despite a number of legislative changes to improve gender equity, gender-based violence is very high, including rape and sexual harassment on the streets (Gqola 2007, p. 115). As Gqola further elaborates,

> 'the empowerment of women', as currently employed and aired in South Africa, rests on the assumption that ensuring that some women have access to wealth, positions in government and corporate office is enough gender progressive work for our society. This assumption is flawed on various levels, even if increased representation of women across all sectors of our society is a worthwhile and necessary project (2007, p. 115).

It is flawed because various factors hinder women's rise, including the expectation that to succeed, women have to fit into the current system rather than the structures being adapted to suit the needs and requirements of women (ibid.).

Buiten's study of the journalism industry in South Africa confirms these observations. Her interviews of South African journalists and editors indicated that while, at a personal level, some appreciated the need for progressive approaches to gender issues, the overarching discourse was that of liberal discourse. As such, 'liberal-inclusionary feminist discourses shaped, and set limitations on, how journalists understood gender issues' (2013, p. 61). Further, these media workers did not have an appreciation of their role as producers of gendered texts which affect societal gender relations.

Similar trends are noted in Kenya in a study of mothers of political prisoners who acted together to go on hunger strike in a public park to demand the release of their sons, who had been jailed by President Moi in 1992 for their political activities in fighting for multi-party democracy. These women and their sympathizers engaged in protest activities for a year before their sons were released. Nancy Worthington studied the coverage of this activism in Kenya's independent news magazine the *Weekly Review*. Stamp (1995) had proposed that 'combative motherhood' is able to give such actors moral authority that can be effective in social change and also bridge the public and private spheres that usually govern media work thereby transcending media invisibility given to women actors (Worthington 2001, p. 171).

However, in this case, the publication effaced the women's agency by painting them as agents of opposition politics suggesting 'to readers that the women did not and possibly could not think for themselves' (Worthington 2001, p. 178). These women's names were not used in news coverage by *Weekly Review* except in one case when three of them collapsed during the hunger strike. Gqola (2007) speaks of similar invisibilization of women in South Africa.

Worthington (2001) notes that the *Weekly Review* coverage of Mothers of Political Prisoners severed the symbolic link between motherhood and their political action through framing that divided their maternal authority, actual or symbolic, from their 'combative' behaviour (Worthington 2001, p. 180). Without this symbolic link, 'the advocates were portrayed simply as combative women or political dupes, two much less appealing representations that were reinforced by their appearance in the masculine genre of news' (Worthington 2001, p. 180).

This negation of women's political agency by this publication fits with a larger discourse where women's voices are de-legitimated in media discourse and their activism usurped by other forces. While women's movements per se are not always bastions of confronting gender injustice, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign raises critical issues of women's rights. I examined the Facebook page of this campaign in the first two months of the disappearance of the girls to see how issues of social justice feature in the posts regarding this campaign. Beyond the urgency of rescuing the girls, to what degree were larger issues of gender justice part of the posts and interactions on the campaign's page on Facebook? How is problem conceptualized on social media? Are broader issues of women's oppression and its systemic nature part of the discussion? Most studies have looked at gender discourse in mainstream media. This looks at social media, without media gatekeepers, to examine campaigners' unfiltered expressions.

There are divergent views on the efficacy of online campaigning. Some have described it as simply fleeting, clicktivism (Christensen 2011; Drumbl 2012) while others see a real potential for creating cosmopolitan public (Madianou 2013, p. 250). A criticism directed at mediated suffering—that it does not lead to action—is obviated in social media networks as people can mobilize by sharing, donating, signing petitions and so forth. Action on social media is characterized as 'understanding/awareness; talk; and action' (Madianou 2013, p. 252).

