Feminist Africa

e-spaces : e-politics

Feminist Africa is a continental gender studies journal produced by the community of feminist scholars. It provides a platform for intellectual and activist research, dialogue and strategy. *Feminist Africa* attends to the complex and diverse dynamics of creativity and resistance that have emerged in postcolonial Africa, and the manner in which these are shaped by the shifting global geopolitical configurations of power.

It is currently based at the African Gender Institute in Cape Town.

A full text version of this journal is available on the *Feminist Africa* website: http://www.feministafrica.org

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e-spaces : e-politics

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Editorial policy

Feminist Africa is guided by a profound commitment to transforming gender hierarchies in Africa, and seeks to redress injustice and inequality in its content and design, and by its open-access and continentally-targeted distribution strategy. *Feminist Africa* targets gender researchers, students, educators, women's organisations and feminist activists throughout Africa. It works to develop a feminist intellectual community by promoting and enhancing African women's intellectual work. To overcome the access and distribution challenges facing conventional academic publications, *Feminist Africa* deploys a dual dissemination strategy, using the Internet as a key tool for knowledge-sharing and communication, while making hard copies available to those based at African institutions.

Two issues are produced per annum, in accordance with themes specified in the calls for contributions.

The editorial team can be contacted at agi-feministafrica@uct.ac.za

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All submissions to *Feminist Africa* must use the FA style sheet, and should not include graphics.

Feature articles should not exceed 6 500 words. Other contributions should not exceed 2 000 words.

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Editorial: Feminist engagements with 21st-century communications technology

Jennifer Radloff

Introduction

The advent and development of the internet has expanded the frontiers of feminist activism. *Feminist Africa* is itself a prime example of the audacious digital engagements displayed by women's movements all over the world. Established over 10 years ago with the support of Africa's resurgent feminist community, *Feminist Africa* is the continent's first open-access online scholarly journal, and still the only one dedicated to publishing and promoting independent feminist scholarship as an activist project. Originally envisaged as an online intellectual forum for feminist research and activism, *FA* also produced a limited print edition to address the limited digital access that the African Gender Institute's survey of the feminist intellectual community revealed (Radloff 2002).

However, as access and use of the internet mirrors the sex/gender, class and other power dynamics offline, so do the violations. State control, censorship, surveillance, invasion of privacy, curtailment of freedom of expression and association, and violence against women are some of the issues that internet rights organisations are taking up, and which United Nations structures are attempting to address. The UN Human Rights Commission (2013) affirmed that:

> the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, which is applicable regardless of frontiers and through any media of one's choice, in accordance with articles 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/HRC/20/l.13). (Library of Congress, 2012)

At the 2013 Internet Governance Forum (IGF), a multi-stakeholder forum for policy dialogue on issues of internet governance, the key message from women's rights activists was that

> the human rights of women and sexual minorities are being increasingly impacted by the internet, not only through violence and discrimination, but through policies and legislation that do not recognise their specific contexts, concerns and capacities. (Finnegan, 2013)

Enter *Feminist Africa* 18 – offering our unique perspective to independent public discourse on the implications of global digitisation, presenting African perspectives that emerge out of feminist praxis across the continent. In this issue we follow up on issue 17 (Researching Sexuality with Young Women: Southern Africa, 2012), keeping pace with the rapid expansion of cyberfeminism by presenting the latest on African women's ongoing and remarkable contribution to this global arena.

Historical evidence reveals that it was a woman – Ada Lovelace (1815–1852) – who wrote the first computer programme. Lovelace also originated the concept of using binary numbers, and was an early visionary – seeing the potential of the earliest computer models to develop far beyond simple number-crunching. Xide Xie (1921–2000), banished during the Cultural Revolution, was key to the development of solid-state physics in China. Rose Dieng-Kuntz (1956–2008), Senegalese scientist, was one of the first scholars to understand the important of the Web and to map how it would evolve to specialise in artificial intelligence and knowledge management.

Indian feminist Anita Gurumurthy, deeply disturbed by the fate of Snowden, the whistleblower who made world headlines by sharing classified information on USA, British and Israeli abuses of surveillance technology, alongside other profoundly disturbing military secrets, reflects:

> [t]he turn of events is deeply disturbing for global justice. And for the feminist project, it is a sobering moment. Just as we were beginning to creatively bend space with digital tools for building community, forging social movements, organising dissent and publishing perspectives on gender justice, we begin to realise that the 'network' may indeed be monolithic, pervasive and unexceptional. However, feminist activism requires an abiding commitment to constructive, forward-looking analysis and theory that can assist action for change. (Gurumurthy, 2013: 25)

At the core of being human is the desire to communicate, and to make sense and meaning through communicating. Through collective and individual reflection, we create and re-create knowledge.

Since their inception, women's movements have responded to the patriarchal privileging of male knowledge by developing a rich array of alternative communication strategies. From women's collectives, reading, writing and storytelling circles, feminist presses, radio stations and films, women speak out, write, and publish, creating new discourses and challenging patriarchal and imperialist legacies that continue to marginalise, erase, and reduce women's contributions to the world, while reinscribing male supremacy by default.

Information and communications technologies (ICTs), and the more recent proliferation of social media and digital tools, are profoundly and irrevocably reshaping our world. As Huizing and Esterhuysen note:

> No struggle for social justice is a better measure of success than that for women's rights and gender equality. This can also be applied to the internet. A truly free internet that fulfils its potential as a tool for social justice is an internet that is not just used by women, but also shaped by them through their involvement in its governance and development. It is an internet on which women have the freedom and capacity to actively tell their stories, participate in social, political and economic life, and claim their rights to be empowered, equal citizens of the world who can live free from discrimination and the fear of violence. (Huizing and Esterhuysen, 2013: 6)

In the mid-1990s, there were intense debates amongst feminists on the use of ICTs in women's rights activism and in academia. It was glaringly obvious that access and the ability to use ICTs mirrored lines of privilege. Even in the women's and other social movements trying hard to be inclusive, ICTs presented old challenges in a new guise. Until challenged, access and use reproduced not only gender inequalities but also historical, linguistic, geopolitical, economic, cultural, racial and other interconnected axes of privilege and power.

Feminist communications rights activists started lobbying for ICTs to be included in platforms and processes such as Section J of the Beijing Platform, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the African Union. Non-

governmental organisations began using email, mailing lists, building websites and requesting capacity building in order to integrate these new tools into the work of organisations. Women's networks started working with inclusive strategies such as printing out and faxing emails from mailing lists, recording conference proceedings and circulating them to community radio stations, offering printed versions of internet-based articles. Organisations focusing on building women's capacity to use ICTs effectively were born, such as Women'sNet[1] in South Africa, Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)[2] in Uganda and Linux Chix Africa. Collaborative networks were created such as FLAMME, a network of African women online, committed to strengthening the capacity of women through the use of ICTs to lobby, advocate and participate in the Beijing +5 process. Powerful and inclusive methodologies were used to develop platforms and networks. Both FLAMME and Women'sNet brought women from organisations across Africa together to share skills and build capacity in creating websites and facilitating mailing lists.

The Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) sector acknowledged what became known as the "digital divide" and provided statistics which proved how polarising ICTs could be. The schism between the "developing" and "developed" world again reflected inequalities in access and reinforced exclusions with statistics showing that 77% of people in developed countries are online against only 31% of people in developing ones (Wikipedia, 2013a). The "gender digital divide" reinforces the inequities women face as well as the disparities between developed and developing world. In an article published recently in the *Global Information Society Watch 2013* on women's rights, gender and ICTs, Joanne Sandler cautions that,

> while recent data notes that 46% of the global web population is female, this masks other disparities. In wealthier regions such as in North America, the web population is evenly split. A UN Women/US State Department/Intel report cites that, on average across the developing world, nearly 25% fewer women than men have access to the internet, and the gender gap soars to nearly 45% in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. (Sandler, 2013: 10)

By the early 2000s, women's groups in Africa, fully aware that ICTs had revolutionised access to information, were creating alternative spaces and setting up dynamic and creative networks that challenge the monopolisation

of power and control over contemporary technologies by rich nations and corporations dominated by men. As Sandler notes,

> [w]hile the online world often replicates and potentially exacerbates the offline world's existing opportunities and inequalities – including those related to gender, class, race, disability and other lines of identity – it also requires us to adjust the lens of gender and human rights that we apply offline to enable us to map and claim our rights in this new terrain. (Sandler, 2013: 8)

The advent of the more interactive Web 2.0 (Wikipedia, 2013b) technologies and social media have further catalysed women's digital engagement. Blogging proliferated and became a popular way for women to write, debate, comment and self-publish on a range of issues. Facebook became not only a social connecting space but a way for activists to reach wide audiences at very little cost. Twitter enabled activists to share, almost in real-time, updates from meetings and conferences and include links to videos, websites and online petitions. People not able to attend important policy spaces could comment and include their opinions. YouTube facilitated the instant uploading of video clips which allowed activists on the frontline to document and display violations, now often picked up by mainstream media. Photo- and music-sharing sites gave rise to "mashups" (blending information from different sources) and challenged traditional notions of copyright. Online conferencing connected people in a virtual space and global organisations can now meet regularly using digital platforms. Skype and Voice Over Internet Protocol enables inexpensive voice and video connections creating a sense of closeness and deepening virtual relationships.

The most ubiquitous digital tool in Africa is the mobile phone. It has become the most popular way of accessing the internet. Research indicates that the uptake by women has been huge, although in most countries, men still outnumber women in terms of ownership of mobile phones.

> Mobile ownership among females increased in all countries over the two periods observed, in particular in Botswana (23.8%), Uganda (22.3%) and Kenya (21%). In fact, the adoption of mobile phones among women exceeds that of men in Botswana in particular, and also in Namibia and Cameroon, though by a lesser extent. However, in all the other countries surveyed, the share of men that own a mobile phone continues to be higher in comparison to women. (Deen-Swarray and Moyo, 2013: 16)

In her article on mobile technologies and feminist politics, Sanya engages with the ways that mobile phones in Kenya have the potential to circulate indigenous feminisms, cultures and cultural products. She argues that "there is a possibility to reveal the multiplicities of black, rural Kenyan women's identities, which are sometimes depicted as stagnant or monolithic. Here, I am arguing that these new users of information communication technologies are, in many cases, asserting their agency in using the mobile phone in ways that have previously been unarticulated or unintended by the inventor."

Wakunuma's Standpoint warns that there is a danger in focusing on a single technology when working to bring internet access to developing countries. She problemetises the focus on mobiles as being the development tool which can assist in building stronger economies and fighting hunger. Robust regulatory policies are as important for sustainable economic growth including an inclusive information society. She says "issues of gender remain implicated and important in discussions beyond the potential of technologies like mobile phones in achieving the development agenda. In addition, issues such as access and use are much more complex than often imagined hence the need for a multi-dimensional view."

Sometimes a single moment in time can re-orient and open up spaces that change relationships and bring new understandings to things tangible and intangible. The internet, which never "forgets," captures the debates and positions of those moments. It can also provide anonymity, and cover for those not wishing to be exposed to public scrutiny or attack. When the Joburg Pride "clash" happened in 2012, historical racial wounds erupted in a community already still experiencing homophobic violence and ostracism. As McLean says in her article,

> The response from the parade and Pride organisers was not one of solidarity; instead the organisers and activists clashed violently. This event made possible very difficult conversations, which could not have been previously held in a public space. These conversations took place not only in the moment of clashing, or in face-to-face conversations afterwards, but they also manifested on digital platforms such as the social networking site, Facebook. Digital and online platforms are interesting in that it is on these platforms that sentiments around issues such as the de-politicisation or commercialisation of Pride in South Africa become visible in a way that is not always possible offline.

Tagnay and Kee's Standpoint explores issues arising in the EROTICS (Exploratory Research on Sexuality & ICTs) project. They write about how sexual expression, sexualities and sexual health practices, and the assertion of sexual rights play out in uses of ICTs. Looking through the "specific lenses of access to information on sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights and the freedom of expression of marginalised sections of society, such as young women, transgender communities, lesbians, queer activists and feminist activists" on the African continent, Tagnay and Kee show how these communities are able to try out identities as well as perform and practise new gender identities. In an era where governments in Africa (and beyond) are using surveillance to monitor and track citizen discontent more generally, EROTICS' research findings have great import. It is now common practice for governments to work with corporates and internet intermediaries to shut down mobile phone access in times of protest.

Censorship of sexual content is a sticky issue offline as it is online. The authors examine the moral and cultural attitudes that drive the regulation of sexual content. Online content has several layers of corporate control and the gatekeepers are often inconsistent, operating in a policy vacuum that defaults to sex/gender conservatism that cyberfeminists are challenging: "Corporate actors such as internet service providers or social media platforms, who often take the side of internet freedom in public discourse, have often censored sexual speech for questionable reasons. Feminists are increasingly challenging Facebook's content policies."

With all the revolutionary possibilities and creative potentials of new communication technologies, we are also witnessing the emergence of new divisions. Young people who are born into the digital information age are engaging with digital tools and living in ways in which the "older" generation are not. Generational analysis needs to problematise both the issues and the responses generated by these differences. Lewis *et al* provide critical reflections on the generational challenges arising in social media, noting how the assimilation of a few women into positions of structural power undermines feminist politics when such individuals do not care to advocate for the interests of other women. The liberatory potential of ICTs for women in general is thus deflected.

Lewis *et al* discuss a digital activist project that engages women students at a historically marginalised university and young women from

socially marginalised communities surrounding the university and broader observations on young women's engagements with ICTs, to explore the complicated gendered barriers to young women's access to and use of new technologies. The core of the exploration of the article by Lewis *et al* is focused on the key political terrain of civic participation, empowerment and identity politics to emphasise the liberatory potential that ICTs offer younger generations of women. It is often believed that the capitalist consumerist desires are the primary motivation for a younger generation seeking glamour and social status to use ICTs. The authors challenge the pervasiveness of the "bling factor" and explore the need for direct and unmediated communication around political, social and existential issues. The rising dominance of social media in young people's connectivity and social interactions are recalibrated and re-invented as spaces for discussion on civic issues and experiences of many forms of oppressions that often have no space for voice offline for young women.

In her article in this edition of *Feminist Africa*, drawn from her extensive PhD research on radio and rural women in Zimbabwe, Mudavanhu challenges a popular notion that new communication technologies have rendered radio redundant. Although the ubiquity of mobile phone technology is very clear, this has not displaced radio as the most accessible and powerful communication tool on the continent of Africa. The author provides "some ethnographic insights into the place of radio in the daily lives of the women who were interviewed."

In Zimbabwe's politically charged and economically unstable environment, media is tightly controlled. The establishment of a radio station for rural Zimbabwean women is audacious in the context of ongoing conflict between political factions. Mudavanhu notes that all the women interviewed stated that they listen to the State-run Radio Zimbabwe but are afraid to admit to listening to the "independent" radio stations. One interviewee told of listening to Radio Mozambique during the pre-1980 liberation struggle, a station which the Ian Smith government had banned. The subtle agency with which the women tune in and out of Radio Zimbabwe suggests a discontent with the State-controlled station.

Creating secure and supportive spaces for witnessing, for discussion, disagreement and knowledge sharing is an important element of feminist activism for building solidarity and finding a safe place to "land." Mailing lists

(or listserves) are relatively "old school" in the midst of social media platforms but are still often the preferred medium for activists in creating facilitated online spaces with a relative sense of safety. Sarita Ranchod in her Standpoint provides an analysis of the Gender and Women's Studies in Africa (GWS Africa) listserve's responses to the objectionable "Undies for Africa" marketing campaign of a Canadian private company, Nectar Lingerie. For those not familiar with it, the GWS Africa mailing list (also known as the Feminist listserve) established in 2002 just ahead of *Feminist Africa,* provides feminist activists and academics a forum for sharing and engagement. Ranchod's article reflects on the politics of feminist communication and activism noting that these virtual spaces reflect the power relations that charaterise non-virtual production.

Following Ranchod's discussion, Hwang describes the rapid cyber-response to the "Undies for Africa" marketing campaign as an "armchair revolution," documenting the effectiveness of the angry collective response from African women all over the world.

Oumy Ndiaye tells of how M-Pesa,[3] a mobile banking service targeting poor women, has benefited poor and rural women, lauding this as "revolutionary" – clearly not using the word in the same way as Ranchod does. However, she does not fail to acknowledge the serious need for proper research to assess M-Pesa accurately.

Although feminists globally are utilising contemporary communications technologies to serve their agendas, "Undies for Africa" presents only one example of corporate-sponsored indignities that characterise the activities of many corporate actors. Left unchallenged, the internet reiterates social injustices, exclusions and violence in the "real" world.

"Digital dangers" range from technology-related violence against women to censoring of life-saving sexual health information. Digital surveillance monitors activists and infiltrators entrap, just as previous surveillance did, but more effectively and pervasively that we could possible have imagined in the 20th century. Both Clunaigh and Wakunuma explore digital safety issues and ways in which activists are building capacities within movements to secure spaces and voices from online threats.

FA 18's bumper Conversations section underlines the ingenuity of feminists employing social media to pursue change agendas. Hakima Abbas interviews Blessol Gathoni on the Watetezi-Haki platform which documents

abuses of sex workers and LGBTIQ persons in public places, most of which tend to remain undocumented and unreported.

Jane Bennett speaks with Sally-Jean Shackleton, currently director of SWEAT (Sex Workers' Education and Advocacy Taskteam, Cape Town) about her work with Women'sNet, the first feminist e-technology hub in South Africa, while Selina Mudavanhu speaks with Maggie Mapondera of Just Associates, eliciting her reflections on the place of contemporary communications technologies in storytelling.

Feminist Africa 18 profiles the Asikana Network, a vibrant network of young women in the information technology industry who are challenging the "male geek stereotype" and forging space for young women and girls to chart a career in technology, and Inkanyiso which provides a digital space for community in a South Africa that habitually subjects lesbians to misogynistic violence.

Feminists all over Africa continue to engage with the internet in ways that support creativity, activism, social connections, pleasure and change, strategically moving into the virtual world in ways that will continue – like *Feminist Africa* – to ensure voice and visibility for women's rights.

Endnotes

1.	Available at <http://www.womensnet.org.za>.
2.	Available at <http://www.wougnet.org>.
3.	"M" for mobile, *pesa* is Swahili for money.

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Disrupting patriarchy: An examination of the role of e-technologies in rural Kenya

Brenda Nyandiko Sanya

> When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist – especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives, and the burden of African development. It is not possible to advocate independence for the African continent without also believing that African women must have the best that the environment can offer. For some of us, this is the crucial element in our feminism. (Aidoo, 1998: 39)

This article considers the significant growth of the mobile telephone industry in Kenya and discusses the mobile phone as a potential tool to circulate grassroots (or indigenous) feminisms, cultures and cultural products. In considering the mobile phone and the utility of affiliated applications such as one of Kenya's mobile banking systems and their impact on social and cultural lives (an impact that may not be an intended or explicit outcome of the innovator's work) this essay suggests that this important advancement in technology, which surpassed and bypassed other technologies in most communities in Africa, must be examined critically, both in terms of the cultural shifts caused by the explicit *and* implicit transmission and exchange of information. By democratising access to technology, the mobile phone allows us to question established social assumptions and values regarding information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the assumed social and educational discourses that tend to dominate conversations about information in traditional media and dominant culture.

Introduction

Research on the use of mobile phones has been on the rise with the proliferation and the prevalent use of mobile phones, particularly in nations with limited access to other forms of ICTs. The research surrounding this work has largely been embedded in discourses of literacy, capitalism, microfinance, the "modernization and 'leapfrogging' paradigm,"[1] and linked to growth and economic development (Chiumbu, 2012: 193). However, this is changing in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring.[2] More literature is emerging in sub-Saharan Africa, focused on mobile phones and their use for political organising, and their effects on the social realities in sub-Saharan African societies.[3] In following this research, I consider the role of the information technology's hardware and software (the mobile phone and its applications) and how its uses have been and continue to be morphed into socio-cultural avenues that are inextricably connected to the creator/inventor, but also unique to the user. In this case, I study how the agency of the user can perhaps be used to complicate and problematise the oversimplified and sometimes pejorative and colonial depictions of rural black Kenyan women in economic development work. With this transmitter of information, there is a possibility to reveal the multiplicities of black, rural Kenyan women's identities, which are sometimes depicted as stagnant or monolithic. Here, I am arguing that these new users of ICTs are, in many cases, asserting their agency in using the mobile phone in ways that have previously been unarticulated or unintended by the inventor.

Bringing to the forefront a discussion about possibilities for circulation of the plurality and multiplicity of identities, modes of resistance and cooperation, grassroots and indigenous feminisms, cultures and cultural products, is not an assertion that such action is happening, nor that these are the only innovative imaginations that can be considered; rather it is the introduction of a broad overreaching question: What would it look like for the mobile phone to advance feminist agendas even as they are deeply embedded in patriarchal systems of capitalism? Given the history of the exclusion of forms of knowledge associated with women from the professionalisation of technological expertise (Wajcman, 2004), knowledge diffusion theory and scholarship on these technologies, how does the utility of the mobile phone and its associated services and products allow the consumer to be a producer or circulator of information and knowledge, while at the same time introducing a new set of hybridised communicative and cultural practices?

Could the mobile phone then be part of the conversations about ever-changing identity, where they can give voice to the experiences and realities of Kenyans as they decide and navigate their *own* destiny in relation to industrialisation and globalisation? In the end, I argue that although it may not be clear what is happening, "the social lives" (Appadurai, 1986) of mobile phones are important sites of possibilities and potential sites to circulate indigenous knowledge and feminisms.

In considering the role of ICT in more broad cultural terms, Zembylas and Vrasidas (2005) posit that these technologies serve both as a symbol and an aspect of globalisation. They write:

> They are symbols because they offer the most powerful networking platform for communication, information, education, democracy, culture, and business that is unrestricted by borders. As aspects of globalization, ICTs impact on mobility and communication and cause social, cultural, political, and other changes around the world. (p. 81)

These insights from Zembylas and Vrasidas highlight the possibilities and realities regarding the use of ICTs and specifically serve as foundational theory that examines culture and globalisation. Similarly, in his essay "Cell Phones, Social Inequality, and Contemporary Culture in Nigeria," Daniel Smith discusses phone use in Nigeria, in cultural terms. His analysis highlights how the mobile phone introduced an opportunity for more people to "participate in a technology previously limited to only the most elite social class" while at the same time exposing societal disparities (Smith, 2006: 499). Furthermore, Kenyans, Nigerians and other Africans using mobile phones have found ways to circumvent expensive processes related to mobile phone use. One such example is "flashing," where one user calls another and before there is a chance for the recipient of the call to answer the caller hangs up thereby not spending money but signalling to the recipient of the call to call the original caller.

The burgeoning use of mobile phones

Since the proliferation of mobile phones, there has been a rapid increase in phone use across the African continent with over 500 million mobile subscribers (Rao, 2011). Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Ghana lead these phone markets and in East Africa, Kenya has the largest phone banking system, with users in Kenya showing greater "propensity to make e-commerce and m-commerce transactions with forty-six per cent of Kenyan [...] users

having made remote purchases via mobile internet, fixed internet and telephone respectively" (Rao, 2011: 27; Hughes and Lonie, 2007). The most recent statistics from Kenya's communication industry regulatory authority show that the number of registered mobile subscribers in Kenya now stands at 30,4 million, which is an increase from the 29,7 million reported in the previous quarter (Communications Commission of Kenya, 2013). Evidence of the spread and growth of mobile phone use is evident with the new governmental requirements that limit the number of subscriber identification module (SIM) cards that an individual can purchase, and requires a regulated mandatory registration, which involves a government-issued identification document (Communications Commission of Kenya, 2010). Additionally, although the use of mobile phones for voice calls is growing, there is also growth related to commerce and internet-based services.

One of the major breakthroughs in the Kenyan mobile phone market was the introduction of M-Pesa,[4] that nation's largest mobile-based money-transfer application. M-Pesa accounted for the movement of approximately US$8,6 billion in the first half of 2012 among Kenyan mobile phone users (The Economist, 2012). Through this application and its expansive network, Kenyans are offered the opportunity to inject capital into previously economically depressed communities, transfer money safely and privately, have access to money in their communities and make financial transactions 24 hours a day. Although there has been little research-based evidence to explain M-Pesa's success, there is much speculation ranging from the simplicity of the communication, pricing that is lower than other banking platforms, limited information required from users,[5] and more recently, the ability to register for the application M-Pesa on a SIM card, thus allowing those who rent or borrow mobile phone (handsets) to use M-Pesa (Communications Commission of Kenya, 2013). Whatever the reasons, the use of M-Pesa has continued to rapidly spread across not only Kenya, but also East Africa, and continues to draw international attention.

I introduce M-Pesa, because it is connected with accessing money, relies on ICTs and has been connected to the growth of mobile phone use in Kenya. Whether the phones are borrowed, rented, or purchased, there is an increase in SIM card purchases, and inadvertently a greater connection to larger networks of other users. With such widespread use, scholars like Sarah Chiumbu (2012) encourage us to think about the innovative and divergent use

of mobile technologies as illustrations of the "dialectic relationship between structure and agency and indicate that 'micro' social practices and 'macro' economic practices can sometime be interactive and iterative" (p.196). In this capacity then, outcomes of the use of mobile phones are not inevitable or predictable, rather, mobile phone companies (and their software technologies) serve primarily as mediators of the agency found when using applications like M-Pesa. Here we see the potential for the use of mobile phones in "an organic and bottom-up manner" (p.194). Following Chiumbu's decentring of the instrumental use of technology and the technology itself, we can begin to consider technology's transformative capacities by holding in tension the social agent's capacity to utilise technology and shape it in their use. Consequently, we see that social subjects and social systems are continually reproducing and reforming each other.

It is in this framework of tension where we see the user playing multiple roles, both as the innovator and as the creative user, and lurking in the background of this innovative work is the circulation of knowledge, not only from a "top-down" approach, but where individuals have a space to share and discuss information and create communities that are supportive.

Feminism in the local context

To consider mobile phone use, interruption, and diversion as feminist possibilities then one must contextualise and complicate feminist work in Kenya and Africa, in relation to third-world feminism, black feminism, western feminism, and global feminism. Furthermore, in understanding feminist movements, there has to be a move away from universalising representations of social change, and a move toward understanding the variation in feminist concerns, goals, and strategies and a centring of the localised agendas. I consider feminism with a broad stroke, as a project aimed at challenging women's subordination to men, and although it may be embedded in certain theories, methodologies, and organisations, I primarily consider it a structural framework in opposition to patriarchy and misogyny. As understood here, the goals and agendas of local feminist movements can be shared in multiple spaces, but cannot be dictated by groups external to the locale. Therefore, placing the mobile phone in this space has profound significance, and exciting potential for self-description, mapping of personal, social and bodily realities and as an imaginative resource in quotidian and unexpected discourses about female agency.

At heart of this is the historical consideration of the reality of the shifting conceptualisations of gender and the character of African women's agency. Although I consider indigenous cultural practices as important in these conversations, they must not be valorised or introduced as non-existent historical mythologies of the experiences of African women; rather, they should function as a reminder of the multiplicity of cultural experiences and understandings of gender, and as a move away from ascribed identities which often deny voice and agency among African women. This is only possible by giving voice to the marginalised, often silenced, women. The silencing of marginalised people often leads to the lack of nuanced discussions about the significance of colonial power and western imperialism while at the same time realising the profound reality that the feminist act begins when the ever-changing individual is given their own voice and access to the power to self-identify, name themselves, and to speak (Collins, 1998). This cannot be resolved simply by adding more women in legislative positions, or changing laws, because this only privileges those who are highly educated and of higher socio-economic class.

The changes are important, however, real change for more women involves understanding African feminism/s and women's histories; a project that is simultaneously embedded in feminist methodology and black studies, it is work that must be conceptualised within and outside of the bounds of classrooms, organisations and governments. It is a project of knowledge circulation and transformation that reveals the continued impacts of transnational, African, and local power structures. Oyewumi (1997) challenges approaches to gender justice that are based on universal assumptions about oppression of women. Following Oyewumi, who distinguishes between "feminism" and the "feminist," and argues that unlike feminism, the term "feminist," "has a broader reach [associated with] a range of behaviour indicating female agency and self-determination" (Oyewumi, 2003: 2), I consider the avenue created by the mobile phone. Technology in this space and conceptualisations (perhaps with the mobile phone or another emerging and morphing technology) where there are possibilities to challenge power relations (both local and global) and knowledge proliferation can begin.

Simultaneous circulation and disruption of ideas

The mobile phone joins the technological revolution that mediates the challenges faced by intra-national, intra-continental and even the international

dispersal of peoples in Africa. The mobile phone has joined previous telecommunication devices which "compressed the spatial and temporal distances between home and abroad, offers the contemporary diasporas, unlike the historic diasporas, unprecedented opportunities to be transnational and transcultural, to be people of multiple worlds and focalities, perpetually translocated, physically and culturally, between several countries or several continents" (Zeleza, 2005: 55). With Kenya's expanding mobile banking system, more and more Kenyans are invested in learning to use the technology in order to send and receive money both within the nation and also within the region. It also allowed for privacy never before seen in Kenya. Individuals could send, receive and store money virtually and had access to withdrawal services closer to them. This unprecedented influx of mobile phone use and the banking application has the potential not only to retain the ties between the dispersed people and their communities of origin, but also introduces a space where individuals can create and sustain supportive virtual communities. The mobile phone then is a venue of convergence of multiple practices. In the mobile phone we can find a point of entry into this broader discussion, which has had practical implications.

As stated before, what mobile banking then does, is that it introduces capital to women in a private sphere, which addresses some concerns about women's ability to make decisions about finances in the home, empowering women economically and socially. Here, "empowerment" is understood to have a foundation in grassroots organising and participation. This feminist conceptualisation of empowerment relies on justice, grassroots power and transformative social change, and is not purely predicated upon the injection of capital into communities; in this vision empowerment is not contained within the realm of capital and capitalism. The mobile phone also creates a reason to have avenues of collaboration, possibilities, spaces where women can have a platform to access not only money but also to make phone calls and speak to others. Furthermore, it also has created a growing mobile-literate population, and from my studies, this was an area where there was very little research available. Relying on Hall's critique of traditional research on communication as being linear by interpreting communication as a mere "circulation circuit" (Hall, 1980: 128), the mobile phone provides a platform where we see the circulation of feminism and communication paradigm shifts.

With changing political environments in many African nations and the moving away from a tendency for the usurpation of women's movements by entities affiliated by the government (Gadzekpo, 2009), there has been a flourishing of the women's movement in Africa and improved growth in research and knowledge production and circulation. However, in many states, these activities have long remained in urban centres, disconnected from rural communities. In addition to women being marginalised in legislation and discourses that impacted national social and economic agendas, rural women, limited by their distance from urban governments, have often been absent in the processes of writing legislation, making the deregulation of telecommunication, a revolution for all Africans but even more importantly for rural communities. Although technology is not gender neutral, a report published by the Commission for Africa reveals that there is evidence that more women are using ICTs, specifically to network with friends and family, to trade and to get information and news. Furthermore, the report articulates that the "mobile phone is creating virtual infrastructures and raising the possibility of unthought-of transformations in African culture, infrastructure and politics" (Commission for Africa, 2005: 32).

The importance of telecommunication devices and the virtual and physical feminist communities that have been created was evident during the process of drafting the constitution in Kenya. The constitutional review process was conducted under the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission Act, which allowed for a people-driven constitution. FIDA Kenya,[6] which was the most vocal women's lobbying group, presented a memorandum documenting the women's agenda for the constitution drafting process. This memorandum detailed ideas presented at various public forums and was drafted together with other organisations that were also interested in seeing gender justice as a central component of the constitutional review process (Maingi, 2011: 59). Entities like FIDA Kenya and Warembo ni Yes[7] concurrently undertook civic education on the content of the draft constitution, prior to the national referendum. On both fronts, their involvement provided a widespread collection and distribution of information, especially among women and other marginalised populations. With Kenya's low level of literacy, it was important to have public hearings to have meaningful public participation. These public hearings featured oral presentations with translations into other languages and clarification of the proposed amendments. In cases where the

public hearings format may have "systematically [disadvantaged] some groups or viewpoints, such as women or ethnic minorities," the commission also accepted individual petitions (Bannon, 2007: 1862).

During the constitution reform process, outcomes and opinions on the debates over land ownership and reproductive rights were often transmitted via text messages on mobile phones. Distinctive aspects of communication functioned on a model of production-circulation-distribution/consumption-reproduction, with grassroots feminist organisations communicating with women during the drafting of the proposed constitution and lobbying on their behalf, but also served as a space to educate prior to the referendum vote. Mobile phones, as a medium and not a force, fostered participation in Kenyan cultural life, in what Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) terms "feminism without borders." Through well-established feminist organisations like FIDA Kenya[8] and newer movements like Warembo ni Yes, ICTs along with other communication platforms such as community forums were used to amplify the voices of women and in so doing bolstered grassroots feminist work and introduced innovative feminist leaders who emerged to advance gender justice both on local and national levels. Many of these leaders continue with the implementation work, even after the signing of Kenya's new constitution into law in 2010.[9]

What Warembo ni Yes's work highlighted was the importance of cultures of exchange, where alliances were formed to document the alternative realities, histories and new identity positions. These alliances that were formed with the flattening and crossing of racial, cultural, ethnic, diasporic, boundaries uncovered "alternative, non-identical histories that [challenged] and [disrupted] the spatial and temporal location of a hegemonic history" (Mohanty, 2003: 78–79). Fostered by the privacy and anonymity of technology, there has been an evolution of new behaviours and spaces from the contact and fusion of multiple influences. Movements like Warembo ni Yes, in their use of the digital imaginary revealed the divergent, unexpected, and creative use of mobile phones for activities that are imbued with iconic symbolism, revealing the powerful, useful, and meaningful possibilities. However, the rapid increase of mobile phone use has allowed for non-state actors to organise around feminist agendas.