Kony 2012 marked a watershed moment for campaigns on Africa and showed the potential of using digital networked tools to create a visible campaign for causes. The 30-minute video, which went viral, reaching 110 million hits in six days, was made by a US charity, Invisible Children Inc (Nothias 2013). By contrast, the #bringbackourgirls social media campaign is home-grown and started by a tweet from a Nigerian lawyer, Ibrahim M. Abdullahi, using the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls on 23 April.[2] This became the catchphrase for the campaign globally not just for the social media campaign but also for street protests.

Political action on the internet is affected by the digital divide, with parts of the world having unrestricted access while others have inadequate access, thereby reducing the impact of collective virtual activism (Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010). Though it must be noted the fastest growth in mobile phone adoption is in Africa 'total mobile subscription penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to be around 80 percent in 2015' and 'by 2021, it is expected to reach 100 percent in the region' (Sub-Saharan Ericsson Report 2015). This is significant because people in sub-Saharan region largely access

the internet through their phones for online activities such as social networking. As such, 'growing smartphone ownership and a lack of fixed broadband availability has resulted in mobile broadband being the most common way to connect to the internet' so that '83 percent of Nigerian mobile phone subscribers rely solely on this channel' (Ericsson Mobility Report 2015).

The Case

As indicated earlier, the abduction of the 276 girls and attendant lack of government action in Nigeria to recover the girls led to protests by parents and their sympathizers in Nigerian cities. It also led to a social media campaign mostly on Facebook and Twitter which picked up global support including the US first lady, Michelle Obama, Secretary Hillary Clinton, actress Anne Hathaway among dozens more celebrities and world leaders. The campaign called for a social media march, organizing events such as marches and vigils and signing petitions among other activities.

Two years on and the Facebook campaign is still on. However, the activity peaked in the first two months of the campaign. The corpus analysed comprised the Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/bringbackourgirls for the campaign focusing on the initial months of the campaign.

This chapter examines posts and comments on gender on the official campaign page. Among issues on this page regarding the calls for release of the girls and planning of various events in various places are posts and interactions regarding the nature of this crime and the larger socio-political issues surrounding it. This chapter reflects Facebook users' views on the gender question as represented within the comments and posts regarding this campaign. The methodology is thematic analysis of texts. Four main themes that relate to feminist concerns in the posts. These include right to education for girls, condemnation of human trafficking, religious oppression and women power.

Education as a Tool for Girls' Empowerment – 'Nothing can terrify a gorilla like a little girl with a text book!'

One of the enduring themes of feminist movement worldwide has been the education of women. Education remains one of the areas that women's organizations around the world have campaigned for so the girl child is not left behind.

Girls' empowerment is overwhelmingly defined as participation in education in online discourse. In tandem with demands of feminism, particularly the liberal-inclusionary version, preparing the girls to be active participants in society through education is a message that has seeped everywhere and seems to define what women empowerment. Education is seen as the social equalizer that helps girls achieve their dreams. More importantly, it helps them to think for themselves and think for themselves. As Mama posits, education provides women with the critical intellectual tools women can use to seek gender justice (Salo 2001). While an important step, education does not always translate to advancement for women.

Human Trafficking a Threat to Girls Empowerment – 'human trafficking! please sign petitions!'

While education was conceptualized as the means to women's advancement, the abduction of the Chibok girls is seen as a key setback to women's progress. According to comments on Facebook, abduction of the girls is understood in legal terms—human trafficking.

This crime against the young women is therefore defined as an international crime and echoes the global discourse of international justice. However, it is reductionist as it fails to interrogate the interplay of forces that made this heinous act possible. The failure of African governments to control rogue elements within their countries has escalated the discourse of international justice, as demonstrated by *Kony 2012*. However, this international justice discourse fails to interrogate the specific conditions in northern Nigeria that have prepared the ground for the atrocities witnessed including the abduction of the girls.

Religious Oppression Holding Women Back - 'Freedom from ignorance and religious oppression..... Bring back our girls!!!!!'