Conclusion

In 2010, I had the great privilege of working with rural Kenyan women as I conducted an ethnographic research project. This knowledge-sharing process was a catalyst for this essay. The sophisticated ways of knowing and understanding the world, their rights and the challenges they experienced greatly shapes my understanding of feminist work. These conversations are so important in disrupting the staggering impacts of global patriarchy. The constant interruption of conversations and interviews by text messages and phone calls spurred my thinking and I began conceptualise the mobile phone outside the economic realm and going beyond the illustrations of the dialectic relationship between structure and agency (Chiumbu, 2012) towards the circulation of re-imagined epistemologies that speak to the realities in the lives of these women: not only revealing the continued and lasting effects of encounters with empire, but also unveiling the multiplicity of the effects of, and resistance to, patriarchy specifically in a context that is a multivocal articulation, that encompasses different narratives and parallel discourses often absent if we rely only on the logics of western feminism, globalisation, capitalism, and so-called democratic forces.

I opened this essay with a quote from Ama Ata Aidoo, who reveals the importance of feminism and the eradication of social injustice. Like Aidoo, Carole Boyce Davies asserts the need for both distinction and affinity, within feminisms, highlighting that African women and societies have concrete realities and that African feminism "questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favouring of sons," and at the same time "respects African woman's self-reliance and the penchant to cooperative work and social organisation... [it] understands the interconnectedness of race, class, and sex oppression" (Boyce Davies, 1986: 10). Following both Boyce Davies and Aidoo (1998), grounding in African feminism, I suggest a turn towards to both traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women and, the documenting and circulating of African women's realities and stories. The contemporary avenue that I foreground is the mobile phone, in its morphed state.

Endnotes

1. "Leapfrogging" is a term that was originally used in economic development but not often includes technology and theories of technology as a way to discuss the potential to bypass some "processes of accumulation of human capabilities and fixed investment in order to narrow the gaps in productivity and output that separate industrialized and developing countries" (Steinmueller, 2001: 194).

2. The Arab Spring is a time characterised by the revolutionary protests and demonstrations that began in 2010. These protests and demonstrations led to changes in political and presidential power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, as well as continued protests and uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti and Western Sahara. Scholars like Herrera have described this so-called phenomenon as a generational rupture that has allowed the "wired students of this generation [who] had their own ideas about their place in the nation and had been experimenting with ways of exercising citizenship and agitating for a more democratic system" (Herrera, 2012).

3. One such venue is a recent Special Issue of the journal *African Identities*, which is titled, "The social lives of mobile telephony in Africa: Towards a research agenda."

4. M-Pesa ("M" for mobile and "*Pesa*" for money in Swahili) is a mobile phone banking system operated by Kenya's Vodafone affiliate Safaricom (Hughes and Lonie, 2007). Launched in 2007, this was not only the first of its kind in the nation or continent but also globally (Muwanguzi and Musambira, 2009). The application links users to electronic money accounts through a SIM card in their phone. This system, which is East Africa's largest mobile banking system, allows M-Pesa subscribers to deposit and withdraw cash from their accounts through a system that exchanges cash for electronic value at a network of retail stores (Eagle, 2009). This system also allows users to pay bills (in some cases hospital bills and school fees), and to purchase mobile airtime credit. Presently this application has the largest network for the exchange of money across the nation. It has also spurred other mobile phone competitors to start providing similar mobile phone banking services.

5. All that is required is a government-issued identification card, and no deposit.

6. The organisations were "FIDA Kenya, IED, the League of Kenya Women Voters and the Kenya Human Rights Commission" (Maingi, 2011).

7. I discuss Warembo ni Yes later on, however, as some background, its goals during the constitution review process were to "give a voice to women in Kenya who otherwise do not have a platform to express their views on issues such as constitutional review, good governance, public service delivery, corruption, human rights, development and freedom of information" (Malek, 2010).

8. FIDA Kenya's extensive participation, lobbying and civic education work surrounding the constitution is well documented in various venues including a case study titled: *The Kenyan Constitutional Reform Process: A Case Study on the work of FIDA Kenya in Securing Women's Rights.*

9. Following over a decade's work, Kenya's new constitution was signed into law in 2010. One of the major outcomes was legislation of women's rights to own and inherit land (Republic of Kenya, 2010). In addition to this affirmation of land rights, the constitution declares that women will fill at least one-third of elected and appointed government posts.

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Digital as an enabler:
A case study of the Joburg Pride 2012 clash

Nyx McLean

Introduction

In 2012, gender activists from the One in Nine Campaign[1] interrupted the Joburg Pride parade. They did so to demand a minute of silence to remember members of the LGBTIAQ[2] community who had "been murdered because of their sexual orientation and gender expression."[3] The response from the parade and Pride organisers was not one of solidarity; instead the organisers and activists clashed violently. Joburg Pride has always been a contested space, from the first march in 1990 (before the end of apartheid) right through to the clash in 2012. In fact, the points of contestation within the LGBTIAQ community are parallel to some of the tensions that have existed and continue to exist in South Africa.

This event made possible very difficult conversations, which could not have been previously held in a public space. These conversations took place not only in the moment of clashing, or in face-to-face conversations afterwards but they also manifested on digital platforms such as the social networking site, Facebook. Digital and online platforms are interesting in that it is on these platforms that sentiments around issues such as the de-politicisation or commercialisation of Pride in South Africa become visible in a way that is not always possible offline.

To understand the role digital media played, and the nature of the conversations, this study is positioned in the realm of cultural studies and centres in some ways on questions of power and agency. The ways in which the concept of culture as a site of struggle emerges in relation to the case at hand is complex (Fiske, 1987; Epstein Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991).

The violent clash that took place at the Pride parade in Johannesburg in 2012 generated a large number of responses. For the purposes of this study

only a selection of these responses is examined here and a thematic analysis of the content was conducted, from which five dominant themes arose. They are:

- "What's race got to do with this?": Race, inclusivity and intersectionality
- No cause for celebration: The de-politicisation and commercialisation of Pride
- "Maybe next year you can ask": Communication and conversations
- "This is MY route!": Permission, access and the right to Pride
- "They think it's their right to put the rest of us at risk!": Safety and violence

This paper argues that without the digital space, the above-mentioned themes may not have become as evident as they are. It holds that the space of the digital enabled these conversations. This paper provides some context for the 2012 Joburg Pride clash, a very brief overview of the history of Pride, a discussion on what it is about digital space that enables conversations, and goes on to unpack the themes that arise from the digital content generated around the 2012 Joburg Pride clash.

Context

On 6 October 2012, the activists from the One in Nine Campaign halted the annual Joburg Pride parade by staging a "die-in." They lay down in the middle of the street in front of the parade and asked for a minute's silence. This was orchestrated in order to remember the members of the LGBTIAQ community who had "been murdered because of their sexual orientation and gender expression."[4] In response, the event organisers threatened to drive over them with their vehicles and "told us [One in Nine] we had no right to be at the parade."[5]

Joburg Pride is an annual celebration held by the LGBTIAQ community and has taken place since 1990. It is often described as having a history that "runs alongside the history of the transition to democracy in South Africa" (Craven, 2011: III). While there are other Pride events that regularly take place in South Africa, it is the longest-running Pride event in the country (Craven, 2011).

During the 2012 clash there were several parties involved, but the key groups, including their supporters, can be identified as two parties: the Joburg Pride organising committee and parade participants, and the One in Nine Campaign activists. The Joburg Pride organising committee is responsible for

coordinating the Pride events, including the parade, which it describes as "an annual celebration of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) identity and sexual diversity."[6]

The activists who interrupted the Joburg Pride parade were members of the One in Nine Campaign, a gender-based advocacy group which was established in 2006 in response to Jacob Zuma's (South Africa's current president) rape trial.[7] The group is described as consisting of "diverse women, with backgrounds in law, conflict negotiation, sexuality and reproductive rights, HIV, gender-based violence, and most with personal backgrounds of economic struggle" (Bennett, 2008: 7). Bennett further describes the groups as "a movement-building organisation working in a post-1994 South Africa" and that its "discourse and activism have had a powerful impact on the meaning of feminist organising in South Africa" (p.10).

The degree of violence that took place between the Joburg Pride organisers and activists was surprising considering that in South Africa the LGBTIAQ community is often assumed to be a united community. Often it is described as epitomising the diversity and unity of South Africa post-1994, and the movement's history is tied to the country's own history of democracy and endeavour to build a united national identity (Craven 2011). Hungwe and Hungwe (2010) write that membership of a nation requires that individuals carry out "an act of imagination through which they identify with others whom they will never actually meet or even see" (p.33). It is this imagining that is useful to hold onto when interrogating what occurred at Pride 2012 – did the organisers of Pride imagine a different LGBTIAQ South African community to the one that the activists had in mind? Was it these different imaginings of the LGBTIAQ community and the South African nation that led to the tensions and violence at Pride 2012?

Joburg Pride: A brief historical glance

Pride has always been a contested space, and these contests have centred on what the event is meant to be or to symbolise. Some members of the LGBTIAQ community view it as a space for protest while others view it as "a day of celebration" while others, as Craven (2011) argues, view it as both protest and celebration (p.54). Craven's work on the tensions present in the history of Joburg Pride is useful for this research as it traces the history of the movement as well as some of the major issues that have shaped its meanings

and practice over time. These issues include "issues around race, gender, class, gender identity, sexual orientation and the multiple intersections between these identities" (p.7).

Joburg Pride has changed over the course of its existence and Craven describes the current manifestations of Pride as "massive, commercially marketed and slickly run events" as being "a million miles away from the iconic images of the few hundred people, many covering their faces with paper bags, who took part in the first march in 1990" (p.44). She argues that what has remained consistent throughout its history are the tensions that have surrounded the event – tensions which came to a head at the 2012 Joburg Pride event.

The first march in 1990 was planned as a political protest, as were subsequent marches. In 1991 the theme of the march was "March for Equality" and in 1992, "Marching for our Rights" (Craven, 2011: 55). It was in 1994 that the event began to take on a less political tone with the introduction of Paul Stobbs as the chair of the organising committee. He was of the mind that "Pride was too political," and one of his first changes enacted was to change "the name of the event from a 'march' to a 'parade'" (Ibid.).

In 1998 and 1999 there was an attempt to strike a balance between celebration and protest but the event was still referred to as a parade and not a march. A decision was made that the event "should always be described as such" (p.58). Several alternative Pride events emerged over the years, including events such as Soweto Pride, out of the discontent with the "commercial and depoliticised nature of Johannesburg Pride" (Ibid.). In 2007 the organisers of Pride ran and organised the event under a new structure. They described themselves on their website as "organisers, all with considerable skills and experiences in relevant fields and not linked to troubled events" (p.43). They branded the new event as "Joburg Pride" and removed the words "lesbian" and "gay" from the name. This led to the board being accused of devaluing the LGBTIAQ aspect of the event to "make it more attractive and less threatening to heterosexuals" (p.43).

It was at Soweto Pride in 2007, after the murders of lesbian activists Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Massoa,[8] that Carrie Shelver of People Opposing Woman Abuse and the One in Nine Campaign asked why the Joburg Pride event was not taking place in Soweto. Craven argues that this question reflected "the view that following the murders in July it was Soweto that

represented the front line of the struggle for the rights of gay and lesbian people" (p.59). The organisers of Joburg Pride accused Shelver of creating division in the community by asking the question in a public space. In response to this accusation and to Shelver's questioning, several activists protested at the Joburg Pride event. They wore shirts and carried placards with "Bring it to Soweto" printed or written on them, and used the Pride space as a site of protest (Ibid.).

By no means is this brief overview the only work that exists on Pride in South Africa.[9] However, the issues raised by Craven's work are useful in light of this study, and important to hold onto in light of the conversations that took place online, in particular on Facebook, after the 2012 clash.

On methods and selection

The internet and digital platforms are interesting sites to study in that they present the possibility for creating new ties and for the maintenance of existing ties between people and the groups they belong to. In some way this is representative of life offline except that digital platforms make possible the documentation of these interactions (Wellman *et al*, 2001).

The internet is not only "a virtual world external to the viewer but also an internal one, part of the network of links and associations that exist in the viewer's own mind" (McLelland, 2002: 389). This is important to bear in mind when remembering that the values and viewpoints of those partaking in conversations on the pages are still rooted in their contexts and socio-cultural spaces which shape their worldviews. Furthermore, for the purposes of this paper and all research into digital spaces, it is important to note that internet communities are "restricted to the digital 'haves' (or at least those with digital social capital) rather than the 'have nots'" – that offline class and social divides do exist online (Murthy, 2008: 845). In particular it is significant to note that the digital "haves" in South Africa mostly access the internet via their mobile phones. In December 2012 it was estimated that approximately eight million South Africans access the internet from their mobile phones and this too shapes how they use the internet and contribute to conversations online (World Wide Worx, 2012).

A benefit of using the internet as a research tool is that it not only collapses geographical distance but allows for "both asynchronous and synchronous communication between individuals and groups" (Markham,

2011: 118). This means that one can pick up a conversation hours or days after it began because of the archival nature of the internet. This aspect of the internet allows researchers to study the manner in which "social realities are displayed or how these might be negotiated over time" through language and social interaction (p.122). Such is the case with this paper – Facebook's archival nature allowed me as a researcher to search for content generated in October 2012. I could trace all conversations that took place on the Joburg Pride and the One in Nine Campaign's Facebook pages, as well as the online blogs and their comments.

This paper employed a case study approach in order to strive towards an all-inclusive understanding of "how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation," as well as how they make sense of the situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2011: 75). A thematic analysis was conducted in order to identify recurring themes to "offer interpretations of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features" (Richardson, 2007: 15). On sampling, the paper zones in on conversations that took place online, which included press releases, posted to Facebook, a Thought Leader blog post, and several Facebook posts and comments on the Joburg Pride and the One in Nine Campaign pages for the time period 6 October to 20 October 2012.

A few ethical considerations

The internet, in complicating and making possible new ways of doing research, impacts on ethical considerations associated with research. Some of these fundamental issues are anonymity, and the matter of private versus public.

A researcher needs to note that if they were to quote directly from something a participant wrote online, that it is "theoretically possible for any reader to find the real identity of the person quoted" (Robinson and Schulz, 2009: 693). When capturing and publishing information, the researcher needs to take this fact into account and be particularly careful in protecting the participant or research subject's identity (Robinson and Schulz, 2009). Anonymity cannot be guaranteed because a user's distinct language use may be identifiable. Further, some features of internet interactions such as reduced social cues, create a sense of anonymity, not guaranteed anonymity (Stewart and Williams, 2005). It's important to note that the posters or Facebook users are not named to protect their identities, unless they wrote blog posts which were published on a platform other than Facebook.

While on the matter of private versus public, some internet users participating in discussions on public sites may consider their interaction to be private. Others may know that the site is public but will not want to be studied. It is important that researchers are aware of parameters and the "non-obvious perceptions and attitudes of the participants" on the sites (Markham, 2011: 122). Stewart and Williams suggest that traditional ethical guidelines and practices should be reviewed in line with the features of internet research and the considerations that need to be taken into account (Stewart and Williams, 2005: 410).

Digital as an enabler

After the Joburg Pride organisers and the One in Nine Campaign activists clashed, the internet was alive with videos, images, tweets, wall posts and blog posts of what had taken place. After the initial news moment had passed, conversations continued to happen online as people shared content around what had taken place and participated in conversations in comment feeds. Social media and other online spaces became an archive for conversations that occurred among each group's members and between the groups themselves. These conversations, under normal circumstances would eventually disappear in national and local media as other events unfold and capture the public's attention. Social media platforms, in particular Facebook, became enabling spaces which allowed for these conversations to continue. The online conversations and commentary were less careful than those that were being presented in traditional media such as newspapers.

This paper argues that the digital space made it possible for voices to be heard and viewed publicly, voices which would not have been present in the public sphere prior to the reality of social networking sites, such as Facebook. Further, it allowed for people to be exposed to viewpoints that were not their own and to be held accountable for the values they espoused, as well as have these challenged, publicly. This makes possible a richer public sphere, although somewhat more volatile and unstable due to the multitude of uncensored or un-moderated voices.

The internet is increasingly being recognised as a context or a space where one plays one's identity out in the sense that it is a performative space. Performative in the sense that it opens a space for one to present one's identity to the digital community with which one is interacting. This

is, in particular, associated with the rise in popularity and uptake of social networks such as Facebook where a great deal of time spent on the platform is associated with the maintenance of one's identity through the upkeep of one's online profile details and the content with which one interacts.

The internet is in itself a social space and can be recognised as a "public space" (Nip, 2004: 414). To a degree, Facebook became such a public space post-Pride 2012. The tensions, clash and conversations that occurred in Rosebank, Johannesburg moved online to the pages on Facebook. Although the internet is in itself a public space as Nip (2004) has suggested, it is still important to note that the internet, to a large degree, privileges "certain groups, languages, gender or countries to the exclusion of others" (Wall, 2007: 263). In light of some of the tensions around Pride, this is no different to issues such as that of access to white privileged spaces – this is one of the primary, historical contestations to surface around Joburg Pride (Craven, 2011).

The internet's supplementation of social capital

In light of some of the debates within studies on the role of the internet in our daily lives, this paper adopts the argument that the internet supplements social capital (Wellman *et al*, 2001). The internet is seen to be "integrated into rhythms of daily life, with life online viewed as an extension of offline activities" (Wellman *et al*, 2001: 440). It moves away from the argument that the internet plays a central role in our lives, and moves closer to the view that the internet is adopted as and how it is needed (Mehra *et al*, 2004). Research by Prinsloo *et al* positions the internet as "enabling counter publics to exist and contest dominant power relations" (2012: 145–146). As with the case of Joburg Pride 2012, the internet provided a platform to discuss and dissect the clash between the Pride organisers and the activists as well as for members of the LGBTIAQ community to debate some of the issues that arose. What follows is an analysis of the key themes that arose out of the content generated online after the 2012 clash.

Themes

The themes discussed below arose out of content that was released online by Joburg Pride and the One in Nine Campaign, including the comments that were posted to Facebook from individuals engaging with both groups. Due to

the quantity of data online, I've selected only key posts and comments which speak to the themes. Some of the topics they cover include: race, inclusivity, commercialisation, de-politicisation, communication, permission, rights, access, safety, violence and community. They are unpacked below.

"What's race got to do with this?": Race, inclusivity and intersectionality

Race was the primary theme that arose from the thematic analysis of comments and posts. This includes posts by the activists and those who supported the actions of the Joburg Pride organisers. The activists cited racism as being behind the organisers' response, while the organisers' and their supporters wrote that race had nothing to do with the response to the activists.

In her blog post shared on the One in Nine Campaign's Facebook page, Dipika Nath comments on the 2012 clash. The post, "Gay Pride is political" asks "is it a coincidence that all but one of us demanding one minute of silence at Joburg Pride were black, that all those who assaulted and intimidated us were white and that only black people were physically attacked?" (Nath, 2012).

In response to this post, a commenter wrote "what troubles me in South Africa, is that you are defined first by RACE, then SEX, then SEXUAL ORIENTATION. But race trumps all and the preoccupation and constant anxiety about what one's race says about you or what other people will think it says about you tires me."[10] While a member of the One in Nine Campaign page in a post touched on intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989): "There is a difference between a gay, white, male, living in Rosebank and a lesbian, black woman, living in Kwa Tema with regards to accessing rights/freedoms/ safety etc." She goes on to ask, "Have people forgotten about race and class or does the magic wand of 'LGBTI' make that all go away?"[11] This post speaks to many of the comments that feature under this theme of race, inclusivity and intersectionality.

Under another post on 10 October 2012, a member of the One in Nine Campaign page wrote a comment that corresponds with the above post. She wrote that she believed "that had the 1-in-9 activists been a group of all white women, the reaction to them – of asking them to move for safety reasons etc. – would most certainly one of a more respectful nature."[12] This prompted another individual to write "get with the 21st century. This is not about racism, but it's clear that people still hang around in the years before 1994." To which

the first poster wrote, "if you're not willing to acknowledge the far-reaching influences our history and social conditioning (since the dawn of time, all over the world, not just in a South African context) have on our present day social interactions, then we're going to struggle to engage in a progressive, constructive manner here."

While on the Joburg Pride page, an individual responding to comments wrote that "in South Africa, I am oppressed because I am gay full stop. What's race got to do with it?"[13] This comment was followed by another from someone asking her "which south Africa r u living in, being oppressed for being gay only...u must be joking, face this issue on a political content, race has something to do with this." To which the former poster retaliated with "race has something to do with this because you wont let anyone forget, you wont allow for healing and moving on and addressing more pressing issues."[14] The question to ask, if race is not the issue, then what does this individual believe the "more pressing issues" to be?

The above are just some moments of larger and more fragmented discussions or comments made on race and the LGBTIAQ community. These comments show that race and racism are emotive topics in South Africa, one which still needs to be unpacked to begin restorative conversations among South Africans. Speaking to the notion of "more pressing issues" is the next theme which looks at what was raised by the One in Nine Campaign's protest on the de-politicisation and commercialisation of the Joburg Pride event.

No cause for celebration: The de-politicisation and commercialisation of Pride

As mentioned above, the One in Nine Campaign's protest was centred on what they considered to be the de-politicisation and commercialisation of Pride. The leaflets they distributed at the parade before and during their protest included a critique of Pride, with a particular focus on their belief that Pride has increasingly become a commercial event. Their argument, taken from the leaflet's content, was that Pride in its current form had permitted "the old, racial apartheid to be translated into a new, economic apartheid."[15] The protest in itself also consisted of requesting a minute of silence from the parade participants to remember those who had been the victims of hate crimes.

Over the past few years, there has been an "upsurge in hate crimes targeting black lesbians and gender non-conforming persons in particular."

Prinsloo *et al* puts this down to the idea that in South Africa homosexuality is "constructed as a Western import" and that "the policing of lesbian women, apart from [...] exclusionary practice" manifests in "the form of extreme physical abuse including 'corrective rape' and murder" (Prinsloo *et al*, 2012: 140). Despite this, Pride has become increasingly commercialised and has moved away from being a defiant and protest-driven event (Craven 2011). Craven's work supports the content distributed by One in Nine at the 2012 parade and Nath's blog post, "Gay Pride is political" (Nath, 2012).

In her post Nath argues that "Pride has been de-politicised away from a vision of social justice, it is important to point out that Pride's politics, as currently formulated, follow the money" (Ibid.). She continues to write that the Joburg Pride board claim not to be "political animals" and that their event was a platform for others to display their politics. Nath argues quite pointedly that "any forum that claims to work on behalf of LGBT communities, which include black lesbians who are raped and murdered because of who they are and how they look, is in itself a loud and screaming political statement" (Ibid.). The board chooses to distance themselves from political activity, despite the history of Pride being deeply rooted in a political past. However, despite this distancing from politics, the board chose the theme "Protect our Rights" for Joburg Pride 2012 – a political statement and perhaps call to action.

A comment on Thought Leader following this post states quite pointedly that there are "two fairly obvious points as yet unmade: 1. Are the issues of corrective rape and the murder of black lesbians on the agenda of Pride? Is so, how and where? If not, why not? 2. Whether or not 1in9 'disrupted' the parade, the level of violence directed at the small group of women is the big issue. Is the organising committee 'proud' of their leader's horrifying response?"[16]

On 7 October 2012, the Joburg Pride page posted that they would be holding a meeting to discuss the One in Nine Campaign and would release a statement the next day. Someone commented on this post with "what is the use of pride events...why are we coming to the parades ppl are being murdrd in townships that is reality there is no cause for celebration really if we are dying."[17] While another individual commented on the same post that "it feels like Pride organisers have lost touch with the true spirit of Pride. Is pride about activism or have Tanya and co become party planners?"[18]

In response to the press release entitled "Joburg Pride response to One in Nine protest" posted on Facebook on 8 October 2012, there were many comments. One individual commented that a similar demonstration by the One in Nine Campaign had taken place "during the Soweto March and people circled round and observed the minute of silence. I support the right of One in Nine to protest during the march without asking permission." This comment lends itself perfectly to the next theme, a push from Pride organisers and individuals commenting online for the One in Nine Campaign to communicate their intentions and request permission.

"Maybe next year you can ask": Communication and conversations

It appears from the comments online that the Joburg Pride organisers did not try to communicate with the One in Nine Campaign activists at the moment of the protest. Instead, the focus of the organisers was on moving the activists out of the way of the parade participants. In their press release on 8 October 2012, the One in Nine Campaign stated that their members were "distributing leaflets to explain why they were there."[19]

They go on to state that "instead of engaging with us, Pride organisers assaulted us, threatened to drive their cars and trucks over us, called us names and told us we had no right to be at the parade. As lesbians and gender non-conforming people, we had every right to be there and to claim the space and assert our demands as anyone else attending the parade."[20]

An individual commenting on Nath's blog post, "Gay Pride is political," wrote "maybe next year you can ask the organising committee BEFOREHAND to incorporate your cause into the march?"[21] This is a strange suggestion that members of the LGBTIAQ community should request permission to display their outrage at the attacks and deaths of members of the community. This sort of theme continued with posts such as one posted on the One in Nine Campaign's wall reading "next time better planning is advisable."[22] With another person responding to a Joburg Pride page post on 7 October 2012 on the convening of a meeting to discuss the One in Nine Campaign, wrote that the One in Nine Campaign should have arranged with the Pride organisers for "the 1 minute of silence beforehand" and that they were "sure that they would have been more than welcome to accommodate them."[23]

These comments on communication and requesting space during the parade beforehand to have a protest or demonstration speak to the notion

of permission, access and the right to Pride. It also speaks quite loudly about the notion of ownership, that a particular group "owns" a space that is part of the larger LGBTIAQ community's history.

"This is MY route!": Permission, access and the right to Pride

Charl Blignaut's article in *City Press* (13 October 2012), entitled "Some of us are freer than others" concludes by describing an image from footage taken at Pride where Jenni Green, a Joburg Pride board member, is seen shouting "drive over them" and then turns to the camera and declares "this is MY route!" (Blignaut's emphasis). It appears in that declaration by Green that members of the organising committee feel a sense of ownership and control over what was celebrated as an event belonging to all members of the LGBTIAQ community.

A comment after Nath's post supports this sense of ownership, a commenter wrote, "a jolly and fun and organised parade, requiring some serious negotiations with Traffic dept and other authorities was disrupted. No-one, regardless of what you stand for, has the right to do that. It is rude, and smacks of a culture of entitlement." Comments on ownership and "entitlement" support the sense that Pride is seen as belonging to the Joburg Pride board and not the LGBTIAQ community.

What stands out under this theme is that the One in Nine Campaign were criticised by the Joburg Pride board for not planning with the Joburg Pride organisers to have a minute's silence. A minute's silence which served to honour those members of the LGBTIAQ community who had been the victims of hate crimes. In response to Joburg Pride's post on 7 October 2012: "Joburg Pride will convene a meeting first thing tomorrow morning and will release a statement regarding the 1 in 9 campaign," an individual posted a comment that said "my reaction – stop the parade for one minute and join them in the cause. After all it is part of our community getting killed. Or is it because we don't care about the black lesbians and people that get killed because of who they are."

Another commenter wrote in response to the 7 October 2012 "convening a meeting to discuss 1 in 9 post" that "I'd like to thank the protestors for reminding us all that apartheid is still very much alive in our country, and that a lot of work still needs to be done – now more than ever."[24] Nath writes in her piece that "if there had been any doubt in our minds it became clear

then that queerness as identity cannot constitute a common political ground" (Nath, 2012). She goes on to say that if there had been "any illusions that queerness, and the acquisition of formal LGBT rights, in South Africa had started to bridge racial and socioeconomic divides and that we were all part of the LGBT community (in the singular), here is incontrovertible evidence that we are dissected along class, race and gender lines now more than ever" (Ibid.).

On 8 October's post, someone commented "I'm all for stating your cause but do it within the ambit of the law and the rules set out...I support every effort made by the Pride Board and feel that the One in Nine campaign should rather find better and legal ways to state their cause. A float in the parade could of got the message across just as clear without breaking laws." This speaks to a prescription for what constitutes a political protest or way of conveying a message, that if the activists had acquired a float, they would have made a greater impact. However, the clash that took place – although unintended – had far more impact than any float at Joburg Pride could ever be.

"They think it's their right to put the rest of us at risk!": Safety and violence

The Joburg Pride board focused on the issue of safety in their response to the One in Nine Campaign's protest action. In their press release they wrote that the "group of protestors" who "ran out into the road and formed a human blockade across the Pride route" had "caused a major safety hazard."[25]

They further stated that they thought that the protestor's banner "no cause for celebration" was an anti-gay statement. They note that "some hostile interactions" took place "between members of the LGBTI community in the Parade and the protestors," while the marshals were attempting to "move the protestors to the side of the road, so that the parade could continue safely, but were met with further resistance."[26]

In response to the 7 October post about the Joburg Pride board convening a meeting to discuss and release a statement regarding the One in Nine Campaign someone commented that to "stop a parade of this magnitude if you have followed correct procedure, approached the board and arranged for this to be legally done, not hi jack a parade and put other people's safety at risk, this sends out the wrong message and puts the LGBTI community in the wrong kind of media spotlight!"[27]

Nearly every comment on the Joburg Pride page posted by members of the board or its supporters focused on safety and risk, which is ironic from a board whose message for Joburg Pride 2012 had been "Protect our Rights" and who were concerned with safety but resorted to violence against the protestors from the One in Nine Campaign. To support this statement, an individual commented on the Joburg Pride page, "the theme was protecting our rights! That the Joburg Pride committee infringed upon LGBT rights to organise is very telling! The racism displayed, and subsequently defended here, is appalling! The racism of white liberals is disgusting. Shame on you! Shame on all of you!"

Concluding remarks

The conversations featured would not have been possible or have had the degree of exposure they did without the digital space and what it offers in terms of communication. For instance, if social networking sites, like Facebook, did not archive or store the data shared or posted to the platform, the conversations that feature in this paper, would have been lost. However, it is always important to bear in mind that not everyone in South Africa has equal access to the internet and digital platforms to voice their position on what took place at Joburg Pride 2012.

It is evident in the themes discussed that the South African LGBTIAQ community is divided along several lines, and that dialogue between members of the community is not easy. The themes have resurfaced in the digital space and public sphere with the announcement of the disbanding of the Joburg Pride board on 3 April 2013.[28] This announcement and the conversations that have spun off from it, as well as the content from the Joburg Pride 2012 clash will inform a larger research project going forward. In particular, this forthcoming research will seek to unpack how the conflict that arose between the Joburg Pride and the One in Nine Campaign groups is in fact a reflection of the tensions that exist in South Africa and are part of a broader conversation around citizenship and national identity.

Lastly, it is important to note that in relying on digital platforms, in a country where there are only a few "digital 'haves'," that this analysis is not a fully inclusive analysis of all the issues that arose out of the Joburg Pride 2012 clash (Murthy, 2008: 845). It is rather an analysis of the digital content available to those with access, and able to contribute to the conversations online.

Endnotes

1. The One in Nine Campaign is an organisation "grounded on a feminist critical analysis of the patriarchal nature of existing political arrangements" (Milani, 2012: 20). The campaign was formed in 2006 in response to the Zuma rape trial. The campaign "supports survivors of sexual violence" and works to "apply pressure on various branches of the criminal justice system through direct action and targeted advocacy." (One in Nine, 2014).

2. LGBTIAQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and queer.

3. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.

4. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.

5. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.

6. The Joburg Pride website describing what the responsibility of the organising committee is. www. Joburgpride.org.

7. One in Nine Campaign's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/members/).

8. Sigasa and Massoa were murdered in Soweto on 7 July 2007. Their murders were considered to be hate crimes because they were targeted because of their sexual orientation (Women'sNet, 2007).

9. Another useful read on Pride in South Africa is De Waal and Manion (2007). This text explores Pride from 1990 to 2005.

10. A comment on Dipika Nath's blog post (Nath, 2012).

11. A member of the One in Nine Campaign's post on the group's Facebook page on 10 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/).

12. A member of the One in Nine Campaign commenting on another member's post. 10 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/).

13. An individual commenting on a post on the Joburg Pride Facebook page. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

14. An individual responding to a comment on a post on the Joburg Pride Facebook page. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

15. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.

16. A comment in response to Dipika Nath's blog post (Nath, 2012).

17. A comment to the Joburg Pride post that they would be holding a meeting to discuss the One in Nine Campaign. 7 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

18. A comment to the Joburg Pride post that they would be holding a meeting

to discuss the One in Nine Campaign. 7 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

19. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.