Feminism has identified religious dogma as one of the way through which women's oppression is accomplished. As Nkealah notes, feminism 'strives for the total liberation of women from religious and socio-cultural institutions that relegate women to the periphery of existence' (2006, p. 138). Clearly this position seems universally accepted and characterizes the Facebook comments on the campaign site.

Religious extremist dogma has been used for millennia to subordinate women's intellects, emotions and bodies. As such, female sexuality remains 'an issue that cannot be separated from African women's racialized and gendered histories and other social, political, religious, and economic relations' (Ampofo and Beoku-Betts et al. 2004, p. 695). Religious propaganda, from political Islam, in this case remains one of the key tenets used to disempower and subjugate women and deny them their human rights and is a key sub-theme in online interactions and posts.

Women's Power - 'Women's kick ass army!!!'

Despite women's vulnerability in this situation, their power is also recognized in some of the posts as noted below. This aspect goes furthest in demonstrating understand of the causes of gender inequity in our world today that seems premised on female subjugation. This theme goes furthest in recognizing the need to bring transformation in gender relations where one gender is not seen as a threat to the other—'When will men stop fearing women?' as one campaigner poses. The theme suggests a changing of guard may be necessary for things to turn around. Women's strength is constructed to emanate from bonds they share and the value accorded to the human person.

Conclusion

This campaign brought into sharp relief the real everyday struggles women in northern Nigeria experience in an attempt to get an education. School completion rates are very low, in fact, 'only 4 % of females complete secondary school in the Northern zones' (British Council Gender in Nigeria Report 2012, p. 2). The implications for human development are vast, given the Nigerian's high population and its place as a leading country in Africa.

The analysis of social media discourse shows that feminism concerns resonate with those campaigning for the release of the girls on social media and elsewhere. However, the discussion fits more on the liberal inclusive side of the continuum than the progressive side. It is widely expected that legal and institutional changes and making space for women within the current configuration of power will produce the changes needed to uplift the lot to girls. While the prospects of transformation of power relations

are acknowledged, they remain marginal. Hence, while access to education is an important feature of social media discourse in this campaign, in Sri Lanka, women's educational achievement, almost at par with men, has not translated into social mobility through employment as women are held back by traditional gender roles such as motherhood, and by negative attitudes towards women taking up certain professions. Institutionalized sexism and racism also remain a problem for Sri Lankan women she further notes. Thus, questions of access serve as the first step of a long journey to afford women their full human rights, a reality that remains largely unacknowledged in public discourse that this campaign is symptomatic of.

The international justice discourse generalizes the conditions in northern Nigeria with those in other parts of the world where criminal elements have caused havoc. There is no discussion of the larger sociopolitical issues in northern Nigeria that the girls' abduction is symptomatic of. As Madianou (2013) notes in her study of two social media campaigns, *Kony 2012* and Waterforward, the national contexts for these causes are not provided in the campaign. She notes that historical context is absent in *Kony 2012* despite its 30-minute length. Yet 'African feminisms critique and reject dominant narratives that generalize and essentialize the condition of African women, men and children and seek awareness of specific contexts, cultures and peoples' (Chilisa and Ntseane 2010, p. 619).

Despite the discourses of the campaign resonating with feminist discourses, they cannot be classified as revolutionary. For example, they hardly question the system of patriarchy defined as 'self-sustaining structures of power, by means of which women's interests are always ultimately subordinated to male interests, constitute the social order known as 'patriarchy', a designation which applies to almost all human societies, past and present' (Morris 1993 in Nkealah 2006, p. 136). It is this system that made the girls vulnerable and also led to President Jonathan Goodluck's failure to act with sufficient urgency to rescue the girls.

Notes

1. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33446305
2. http://mashable.com/2014/05/06/nigeria-girls-bringbackourgirls/#c2kvqwDBTOqp

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CHAPTER 16

Erratum to: Global Activism or Media Spectacle? An exploration of 'Bring Back Our Girls Campaign'

Dorothy Njoroge

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