20. One in Nine Campaign. 8 October 2012. Statement by the One in Nine Campaign. www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/.

21. A comment on Dipika Nath's blog post (Nath, 2012).

22. An individual posting on the One in Nine Campaign's wall. 9 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/).

23. An individual posting on the One in Nine Campaign's Facebook page. 9 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/groups/10123398375/).

24. An individual commenting on a post on the Joburg Pride Facebook page. 7 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

25. Joburg Pride's press release posted to their Facebook page. 8 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

26. Joburg Pride's press release posted to their Facebook page. 8 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

27. A comment in response to Joburg Pride's press release posted to their Facebook page. 8 October 2012. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

28. Press release on Joburg Pride's Facebook page announcing the organising committee's disbanding. 3 April 2013. (www.facebook.com/joburgpride).

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Exploring new media technologies among young South African Women

Desiree Lewis, Tigist Shewarega Hussen[1] and Monique van Vuuren

Introduction

Contemporary South Africa reveals far less evidence of the sustained and widespread debate, networking and activism that raised public awareness about feminisms in previous decades. During the 1980s, organisations aligned with the United Democratic Front offered spaces for working women, students and activists to craft feminist discourses and activism in relation to anti-apartheid politics. By 1992, the Women's National Coalition, drawing together numerous women from different regional coalitions, community organisations and political parties collaboratively pursued the integration of gender transformation into the new political dispensation being negotiated at the time. Kemp *et al* remark on the way the Women's National Coalition allowed diverse groups of South African women to "identify common concerns...[and to] command an authority that none of them could achieve alone" (1995: 151). Feminist activism and discourses during the 1990s also incorporated animated controversy about race, class and knowledge production. Teresa Barnes' (2002) analysis of feminist conferences and workshops throughout the 1990s reveals how students, activists and academics engaged in difficult debates about power relations among South African women and feminists.

The visibility and impact of discourses about gender transformation in the present day are significantly different. At one level, gender activism has become increasingly issue-driven, with women farm workers, domestic workers or sex workers, for example, tackling policies or circumstances that directly affect their members.[2] At the same time, "gender activism" has increasingly taken the form of assimilationist politics, where a minority of women achieves positions of power and rarely acts to ensure the empowerment of the majority. As Shireen Hassim argues, "The idea of gender equality is thus increasingly

reduced to a vague set of 'good intentions', which are rarely translated into meaningful policy and ideological demands" (2006: 368). Sectoral forms of gender activism and inclusionary politics fail to "impact laterally on the political agendas of other social movements and in civil society more generally" (Ibid.). This situation does little to galvanise public debate about deeply entrenched power and injustice – especially among young women, who are unable to find inspiration in past experiences or memories of intellectual and political activism.

This article reflects on how the use of digitised communication and social media among young black South African women can be situated and assessed within the current context. The authors focus especially on nuanced explorations of "civic participation," "empowerment" and "identity politics" in acknowledging the liberatory potential of young women's use of information and communication technology (ICTs) and seeking to assess its effects in realistic ways. We therefore speculate about how the uses of ICTs can both open up new possibilities for activism and agency and reveal the difficult formation of what Nancy Fraser has called "subaltern counterpublics" (1992: 109–142) among socially marginalised young women.

Our analysis is guided by our different locations and research interests as women who live and work in Cape Town. Desiree Lewis teaches Women's and Gender Studies at a historically black university, the University of the Western Cape, and has recently become involved in action research on feminist knowledge production and new media. As an older woman whose encounters with feminist and anti-racist politics date back to struggles as a student during the 1980s, she is especially intrigued by how young South African women find a voice in the face of new challenges for social justice and the overwhelming range of information and visual images that they confront. Tigist Shewarega Hussen is a PhD student completing her research on embodied subjectivities in the post-apartheid South African imaginary. Having begun her university studies in Management Information System (MIS), a profession integrating computer science technologies with people-oriented fieldwork, she shifted to gender studies as a postgraduate. She therefore has an ongoing interest in the gendered impacts of digital technologies alongside her current political and academic interests in gender relations. Monique van Vuuren, who defines herself as always having been a "feminist at heart," is determined to explore issues of justice and equality in interdisciplinary and

creative ways. Her MA research focuses on the cultural implications of young women's self-expression and knowledge production through communicative forms including social media.

Since February 2013, the three authors have been involved in a digital activist project whose participants include women students at a historically marginalised university, the University of the Western Cape, and young women from socially marginalised communities surrounding the university.[3] Part of a broader three-country project[4] which seeks to enhance socially marginalised women's public participation, the South African component of the project has focused specifically on young women. Our analysis is based on work within this project as well as general observations about the engagement of young South African women.

Young women's "cognitive surplus"

A dominant understanding of the role of ICTs for women's empowerment in the global South has been its potential to facilitate job-creation and "national" economic growth. Echoing an entrenched developmentalist model, this view advocates increasing and facilitating socially marginalised women's access to technology. The growing ICT for development research, technology, business, education and skills training and funding industries – driven both nationally by business and government and internationally – has reinforced this: Northern donor funding and research, government policy and business corporations unrelentingly repeat the message that marginalised women in South Africa will inevitably be empowered through increasing their access to ICTs. It is revealing that some of the case studies in the book, *African women and ICTs* edited by Ineke Buskens and Anne Webb (2009) draw on this developmentalist model. Driven by the United Nations since the 1970s in order to integrate women in the global South into existing global economic systems, this model has become deeply entrenched in work about third-world women and ICTs.[5]

A preoccupation among many young South African women with skills acquisition and the translation of these into "empowerment" is not solely the result of dominant developmentalist agendas promoted by governments, many NGOs or business corporations. Enormous economic challenges confront young black South African women in the present day. The growth of multinational companies and increasing labour specialisation in the post-

apartheid period has transformed earlier employment patterns and eroded the employment routes taken by previous generations of women. Currently, unemployment in South Africa has increased, and has had a particularly destructive impact on *young* women and men.[6]

At one level, many young South African women's deep preoccupation with skills acquisition is symptomatic of national and global structural problems: the post-apartheid government's rapid embrace of neoliberal policies and neoliberalism globally has tended to generate an instinct for individual survival and personal growth within the existing socio-economic system. Yet we would also argue that many young women's attraction to ICTs speaks volumes about their perceptions of their potential to create, rather than simply consume, the media content that gratifies them. In their study of women students at the University of Zimbabwe, Mbambo-Thata *et al* (2009) show that female students' limited engagement relative to their male counterparts was not a result of timidity or technophobia. Women students, they argue, "did not lack confidence in their capacities" (2009: 70), but were constrained by using them in male-dominated institutional spaces and cultures and benefited enormously from female-friendly approaches.

This confidence in a women-centred environment was clearly manifested in our work with Project participants. In focus groups and workshops among young women, we have been made aware of the zeal with which young women have responded to new technologies ranging from iPads to video cameras. Significantly, this enthusiasm and confidence have been pronounced among both student participants and the young women with no tertiary-level education.

What can such young women's confidence about their right and ability to use media tools tell us? Clay Shirky's (2010)[7] discussion of the "cognitive surplus" available to groups in making choices about what media they engage with and derive gratification from is suggestive here. Shirky's cyber-optimism is clearly Western-centric, and his effusive praise for the new "connected age" ignores and fudges many complexities, contradictions and power relations. At the same time, his notion of "cognitive surplus" provides a valuable concept in making sense of how individuals – from different groups – use the free time available to them, even when this "free" time might be in-between intensive labour or compromised by emotionally and materially draining pressures. As Shirky suggests, ICTs are embraced by particular users because, among

an increasingly wide range of choices, they satisfy the users' intellectual, creative, existential and political needs. While Shirky does not dwell on this, the potential of ICTs to address a confluence of imaginative, self-defining and social needs is what we wish to concentrate on here. In what follows, we explore the multilayered ways in which certain socially marginalised young women in South Africa are struggling to develop new languages of personal and social freedoms in the context of the political gap resulting from the current weakness of a national women's movement specifically, and, more generally, the fragility of intellectual and political activism that frames particular social struggles and challenges.

In their account of mobile phone culture in Africa, the editors of *Mobile phones: The new talking drums of Africa* (De Bruijn *et al* 2009) write that it is often women who have embraced the more expensive and slick aspects of mobile phones, adventurously harnessing them as a "vehicles for identity and identification" (2009: 14). This seems to confirm stereotypes about women as the naïve dupes of consumerism; the suggestion is that men, motivated by pragmatism, tend to turn rationally to ICTs for their functional use, while women, who are assumed to be intensively socialised into "looking good for others," are more likely to embrace their possibilities for status and image.

However, another way of explaining the popularity and enthusiastic uptake of the more expensive and innovative technologies among women is to take into account their distinctive needs for independent and "authentic" communication, the extent to which mainstream communicative platforms, including television, magazines and newspapers, and, indeed, many new media platforms as well, ignore their vantage points. From this perspective, marginalised groups' embracing of the most innovative mobile phones or applications can be seen as their quest for communicative channels that transcend those that simply reinforce their silence, objectification or absence. This explanation partially accounts for the high consumption of expensive and state-of the-art mobile phones in Africa, and the comparatively frugal and modest use and purchase of mobile phones in many countries in the North. In what follows, it will be suggested that young women are often motivated by a politicised need for "authentic" communication, and while aspirations to modernity, glamour and social acceptance may certainly come into play, these are not the only reasons for their passionate interests in new media.

Youth, young women and civic engagement

Hermann Wasserman affirms the importance of studies of popular culture in Africa that avoid a "naïve celebration of resistance" (2010: 10) and instead convey a "nuanced assessment" of how it can become a "platform for the articulation of controversial or popular political views" (Wasserman, 2010: 10). In this section, we seek to explore ways in which South Africans marginalised on the basis of age as well as gender have used new media platforms to carve out spaces of freedom and moments of independent communication. These spaces and moments rarely provide direct political commentary or resistance; rather, they offer cognitive spaces in which certain youth, and young women in particular, articulate their consciousness of their social, cultural and political world.

Livingstone *et al* argue that "young people are often positioned by even the most well-meaning public sector sites not as citizens but as citizens-in-waiting" (2007: 5). Many bewail the prevalence of a widespread sense of apathy to politics in present-day South Africa, and point to the lack of involvement of young South African men and women citizens in the political sphere/space/affairs. This holds true in political matters at various government – national, provincial, or municipal – levels over issues ranging from service delivery to violence against children and women.

South African politicians are inclined to espouse the doctrine that "young people should always respect their elders." This doctrine was directly articulated and valorised by President Jacob Zuma on numerous occasions when responding to dissent or vilifications by the former ANC Youth League (ANCYL) president Julius Malema and his supporters.[8] While Malema does of course not represent "the youth," and has of course utilised patriarchal and exclusivist politics for his own political ends, the castigation of the youth by an elder is a deeply entrenched trope for prescribing the silence and compliance of young people in governance, and young women especially. The message clearly implies that South African politics, similar to the politics of other postcolonial states in Africa, is the domain of the veterans, the "old," those who fought for liberation and ensured that a younger generation has freedom.

The Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa (EISA)[9] together with the SADC Youth Movement recently reported that this kind of political culture and discourse creates an increasing level of apathy and

disinterest in politics among young people. As a result, many young people abdicate interest in politics by citing youth or inexperience. As Livingston *et al* noted, "they feel justified in recognising little responsibility to participate" (2007: 5) and this is recently evident in trends in the political landscape of South Africa, whereby there is a steady decline in the number of politically active eligible young people who join unions, political parties or even vote in elections.

Young people's avoidance of existing political institutions as well as the new and traditional information associated with these is partly a result of their perceived lack of autonomy. A recent example of young people's political response – outside of the predictable frameworks of political discourse – involved their reactions to a bank's advertising campaign. In January 2013 the South African First National Bank (FNB) created a campaign called "You Can Help," using a series of online videos in which a number of South African youths, mainly from socially marginalised communities, addressed the nation about critical political and social issues in the country. The campaign generated considerable controversy. Although the purpose of the advertisement, according to the bank, is to galvanise the nation into helping, the African National Congress (ANC), particularly the ANCYL, called the campaign "treacherous." They insist that the scripts read by the young people featured in the video were edited in order to convey the political stand that FNB seemed to have against the ANC. Evidently, ANC spokesperson Jackson Mthembu said the party was appalled by the campaign "in which the ANC, its leadership and government, is under attack on a commercial masqueraded as youth views" (News24, 2013). The ad was eventually withdrawn following outraged criticism from the ruling party, the ANC.

Although the mainstream media gave some coverage to this event and popular responses, the most animated responses came from young people using mobile phones, Twitter, Facebook and other social media. Many felt that the bank, despite its own entanglement in capitalist accumulation, had created a politically important opportunity for young people to speak out about corruption, their sense of betrayal by their leaders and the problems with the present South African government.

Online responses, debates and comments on different media Twitter, Mxit, Facebook and YouTube proved the youth's strong sense of civic identity. For instance, a young woman on YouTube link commented that "And this advert

wasbanned ??????."[10] Disappointed by the banning of the advertisement another individual commented "I see a lot of ass kissing by corporates as they do everything the ruling party thinks is politically correct to say or do, they found the shoe to be fitting and they wore it."[11] Because many of the campaigns featured young black people from impoverished communities (some of whom were filmed at their schools), their testimonies (within the public sphere) encouraged others in similar situations to comment using mobile phones, the internet and any other communicative resources available to them. The energetic communication among less-privileged young people about issues of governance and the corruptness of certain politicians was an unusual moment in South African political debate. And many were disappointed by the bank's eventual decision to back down following the ruling party's criticism. Although the campaign videos continue to exist on YouTube,[12] the political dialogues that would have surfaced had this campaign continued in the public sphere dissipated, and so compromised one platform for youth's civic engagement through interactive networking.

What this example also reveals is the way potential sites or subjects for young people's civic participation can be abruptly curtailed when there is a belief – whether by ruling parties, by older people or the media – that more important issues should take precedence. Here it is clear that "young people are often positioned by even the most well-meaning public sector sites not as citizens but as citizens-in-waiting" (Livingstone *et al* 2007: 5). The idea that these youths could or should have their own opinions was not acknowledged, since youths are instrumentalised in others agendas. Clearly conveying this, ANC spokesperson Keith Khoza said "young people don't necessarily understand the challenges of governance and undoing 250 years of oppression and colonialism" (see Bauer, 2013).

Authoritarian politics involving the castigation of the youth by elders is a deeply entrenched pattern for enforcing the silence and compliance of young people in governance. The message clearly implies that South African politics, similar to the authoritarian politics of other postcolonial states in Africa, is the domain of the veterans, the "old," those who fought for liberation and ensured that a younger generation has freedom. A political culture that infantalises youths by defining them as those who should remain listeners and not critical commentators can easily create a high level of apathy and disinterest among youth by proscribing their "public participation."

We agree with Vromen (2007) and Livingstone *et al*'s (2007) arguments that often websites are used to reinforce or confirm a political status quo. As such, they frequently "focus on government-directed information delivery and consultation with individuals rather than active processes of citizen ownership and collective forms of participation" (Vromen 2007: 61). Confirmations of the status quo can also take the form of impersonal information or scholarship, which, for example, explores marginalised young women's economic, bodily or political exploitation in highly technical and abstract ways.

At another level, internet and mobile activity, unlike traditional media forms such as newspapers, can be driven by youth and other marginalised groups themselves. The cyber-optimist belief that ICTs can provide a political space for young people to "have a right to express themselves, for their voices to become visible to 'be heard' [through]" (Livingstone *et al*, 2007: 4) is therefore important in exploring emerging forms of information-sharing on public interest matters that are driven by those who are marginalised on the basis of age.

The example of the South African youth's engagement with FNB advertisements conveys the need for flexible and context-specific undertandings of civic engagement and politics. In the South African context, the general understanding of civic engagement echoes dominant views about "the political" in previous decades. The limitations of this view of "the political" as spectacular have been criticised by commentators including Njabulo Ndebele (1986). As Ndebele observed, it is often through "rediscovering" the ordinary and the everyday that some of the most penetrating insights into the "political" emerge. In the context of the information revolution, where young women in Cape Town use technologies including Facebook, websites and mobile phones, the content and platforms of much ICT activity frequently form their present expressions about "the ordinary and everyday." Thus, information sharing and networking about civic issues are often developing in forums that appear to be extremely small-scale, frivolous or general – as well as the large-scale platforms for civic engagement, such as Women'sNet.[13] Moreover, many forums established for others' or seemingly general purposes are adapted by young women seeking to articulate their distinctive concerns.

An interesting example of such nascent community formation and civic engagement is the recent "confessions" movement among South African students on Facebook. To our knowledge, this movement runs in three

universities – namely UCT Confessions (based at the University of Cape Town) that at the time of writing has 26 367 followers, UWC Confessions (based at the University of Western Cape) with 283 followers, and Rhodes Confessions (based at Rhodes University) that has 12 755 followers. Unlike individuals' personal Facebook pages, these pages guarantee complete anonymity, allowing individuals to share stories in ways that personal Facebook pages cannot. For young women, especially, this forum has provided a crucial space for testimonies of abuse. Despite the fact that many posters seem to identify as male, women-identified posts often focus on their unique experiences of violence. For instance, on 30 May, UWC Confession 56 wrote:

> *depro alert *Halfway through my degree I found out I was molested as a kid and realised I was raped twice in my teens, one of those times by UWC student. I end up going to a clinic for four weeks. No-one noticed I left campus till three months later, no-one even noticed I was crying on steps outside B-block in full view of everyone. I still can't even grasp the seriousness of my shit coz it's that fucked up, this shit happens much more than people realize, all the stats and shit that gets thrown in our faces on a daily basis desensitize us from realizing how serious this is. I am not comfortable telling people this happened to me with a face, so I hope in some way this post helps open some eyes without me having to give my identity.

What is especially noteworthy about this testimony is the anger in the speaker's reference to existing public platforms ("the stats and shit that get thrown in our faces"). It seems to be her "facelessness" that gives her the power to speak out, to create a sense of solidarity which establishes the link between her own experience and interpretation of violation and the political realities of young women's routine subjection to violence, often in schools or universities. In many ways, then, the widespread use of social media among many young women – whether platforms are set up for them or serve broader purposes – creates opportunities for their expression about "personal" and daily communication that more traditional forms of mobilising and action tend to neglect. And opportunities for such frank communication about the everyday can offer crucial routes into consciousness-raising and transformative politics among young South African women.

While personal and everday experiences and observations frequently form the basis of many young women's civic engagement, their reflections on

groups in wider national and global contexts can also convey commentary on global politics. In our work with young women we have observed that they have been drawn to online pages that raise the complexities of social identification within global contexts. In many cases, visual images become important entry points into discussion about dominant power relations and how they can be unsettled. Here it is worth mentioning Afro Queens,[14] African Heritage City,[15] Black History Album,[16] Unpacking the "F" word,[17] Wild Women Sisterhood[18] and Faithless Daughters[19] as examples. Almost on a daily basis (sometimes continuously throughout the day), these Facebook pages produce different posts that testify to issues of identity from a global perspective. And debates and responses continue on the issue raised by making connections to similar local and international matters.

For instance, on 25 March 2013 on Unpacking the "F" word, a picture of black woman wearing a t-shirt that proclaimed "Please respect me like I am a white person" was posted with an invitation for open discussion around racism and sexism; 290 likes, 50 shares, and 304 comments were made. Although the racial discourse revealed in this picture and conversation is set in the US, due to the characteristics of "online" community, conversations were able to happen globally, with different people from different countries revealing such social issues. Obviously many young women were not happy about the shirt. Some commented that it constituted a denial of black identity. There were comments like "what a stupid fucking shirt," "This is disheartening why as white women? Why not equal?" There were also racist clashes – a young white women responding "I'm going to wear a shirt that says beat me like a black lady," which provoked a black woman to furiously insult her back "you're an asshole."[20]

Some, however, applauded the courage it took for this young women to wear the shirt in public. There were insightful comments: "this thread reads like a lesson on white privilege," "this thread is a good illustration of why someone felt the need to make this shirt," "I love that she feels comfortable expressing her feelings about a very tense topic. Love the freedom of this photo," "She is not implying that there is something wrong with being Black. I think she is challenging white privilege in which white folks are automatically respected for being...white." As a co-author of this article, Tigist was also part of this conversation and commented that "this is not only a statement but a life experience. On a daily basis we all encounter and experience racism in different ways and we always demand to be respected as who we are. This

is another level of conversation talking back to racism and provoking 'if I was white, you would have respected me differently' that is the irony of this picture and that is what makes this very powerful."[21]

The above example shows how "online" civil, political and social participation is dynamic and constantly straddles geographical locations, citizenship, gender and age. The critique of globalised discourses in many of the above becomes an important critical resource for young women to formulate insights into power that resonate with their own experiences. Engaging with such resources is crucial when the internet and traditional media reinforce objectifying, demeaning and disempowering images of young women in the global south. These relentlessly position young women as objects of others' interpretations, rather than as subjects who actively identify their needs and who they are.

It is noteworthy that in many of the sessions among the ICT project participants, the liveliest and most impassioned debates revolved around choices about the logo for identifying the project we convened. Breaking previous language barriers and their associated power relations which affected other group discussions, during these sessions both students and non-students[22] argued forcefully about how particular images reinforced dominant tropes of masculinity, femininity, race and neo-imperialism. This critical reading of images (of bodies and objects) meant that visual texts came to constitute a more accessible language for young women's political discourse *across* language barriers. While reflections on images still needed to be expressed in speech, visual texts seemed to liberate the constraints often associated with an exclusive focus on language and written text. The responses from Project participants suggest that visual images have the potential to provide valuable sources for deepening consciousness about political circumstances and possibly mobilising young women's activism.

In a book on black US-based feminism published in 2006, Patricia Hill Collins describes the emergence of a new generation of young black feminists, who use the resources of popular and commodity culture to define agendas for change. Collins' work precedes the massive transformations to communicative systems in recent years, transformations which have profoundly affected socially marginalised young people in South Africa, despite the digital divide. While much of this communication focuses on entertainment and self-expression, much of it is linked to broader explorations of how personal

experiences are politicised. The communication and association among young women who use ICTs today do often seem trivial. However, complex forms of civic and political commentary are often embedded in communication which seems everyday and banal.

Self-identification, empowerment and creativity

The section above has raised the importance of identity construction, and the psychological needs among many young women to use ICTs in formulating empowering senses of who they are. Such formulation does not involve only a cerebral response to available images, stories and knowledge. Self-identification can also involve hybridised communication which combines traditional and new media. Expressions of self can therefore entail highly imaginative efforts to represent what "personhood" means, and what realities shape personal experiences and responses among young women.

One campaign in our ICT project involved young women identifying themselves politically by writing down slogans and holding these up in order to be photographed. The aim has been to change these slogans regularly, and circulate them in response to particular local events. What emerged powerfully was the extent to which these visual texts, which can be circulated not only on Facebook, but also on mobile phones, or used on posters, offer the potential for mobilising among young women who often feel isolated because they are different. The starting point in mobilising young women, then, was not to gather a group of young women who obviously self-defined as feminist (which must always be a learning process), but to work with a group of women who, in different ways, felt that they had something important to say which was not being heard and could express this both through writing and through their bodily performance – clothes, hairstyling and image. Scope for experimentation and play with the body's surface is obviously enhanced with Facebook, and many young women simply do not have access to Facebook. However, experimenting with short videos that can be shown to others, or circulating photographs can create nascent political conversations and alliances among young women whose strongest mode of communication is often their inscription of their own bodies.

There is of course a long history of feminist cynicism about identity politics, and the preoccupation with defining the (socially disparaged) self positively with reference to, for example, gender, race, sexual orientation or

age. Nancy Fraser (1995), for example, has argued that the preoccupation with the "politics of recognition," the impulse amongst marginalised groups such as blacks, black women, gays and lesbians to assert positive identities can become an end in itself. Identity politics has has therefore jettisoned attention to the politics of redistribution and socio-economic transformation as the foundation of true social justice. In South Africa (and elsewhere), however, where injustice continues to be predicated on assumptions about person's bodies, a defiant talking back to stereotypes is a crucial cultural response to the broader meaning of "injustice."

Many young women who have been involved in ICT feminist activism have stressed the need for creative and artistic forms of self-expression. In discussions, many have emphasised the need for social engagement, and for an emphasis on fun and pleasure. It is a disturbing legacy of left-wing politics (and feminism specifically) in South Africa that politics has been considered a highly serious business. Entertainment, creativity and personal inventiveness have generally been considered suspect. Certain young women, however, have urged the importance of conveying political meaning through humour and parody, while others have stressed the centrality of creative artworks, music or writing to political campaigns, information or gatherings. Creativity especially has seemed to offer young women scope to imagine future possibilities, rather than to fixate on the problems of the present.

Social media creates enormous scope for imagining the self and new worlds. Gus Silber, a South African journalist who has written a study of the social media platform, Mxit, writes that "On Mxit you can be anonymous, a character of your own choosing, unburdened by the perceptions and expectations of other people" (Silber, 2012: 8). Jane Martinson, turning specifically to young women's experimentation with social media, draws on surveys and anecdotal evidence to conclude that that "few young women identify with the word feminism, fearing it sits at odds with a desire to wear makeup or heels" (2013: 1). Yet she also shows that this does not necessarily reflect their discomfort with dominant gender norms and the resources that contemporary popular culture can provide for unsettling socially prescribed femininities. Martinson's argument allows us to reflect on how platforms such as Twitter, Mxit and Whatsapp provide opportunities for young women to produce intricately layered messages about how dominant discourses of gender and sexuality restrict their options and choices and limit the people they would like to be.

This layering has become evident in the MA research of one of the co-authors of this article. As a young person herself, Monique believes that Facebook has become a platform where her voice and self-image as a confident young woman becomes amplified. She also feels that Facebook becomes an important portal to the multiple and self-consciously performative lives, faces and representations of contemporary young women. Monique's exploratory participant observation has pointed to the importance of incorporating Facebook, BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) and Whatsapp as tools for understanding and interacting with young women today. Her research suggests that the virtual world intersects with the "real" world and how young women express their multiple and often contradictory selves on a daily basis. These tools are part of the social world they engage in, an extension of their embodied subjectivities. Consequently, their expanded embodied subjectivities allows them enormous scope to script and re-script themselves, through photographs, images and text. For many young women, these expanded versions of the self circulate in the pubic sphere as richer and more meaningful versions of the women they are believed to be. Often stereotyped as facile entertainment by older people, Facebook deserves to be acknowledged for providing a new platform and vocabulary for engaging with a rapidly changing cultural, economic and social landscape. Its unique logic derives not only from the new register, forms and grammars it puts in place, but from a very different logic about what communication and self-representation entail: conventional communication assumes a more stable relationship between speaker and listener; Facebook assumes the multiplicity and ambivalence of the poster (and whoever engages with it).

One way of exploring this is offered by Bruce Sterling. Sterling contends that we hide ourselves behind an avatar, even backstage behind our computer screen we are acting frontstage. Our Facebook profile permanently communicates when we are not online – we are acting on two different stages at the same time. As a concept, "avatar" epitomises the whole digitised phenomenon. The avatar is our physical representation in the virtual world; another world in which we can even invent ourselves a new self (Sterling, 2012). In line with this, the virtual world, particularly Facebook, offers young women a space where they are in control of how they want to be represented.

This cyber-optimist view, however, must be situated in the context of South Africa's current realities of growing neoliberalism, ongoing social

injustices and the government's increasingly repressive responses to social protest.

The progressive possibilities of young women's use of new media need to be weighed up against the ways in which ICT resources and tools are enmeshed with commodity capitalism. These relentlessly co-opt resources and messages in the interests of a global capitalist system, for example, the marketing and sale of mobile phones, laptops or software in many parts of South Africa, including the most impoverished rural areas, is a stark reminder that these tools are, for many, simply commodities whose sale will increase profits for privileged groups. Even in the most marginalised areas of South Africa, inhabited by those with basic resources in rural and peri-urban areas, for example, mobile phone and mobile phone service provider adverts abound, indicating how poor people, women especially, are targeted as consumers of, for example, mobile phone, even when many cannot afford these (see De Bruijn *et al*, 2009: 8-19).

Yet consumer capitalism and neoliberalism have also led to unexpected forms of connection and solidarities among many young South Africans. Monique's MA research on young women and body image shows that popular culture, especially as mediated by social media, and Facebook in particular, often uncovers innovative associations and encounters among young women from different social classes. In some cases, this has entailed points of convergence around their shared or similar understanding of gender and sexuality, where in previous decades such solidarities were far more complicated by race and class. At one level, racial and class divides remain, and in many areas in Cape Town have been intensified. At another level, certain forms of communication via Facebook or through Mxit or Whatsapp sometimes offer scope for alliances among disaffected youth who draw eclectically on nonconformist icons or symbols especially along the lines of gender and sexuality. And it is significant that these networks are not dependent on the physical localities that young women share for leisure or living. In this way, social media can offer spaces for association and identification that transcend or challenge prescribed or historically inherited patterns of separation.

Monique's participant observation has also shown that many young women's self-presentation through ICTs often transcends the hard lines of heteronormative styles or prescribed femininity. Within hegemonic or mainstream popular culture, clothes, body "marking," dress and accessorising

can challenge the societal order and normative constructs of race, class and gender. Among her participants, and, indeed, for herself as well, there is a constant criss-cross, a back and forth contestation between conforming and rebelling/resisting. All this is in the name of an effort to be different and to defy the norms of belonging in terms of being a "proper woman," a "proper citizen," "heteronormative," a "typical" member of a certain racial group or community.

Social networking therefore becomes more than a space allowing those who already share certain goals to consolidate their politics and pursue common goals. Rather, social networking – often despite unequal access and resources – is a virtual world in which young South African women can explore and redefine racial, gendered and sexualised possibilities of "selfhood," and through these virtual worlds, begin to formulate utopian ideas about the self and possible freedoms.

It is noteworthy that this thinking resonates with recent arguments in radical and feminist politics. In their editorial for an issue of *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* published in 2010, Max Heiven and Alex Khasnabitch focus on a pivotal emerging theme in global radical thought by affirming the role of desire, imagining and creativity in radical politics. From the start of the new millennium, this emphasis has steadily intensified, having been raised by African feminists including Patricia Mcfadden (2003) and Charmaine Pereira (2002). This affirmation of the imagination counters what Stephen Duncombe (2007) describes as the debilitating pragmatism of much post-Enlightenment progressive thought. As he states, within this thought the realm of dreams, imagining and symbolism is almost automatically seen as suspect, reactionary or obfuscatory (2007: 18).

The new interest in radical notions of desire and utopia therefore retrieve dreams, spectacle, envisaged possibilities and symbolism from their reactionary function in conservative myth-making. It is a central argument of this article that new information and communications systems in South Africa, which yield abundant scope for inventive audio, textual and visual creativity, open up many of the possibilities identified by certain progressive thinkers.

Working with young women on social media recently has made it clear that the "politics of recognition,"[23] in the face of the deluge of representations that degrade, misrepresent or silence socially marginalsed women, should be central to feminist ICT activism focusing on youth. Visual

texts, especially photographs or films that allow young women to represent themselves, or to be represented in ways that defy the development industry, or researchers fixated with stories of victimisation, global ideas of stereotypes about African women and the ideas about unemployed young women who drain the country's resources are central ways of talking back to authorities and technologies that seek to control marginalised women's bodies and limit their agency.

It is therefore significant that much "political talk" associated with the project we are involved in takes the form of provocative images aimed at encouraging the viewer to think. With the project's Facebook page, Actifem,[24] these include photographs of black feminists, images of feisty young women's vivid graphic designs with slogans such as "My body, my sexuality, my morals, my life, my choice – not yours" and "Racism, Sexism and Homophobia Are Not Permitted in this Area."

The resonance of images combining very little text are a reminder of the importance of the communicative value of fragments of information in the digitised age. It is possible to see the effects of these as discouraging reflection, promoting information that is quickly digested and forgotten. But the animated responses to many of the short digital activist messages on Facebook pages such as Actifem is evidence of their impact – in politicising groups and encouraging further reflection. The role of the politics of recognition – images and messages that allow groups to recognise an "authentic" and empowered sense of self in the face of othering and misrepresentation – can therefore work hand in hand with broader struggles for justice. Ruth Meena and Mary Rusimbi, writing about Tanzanian women's use of mobile phones and the internet, explore their research participants' life histories with reference to their definitions of "empowerment." Empowerment, they argue, involves their participants being "grounded within" (2009: 205), something which inevitably has to precede meaningfully progressive action. Images and text that convey identity politics can allow marginalised women to trace the reasons for their being subordinated, to connect these with a broader critique of social inequalities and generate a preparedness to act on intersecting inequalities.

Conclusion

Vromen suggests that "traditional indicators of participation that rely on labeling some types of participation as conventional and other types of participation as unconventional tend to both belittle and diminish our capacity to understand young people's participation" (2007: 54). A more important challenge, then, is to reflect carefully on what new communicative forms and meanings are conveying, and on the complex and often ambiguous reasons why these have so rapidly surfaced. Socially marginalised young women in South Africa, as elsewhere, clearly do confront many practical social challenges. Yet to reduce their experiences and expression to clear-cut reactions to "oppression" means missing the opportunity to understand and analyse many of the political effects of what they do with their "cognitive surplus."

Endnotes

1. Co-author Tigist Shewarega Hussen would like to be referred to and cited by her first name, Tigist.

2. Shireen Hassim describes the "fragmentation and stratification" of post-apartheid women's organisation in "The Women's Movement in Democratic South Africa" (2006: 354).

3. These areas include Khayelitsha and Delft, characterised by informal housing and high rates of unemployment.

4. Coordinated by the Bangalore-based organisation, ITforChange, this project facilitates work in three countries: India, Brazil and South Africa. See <http://www.itforchange.net/>

5. See Hafkin (2000).

6. See Wausi *et al* (2013).

7. The title of Shirky's study, this concept frames his arguments about the potential that new technology offers for the popular production, rather than mechanical consumption of publicly available information.

8. See SABC News (2012) and Mdeltshe (2012).

9. For more information, see Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy (no date).

10. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8_0MYzz4cw>

11. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8_0MYzz4cw>

12. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8_0MYzz4cw>

13. Available at <http://www.Women'sNet.org.za/>

14. Available at <https://www.Facebook.com/afroqueens>

15. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/africanheritagecity>

16. Available at <https://www.facebook.co, blackhistoryalbum>

17. Available at <https://facebook.com/pages/Unpacking-the-F-Word/340597015976663>

18. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/WildWomanSisterhood>

19. Availablw at <https://wwwfacebook.com/oshobabe>

20. Available at <https://www.Facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=500163740019989&set=a.340615825974782.70499.340597015976663&type=1&theater>

21. Available at <https://www.Facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=500163740019989&set=a.340615825974782.70499.340597015976663&type=1&theater>

22. All the students speak English fluently, although most speak other African languages. Most of the women who are not students struggle to express themselves in English.

23. The phrase here is used in the sense that Nancy Fraser uses it.

24. Available at <https//www.facebook.com/actifem>

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Sinking into oblivion? Ethnographic insights into the place of radio in the lives of women living in a rural community in Zimbabwe

Selina Mudavanhu

Introduction

In 2010, I decided to embark on a journey to study for a doctoral degree in Media Studies. I was required to come up with a research topic and to write a proposal. I remember speaking to a number of people regarding my potential topic. I wanted to focus on radio and women living in rural Zimbabwe because I felt that this was an area that had not received much attention from media researchers in the country. Of all the discussions that I had, one conversation in particular has stuck with me to date because the person I was speaking to was convinced that studying radio (read old media) in 2010 was not a good idea – "Who cares about radio in 2010? The action is happening elsewhere," the person said. By this the person meant I ought to be focusing on new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The person talked about the then-latest gadgets and the different social networking platforms as well as possible research topics. I nonetheless proceeded to write a proposal on radio. Besides the aforementioned motivation to undertake the research, in Africa, radio remains "by far the most powerful tool of communication on the continent [...]" (Moyo, 2010: 24).

Although ICTs are increasingly becoming ubiquitous in Zimbabwe (most people own at least a mobile phone), this paper argues that this has not meant that traditional media such as radio has sunk into oblivion as the person advising me seemed to be suggesting. Qualitative research carried out between March and April 2011 with some women residing in one rural community in Zimbabwe showed that radio still occupied a position of primacy in their lives. Whereas one woman, Mai Marjory[1] sometimes listened to the radio on her mobile phone when she was away from home, the rest of the women still listened to radio (particularly Radio Zimbabwe)[2] on portable

radio sets or on solar-powered radios. Drawing on the findings of the research, this paper provides some ethnographic insights into the place of radio in the daily lives of the women who were interviewed.

The context

The everyday engagement with radio in the rural community should be understood in the context of the political and economic crisis that took place in Zimbabwe after 2000. The community itself was not immune to the political polarisation that characterised the rest of the country. In the initial meeting of gaining entry into the village, the headman stated in no uncertain terms that he and *his* people were ZANU-PF supporters. Drawing on dominant ideas, the headman framed those who supported ZANU-PF as "patriots." In ways that seemed to contradict the headman's self-assured declaration that *his* people were ZANU-PF, he however acknowledged that there was a "problem" in the community of some people supporting the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).[3] He blamed the division on the influence of "outsiders" (MDC activists coming from the cities as well as activists from non-governmental organisations). In ways reminiscent of hegemonic political discourses in Zimbabwe since 2000, the headman constituted the MDC as a party of "unrepentant traitors." Labelling the opposition in this manner worked to delegitimise them as serious and credible contenders to govern the country. It also worked to create fear in opposition supporters of being seen to be "unpatriotic." This classification also served to justify any actions that might be taken against these political "deviants."

In addition to the headman making his political affiliation known, the community was under surveillance to curb "selling-out," that is people supporting opposition political parties. The community was policed through the headman's police who took on the role of spying and telling the headman of any clandestine political meetings taking place. In addition to the designated police, other people in the community who supported ZANU-PF took it upon themselves to police other people.

The economic situation in this rural area was also not very different from what was happening in the rest of the country. At the time the study was conducted, there were very few men in the community. Whereas in colonial times it was mostly men who left rural areas for towns and mines, the research participants talked about their daughters also having joined the bandwagon of

going away in search of greener pastures in neighbouring cities and countries. As was the case during the colonial era, the women who remained in rural areas relied on subsistence farming for survival (Schmidt, 1991; Gordon, 1996). Almost all the women in the study spoke about life in the community as well as in the country as generally "hard." Asked to elaborate what this meant, most participants alluded to the disconnect between their hard work in trying to provide for their families on the one side and the seemingly unending challenges they faced to survive. They mentioned that they were struggling to feed their families and to keep their children in school. Women who would have been retired if they were in the formal labour force continued to work for their families (for example, Mbuya vaKizito[4] and Mbuya vaJoyce). Mai Nomatter commented that what made 2011 even more challenging was the fact that "it had not rained well and the maize crop was beginning to show signs of strain."

Methodology

As mentioned in an earlier section, the fieldwork took place in 2011 in a rural village in Zimbabwe. During this period, time was dedicated to listening to Radio Zimbabwe as well as to extensive recording of the station's broadcasts from the time it was officially opened at 6am to the time it closed at 12am.[5] Having knowledge of Radio Zimbabwe's programmes and presenters was useful when it came to conducting interviews with women who listened to the station. It assisted in building rapport between the researcher and the participants who initially thought that by virtue of the researcher being "young and from the city" she would not know much about a station like Radio Zimbabwe that broadcast in vernacular. Seeming surprised, some women would remark: "*Saka munototeererawo* Radio Zimbabwe?!" (So you also listen to Radio Zimbabwe?!).

In addition to recording the station's broadcasts, 30 women who listened to the radio every day were identified and interviewed. The aim was to gain the greatest insights possible into their interaction with radio as well as the ideas that were broadcast (Esterberg, 2002). In that context, semi-structured interviews were used. In conducting the interviews there was no dutiful adherence to a predetermined set of questions (Priest, 2010; Flick, 2011); most interviews took unpredictably different directions from the ones the researcher had anticipated. Some of the questions arose during the interviews as follow-

ups to what the women had said. Other questions, particularly those that were asked in later interviews were framed using experiences of earlier interviews.

While in the quantitative research tradition, keeping participants at a distance is regarded as a way of contributing to the production of "objective" knowledge, in this study, there was a conscious attempt to minimise the gap between the researcher and the participants. Drawing on work by feminist scholars such as Mama (1995), the research tried to address the top-down researcher/participant relationship; the researcher was open to being asked and responding to questions posed by participants. In addition to the deliberate move to draw closer to the participants, it should be noted that due to the political situation in the country, the women themselves were not passive and "confined to the role of data source" (Walsh, 1989: 437). They asked questions in order to understand what they were getting themselves into to avoid trouble with the authorities. Some of the questions posed by the participants included: "So are you married?"/ "How old are you?"/ "How many children do you have?" Similar to Achebe's experiences of interviewing women, responding to these questions that bordered on being invasive worked to "break down some of the walls of distrust and fear that are intrinsic to the qualitative research setting" (Achebe, 2002: 13).

Besides conducting interviews with the women, the researcher was also engaged in a process of making notes of observations made during the stay in the community. A range of different things were observed and noted which included the ways power was exercised in the community, women's interactions with radio, observations made during interviews as well as anything that occurred in the community that seemed interesting.

Ethnography of radio

While for young middle-class women studying at the University of Cape Town, the internet occupied a central position in their lives (Mudavanhu and Fröhlich, forthcoming), for the women interviewed in this study, radio was still the medium of choice. For all women except one (Mai Margaret) who had a television set at her home, radio was the only source of information that they had. Mai Sheila for example, explained that she preferred radio because "it was cheaper than buying newspapers and television sets." Other women said even if they could afford to buy newspapers, they were hardly ever sold at their local shops. In addition to economic reasons, most participants mentioned

that they liked radio because it fitted perfectly into their work schedules. As will be alluded to later, the participants said because of their work they hardly had time to sit down so radio was convenient in that while they did their work around the homestead, they could listen to it. "Unlike television where you have to sit down and watch it, with radio I can be sweeping the yard while I am listening to *Nguva yavarwere*"[6] (Mai Tendai).

All the women who were interviewed singled out Radio Zimbabwe as the only station they listened to. None of them acknowledged listening to any other radio stations. While "other" radio stations could mean state-owned radio stations such as Spot FM, Power FM and National FM, in this community however, "other" radio stations was understood to mean "independent" radio stations such as SW Radio Africa that were regarded as promoting a "regime-change agenda." Thus, admitting to listening to these stations was the same as admitting to being a "traitor" and this could have deadly consequences (see Moyo, 2010). Mai Sheila who spoke of listening to "alternative" radio stations said she did so in the context of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. In the interview Mai Sheila gave a detailed account of how during the pre-1980 liberation war she and her family clandestinely listened to Radio Mozambique,[7] a station that the Ian Smith government prohibited people from listening to. She narrated how her family would huddle around a radio set at night in order to "hear from the exiled nationalist leaders regarding how the war was progressing."

In talking about the kinds of radios they owned or had access to, the women mostly talked of two types of radio sets – the "big radio sets" and portable radios that used disposable batteries. The "big radio sets" were solar powered and were located either in the bedroom or the dining room.[8] As noted in the introduction, Mai Marjory was the only woman who had a mobile phone from which she could listen to the popular greeting and music request show, *Kwaziso / Ukhubingelelana*. When approached for the interview, Mai Marjory was watching over one of her cows that had an injured leg as it grazed, while she was tuned into the programme on her mobile phone. Mai Marjory explained that she only switched on the radio on her phone when she was not at home. After the programme, she said she switched off the radio to "save on her phone battery" in case someone wanted to phone her. While the portable radio sets were largely brought out to listen to particular programmes (especially the news and *Kwaziso / Ukhubingelelana*), the "big

radio sets" tended to be always switched on with the volume on high when the women were at home or working in fields close to the home. It was not uncommon to hear radios playing loudly in the distance. Whereas researchers like Spitulnik (2002), whose work focused on radio in Zambia, showed that people carried portable radios beyond the home, in this study, the participants said they mainly listened to the portable radios at home. Besides listening to the radio at home, Chipo, a young woman in her late teens said she sometimes went to the shops with her friends during weekends to "hang out and to listen to the radio." The radios at the shops were among the few that were powered by electricity in the community. Almost each shop had the radio playing on full volume music by artists from Zimbabwe as well as neighbouring Botswana and South Africa.

Speaking about other people who listened to the radio with them, most women said this largely depended on the time of day and sometimes on the programme. During the day for example, the majority of them listened to the radio "alone" with small children and grandchildren. Occasionally some women like Mai Chido went to listen to the news at a neighbour's house. In the evenings, most women said they listened to the radio with other family members; husbands, sons and daughters-in-law.

While some people would name listening to the radio as something they do in their leisure time, for the participants in this study, their everyday listening to the radio was embedded within their work routines. Like Mai Tendai (mentioned at the beginning of this section), Mai Peter said her listening to the radio happened as she did her work. She continued: "I hardly sit down and just listen to the radio [...] it's either I am cooking or washing dishes or preparing to go and sell my wares. I never just sit and listen to the radio." For most women, the working day generally started around 5am and ended around 8pm. "Work" for them meant a range of things. Firstly, it meant doing reproductive work such as cooking, cleaning the homestead, bathing and feeding children, fetching water from the well and fetching firewood.[9] Secondly, it meant doing agricultural work. Depending on the season, the women went to the fields to plant, cultivate and harvest crops especially maize. The women also had vegetable gardens which they tended to. These gardens were located a few kilometres from their homes. The third kind of work that women did was entrepreneurial; they bought and sold fruit and vegetables (Mai Nomatter, Mai Peter and Mbuya vaJoyce).

In the context of the work mentioned above, most women said during weekdays they listened to the radio in the early morning, at lunchtime and in the early evening. Mai Victor and Mai Marjory said they switched on their radios around 6am to listen to the daily morning devotional and prayer as well as the early morning news bulletin. During this time the participants said they tried to listen attentively to what the Pastor was saying. Thereafter, the radio seemed to be in the background as they started attending to their children or grandchildren before they left for school. Notwithstanding the season, most women mentioned they usually came back home at midday from the fields or the garden or from doing business. As they prepared lunch they switched on the radio again to listen to *Kwaziso / Ukhubingelelana* and the news. After lunch, the radio was usually switched off as the women went back to do their work except in cases when they were working in fields close to the home (Mai Victor). Mai Kuda and Mbuya vaJoyce were the only women who were not in the habit of listening to the radio at lunchtime. Mbuya vaJoyce explained that the radio remained switched off because she "wanted to save the batteries." In the evenings, some women (Mbuya vaJoyce, Mai Joyce and Mai Kuda) brought the portable radios to the kitchen to listen to the 7pm news while they prepared or ate supper. Mbuya vaJoyce explained that after the news, they usually switched off the radio because they wanted to rest after a day of hard work. Other women like Mai Peter and Mai Mutsa however, stayed up for another popular programme, *Chakafukidza Dzimba Matenga* aired on Tuesday evenings.

In addition to the fairly predictable times mentioned above, some women kept the radio switched on the whole day when they were at home on particular days such as *musi wechisi*.[10] Mai Kudzi also said on Sundays her daily routine of listening to the radio was slightly disrupted. On days she did not go to church, she usually left the radio on the whole day while she oscillated between paying attention and not paying attention to it.

Although all the women did switch on their radio sets at some points during the day to listen to Radio Zimbabwe, there were times when they chose not to listen to the station. Four women, Mai Tiny, Mai Godfrey, Mai Marjory and Chipo said they sometimes did not concern themselves with radio programmes. Mai Godfrey explained that she sometimes enjoyed listening to her own music CDs by gospel musicians such as *Vabati VaJehovha*. Speaking about listening to "her own music," Mai Marjory spoke of listening to music by the late

Zimbabwean musician, James Chimbombe. The idea of choosing not to listen to Radio Zimbabwe broadcasts is interesting for two reasons. Contrary to the passive audience thesis suggested in most analyses of media texts in Zimbabwe post-2000, the participants in this study were constructing themselves as active participants who could decide to listen or not to listen to Radio Zimbabwe broadcasts. Secondly, it is interesting to note that although the women showed some kind of agency, the songs that they listened to however reinforced the same mainstream ideas broadcast on Radio Zimbabwe.[11]

While women made the choice regarding what to listen to (as in the above instances) there were times when other family members (particularly those who owned the radio sets) decided what they listened to (Mai Themba and Mai Sheila). Mai Sheila for example, said when her sons were at home they "took over control of the radio set and played loud music while she wanted to listen to the news." For Revai who worked in a bottlestore explained that some of the patrons made the decisions on what to listen to.

Conclusion

While the new technologies are increasingly becoming commonplace, this has not meant that traditional media such as radio have become less interesting as the person giving me advice at the beginning of my PhD journey assumed. In the rural community that the study was based radio was still an important source of information for all the women who were interviewed. Mai Marjory's listening to *Kwaziso / Ukhubingelelana* on her mobile phone begins to dismantle the rigid categorisations of "old media" versus "new media" as existing independently of one another. One begins to imagine a future in which there is more convergence rather than ICTs completely obliterating traditional media like radio.

Endnotes

1. All the names that are used in this paper are pseudonyms. *Mai* is a title used for women to mean "mother of" or "wife of." In this paper, the title is used to mean "mother of."

2. Radio Zimbabwe is one of four state-owned radio stations at the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. This station broadcasts in two main languages, Shona and Ndebele.

3. Although the headman spoke of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as if it was one unified party, by 2011 the MDC had split into different factions.

4. *Mbuya* is used in this paper to mean "grandmother of."

5. There were a few days when recording of the station's broadcasts was interrupted by a loss of transmission.

6. *Nguva yevarwere* was a programme dedicated to people who were sick. Radio Zimbabwe listeners were invited to write into the programme and greet their friends and relatives who were not feeling well. Listeners would also include a list of songs that the presenter could select from to play for those people who had been greeted.

7. Frederikse (1982) writes about the programme, *Voice of Zimbabwe*, beamed for an hour every evening to the black population in the country by nationalist leaders from exile through Radio Mozambique during the days of the liberation struggle.

8. Most homesteads generally had three brick structures; a round grass thatched hut that served as the kitchen, a blair toilet and a three-roomed brick house with corrugated or asbestos roofs with two bedrooms and a dining room.

9. The places where women went to fetch water and firewood were not close to their homes. Going to fetch firewood generally meant walking on foot for several kilometres.

10. This was a day in the week that was set aside permanently for resting. No one in the village was allowed to go and work in their fields.

11. One of the central ideas repeated on Radio Zimbabwe is the idea that God is the all-powerful helper of "feeble" people. Some of the music CDs that the women listened to also reinforced this same idea.

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Profile:
The Asikana Network

Chisenga Muyoya

> It's extremely difficult for females in ICT to land their dream ICT jobs because it is still considered a male dominated field.
> – Ella Mbewe, cofounder of the Asikana Network

The Asikana Network is a women-driven group that aims to empower young women and equip them with information and communication technology (ICT) skills to help them in their various fields. Started in January 2012, Asikana, encouraged and supported by the BongHive[1] leadership, has grown into a vibrant and innovative network of young women determined to challenge the "male geek" stereotype. The founders of Asikana Network, Ella Mbewe, Chisenga Muyoya and Regina Mtonga, met at a highly technical training course held at BongoHive in December 2011. Having being the only three female participants, they were driven to form a support group for women in technology.

In his blog *Appropriating Technology for Social Justice and Human Development*, Tony Roberts writes: "Women find it particularly difficult to make their way in the IT field whether due to glass ceilings in the UK or the glass ladders in Lusaka" (Roberts, 2012).

Asikana has partnered with organisations that offer support and mentorship including BongoHive, Anakazi, and Akirachix[2] of Kenya. Through these partnerships Asikana is moving towards realising some of the goals they have set to achieve. An interactive networking platform for like-minded women which also provides a forum that promotes women's participation in ICT is an achievement Asikana has realised. A more ambitious and perhaps ongoing goal is advocating for policies and legislation that endorse the active involvement of women in the ICT sector.

Although women in Zambia (and across Africa) entering the IT industry face constant gender discrimination in the private sector, the Network believes that partnering with the private sector will help them achieve some of their goals. By providing training and capacity building in ICT skills as well as mentorship and facilitating placement for suitably qualified women, the private sector can potentially create a more inclusive environment for women "techies" and enable women to gain experience and confidence in their chosen profession. The Asikana Network targets three main groups of women. One is girls in high school. The women in Asikana believe in eliminating the stereotypical "I can't do that" thinking by working with the girls when they are young. They plan to introduce Asikana Network clubs in schools where girls can meet and receive mentorship and encouragement from other women who are already in the field.

A second group are college students and graduates. This group is made up of women who are either in college studying IT or who would like to branch off into the sector later on in life. They are sometimes already studying IT but simply require an extra nudge from other women in the field to practise it actively. The group also includes women who have completed their tertiary education and may not be sure what steps to take next.

The third group is made up of women in IT who are already working and have some ICT skills but simply wish to share their knowledge as well as pick up new skills from others. One significant achievement which has implications for furthering Asikana's aims beyond Zambia is the creation of a map of women tech hubs in Africa. This map includes brief information on what each tech hub does, as well as where it is located.

Ethel Ella Mbewe, a cofounder of the Asikana Network, explains why they created the crowdmap of women tech hubs in Africa:

"We aim to reach out to other women in technology initiatives in Zambia and Africa at large. We knew we were not alone and realised the need for a platform where we would meet and interact on the different challenges faced by most women in the tech field and together come up with solutions to overcoming these challenges – thus the crowdmap."

She explains how the map works. "The crowdmap maps all women in tech initiatives in Africa. Basically one has to submit a report to do with women in tech in Africa. Submitting a report can be done via email or Twitter and through the submit report button/page on the crowdmap. Once submitted the

reports have to be reviewed and verified before appearing on the crowdmap."

Thus far, 48 women in tech organisations in Africa have been mapped representing 15 African countries including Algeria, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Chisenga Muyoya, cofounder of the Asikana Network, explained who the organisation chose to make use of a mapping initiative:

> 'We think that crowdmapping is the perfect way to make visible the wealth of women's talent and enterprise springing up all across Africa. We want Women in Tech organisations out there to put themselves on the map, make themselves visible and help us to build a supportive and strong community of African Women in Technology.' (Bateman, 2012)

Muyoya continues with what they hope to achieve in the long-term:

> 'The success of high-profile women in technology projects like mFarm, http://mfarm.co.ke/, iCow, http://www.icow.co.ke/, and the active role played by organisations such as AkiraChix, http://akirachix.com/, means that in Kenya the position of women in technology has begun to improve. By strengthening their sister organisations in other African countries and by enabling them to network effectively with each other Asikana intends to contribute to improving the position of Women in Tech across the African continent.'

As Regina Mtonga says in an interview with Kayleigh Bateman,

> 'This is a very positive story about Africa that directly contrasts the negative stereo-typing of Africa as a continent dominated by poverty, corruption and hopelessness. The technology sector is booming in Africa and we want women's participation to be recognised and valued. We hope the map will help to increase demonstrate the wealth of women's talent across the continent.'

When asked about what impact Asikana hopes to have on women beyond those working in the IT industry, Chisenga Muyoya responded by saying, "Albert Schweitzer said that 'example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing.' We believe that by highlighting the activities and achievements of successful women in tech, women all over Africa will begin to believe that they too can reach for the stars."

Apart from the crowdmap, they have begun training in mobile app development, web development and basic IT skills. In addition, they have

trained 25 women in video production and editing.[3] Asikana Network has also initiated an outreach programme to train young school children, equipping them with basic computer skills. This project currently reaches 1 000 kids in 21 disadvantaged schools.

As Mbewe points out, to be successful in the technology field, women have to work twice as hard and be extremely resilient:

> 'We formed the Asikana Network for women facing these challenges to come together to support one another. We aim to change perceptions and behavior towards women in ICT and to level the playing field for those young women who come behind us. Hopefully they will not have to face the same obstacles and we will help them to succeed'. (Bateman, 2012)

And so the Asikana Network grows, with talented and determined women pushing against huge obstacles as a collective of young African women "techies."

For more information on the Asikana Network follow @AsikanaNetwork on Twitter or visit https://www.facebook.com/AsikanaNetwork.

Endnotes

1. Available at <http://bongohive.co.zm/>

2. All three organisations are engaged in promoting women's empowerment and development through technology.

3. Their films on women and technology are available at <http://www.youtube.com/asikananetworkzambia>.

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Profile:
Digital visual activism: A profile of Inkanyiso

Kylie Thomas

> The first thing that every reader should think of when entering this platform is Queer Activism = Queer Media.
> (Inkanyiso, no date)

The Wordpress site, Inkanyiso, is an online space that documents issues relating to queer activism in South Africa. The site contains reports on events and exhibitions of interest to feminist and LGBTQI activists and also contains personal testimony, life stories and poetry.

Many of the contributors to the site are members of the non-profit organisation Inkanyiso, founded by South African photographer and visual activist Zanele Muholi in 2009. The organisation provides skills training for LGBTQI artists and writers in South Africa, providing a much-needed platform for their work. On the site the organisation's objectives are described in the following way:

> Inkanyiso's focus is on Visual Arts & Media Advocacy and visual literacy training. *We Produce. Educate. Disseminate* information… to many audiences especially those who are often marginalized or sensationalized by the mainstream media. (Inkanyiso, no date)

The site provides a way for people to be informed and to connect with others both inside and outside of the country. Based on the comments made by readers of the site, Inkanyiso provides a critical resource. In the South African context where there is widespread homophobia and where lesbian women are subject to systemic social and physical violence, digital spaces such as Inkanyiso provide a space of community and to some extent, of psychological refuge.

Activist work has always been a central component of Muholi's visual practice and the Inkanyiso site makes clear that Muholi's visual activism is by no means limited to photography or to the space of the gallery. Her photographic works have been exhibited in galleries across the world and she has achieved

international acclaim for her work. In 2013 the artist was made an Honorary Professor of the University of the Arts/Hochschule für Künste Bremen and was the recipient of both the Prince Claus and the Carnegie awards. Her work was also featured as part of the South African exhibition at the 55th Venice Biennale. Muholi understands the exhibition of her work in gallery spaces to be a form of visual activism. Her beautiful, carefully composed, black-and-white photographic portraits that assert the presence of lesbian women are often accompanied by works that present a fundamental challenge to the space of the gallery and to those viewing the exhibition. Such interventions include video-works documenting the funerals of black South African lesbians who have been raped and murdered, and works rendered in blood.

Her extensive portrait series, "Faces and Phases," is an excellent example of how the artist is fusing aesthetics and activism in her work. Muholi began the series in 2006 and it represents her ongoing attempt to create a visual archive of lesbian, and in particular, black lesbian lives. The Inkanyiso site contains profiles of several of the people that Muholi has photographed and in this way offers a space for the narratives of those she photographs to be widely circulated. One of the women whose portrait forms part of "Faces and Phases" and whose narrative accompanies her photograph on the site is freelance artist Oyama Mbopa. Her description of why she decided to work with Muholi conveys her understanding of how their collaboration constitutes visual activism:

> I've known Zanele since I was 16yrs old. She's one of those outspoken activists that had felt that enough was enough and if someone didn't take a stand and challenge our country's Constitution and fight for her human rights. When she told me about the Photo Project I was looking forward to the 2nd edition because I also felt that my picture would help assist other LGBTi people to know that they are not alone in this struggle. (Inkanyiso, 2013)

The Inkanyiso site offers a space for dialogic exchange on issues such as access to treatment for transgendered transition. Njabulo Masuku's post "Frustrations of a transgender man" expresses the challenges he has faced in seeking medical care and support as a transgendered person in South Africa (Masuku, 2013). This was followed by a response published four days later by Sbu Kheswa, an activist who works with the transgender organisation GenderDynamiX in Cape Town (Kheswa, 2013). These position pieces relating personal experiences were followed by a response by Transgender and Intersex Africa (TIA), an organisation campaigning for the rights of trans people in South Africa. The TIA piece

acknowledges the struggles of trans and intersex people in the country and at the same time uses the testimonies of Masuku and Kheswa to argue that:

> Trans* organisational funding is one of the biggest problems at the moment, most of us don't even know if our organisations will still exist in the coming year as funding is very difficult to come by. Adding the total number of staff members at TIA and Gender DynamiX equals to 9 people. We cannot expect 9 people to lead and take charge of a trans* movement that includes thousands of trans* people. We all need to own the movement and be the change we want to see in the world. (Transgender and Intersex Africa, 2013)

These exchanges provide an example of how the Inkanyiso site provides a space for critical debate on a wide range of issues affecting LGBTQI people in South Africa and beyond. Inkanyiso is a space of documentation and history-making that chronicles not only the ongoing violence faced by black lesbians in the country but also their dreams, struggles, achievements and hopes. Along with blog sites such as human rights activist Melanie Judge's "Queery";[1] The Forum for the Empowerment of Women website[2] and in particular the Few Tech Voices Project which aims to empower lesbian women to use new media to address gender-based violence; and Free Gender, the Khayelitsha-based black lesbian organisation,[3] Inkanyiso is playing a key role in fostering the production of queer media in South Africa.

Endnotes

1. Available at <http://queery.oia.co.za>.
2. Available at <http://www.few.org.za>.
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In Conversation: "I see Information and Communication Technologies as weapons for good and for bad." Selina Mudavanhu speaks with *Maggie Mapondera*, Program & Communications Officer, Just Associates Southern Africa (JASS SNA)

Selina Mudavanhu (SM): Thank you so much Maggie for taking time out to do this conversation for *Feminist Africa*. I think a good place to start would be with you introducing yourself. What things would you want us to know about you?

Maggie Mapondera (MM): Well, firstly my name [laughs]. I am Maggie Hazvinei Mapondera. I am a feminist activist and writer and I work for a feminist movement building support organisation called JASS or Just Associates. I am passionate about writing and I am passionate about storytelling.

SM: What kinds of stories do you like telling?

MM: I have always understood my writing as a way of excavating or uncovering that which is silenced and that which is hidden, erased. Even when I was a kid, it was about stories about the women in my family. Whether it was my mother or my aunts or my grandmother, it was about these women who obviously were flawed and who were going through very difficult experiences but who were also very strong and powerful in different ways ... ways the world might not necessarily consider as powerful, but I think that's part of the story of how women navigate patriarchy, carve out survival in places or contexts where it's not always easy. I was always interested in telling those sorts of stories and making up fantastical stories, asking them questions. My family still will say now that I was a "talkative brat" [SM and MM laugh] who constantly asked and asked and asked until people had to shut me up by taking me to crèche a year early. I've always been curious, and I have always wanted to create spaces for women to speak. At Yale University where I did my undergraduate, I started convening little workshops and spaces with women; marginalised women in the community, a small urban community [in New Haven, Connecticut]. There were marginalised women: homeless women, women who were struggling with substance abuse, recovering drug addicts,

many of them living on the fringes whether out of choice or necessity or both. And so with a friend of mine, we opened circles where we would do writing exercises together as therapy and a way of accessing creativity and fostering a form of community and solidarity. I think that served to strengthen what had been in my mind already. I used to just write stories, but that experience made me realise the power of storytelling as a way to forge links between very different women from very different backgrounds because we could recognise a sense of commonality among our experiences or in what we had been through ... and there was power in that. And that's only become more real in some of the work that JASS is doing and that I'm getting to be a part of.

SM: Interesting! I share your passion for telling stories. I am happiest telling stories using digital tools. Although I like telling stories, I have discovered that due to several reasons, I have not found the time to create as many digital stories as I would have liked. Do you find time to sit and write?

MM: Well, JASS has sort of taken over my life [SM and MM laugh]. And it's a good thing because I think JASS has helped me to crystallise my politics. The women that I come into contact with every day, by phone, by email or face-to-face have helped me to shape my politics in ways that I wouldn't have been able to in a different space. For JASS the bulk of the work that I do is writing, whether it is writing for the JASS blog, editing web articles, supporting and facilitating communications and knowledge generation with women activists in the countries where we work, producing reports, proposals, you name it. It is writing all the time. So different muscles are being used continuously. And I read voraciously. When I do get the time, I do my own writing. I am working on fiction right now.

SM: No pressure ... I am looking forward to reading your book one day. [MM smiles and nods]. I have noticed over the past few years that increasingly activists in general are using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance their activist endeavours. An example that immediately springs to mind is the ways activists in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region have made use of online spaces to organise. What are your thoughts on online organising?

MM: I think ICTs present huge opportunities for activists but they also pose several challenges. I like to think of ICTs as weapons for good and for bad. They've managed to open so many doors and shatter so many boundaries, especially for women and women activists, to give voice and disseminate

information in contexts where people are silenced. But there are limitations and pitfalls as with any strategy or tool.

SM: You introduce to the conversation a very interesting point ... ICTs as being simultaneously "good" and "bad." Would you mind elaborating further what you mean by that?

MM: Sure. In feminist movement building for example, women's voices are central. It is about amplifying women's voices and it is about creating spaces and platforms so that women can speak out and be heard. It is about facilitating platforms for the issues that sit close and deep in women's hearts to be heard and I think ICTs are fantastic and powerful tools to achieve that. We have mobile phones and we can see how powerful those can be as a mobilising tool, as a tool for social activism and public accountability. With Ushahidi in Kenya, for example, thousands used the platform to log eyewitness reports of violence during the 2007/2008 Kenyan post-election crisis. It's also really great to see the impact of just being able to use ICTs, whether it is a woman in her 20s or a woman in her 60s, being able to use a computer, being able to type out an email or to send a text message on the cell phone or whatever. It's an empowering act, it's transgressive – an act that allows women to claim a certain sense of agency. I don't think this can ever be underestimated.

On the flip side, ICTs can come with risks and challenges. I was looking at statistics the other day, the percentage of people on the African continent that are using the internet isn't that high. Within that small percentage, how many are women? And within that percentage of women who are using ICTs, what does that demographic look like? How is access and use of ICTs defined by class, race, or whatever the case may be? And obviously, if you do choose to use ICTs to speak out against oppression in some shape or form, that voice isn't going into a vacuum. People are listening and those people might not always want to hear what you have to say, they might even want to stop you from saying it.

Having said that, I think movement building and this kind of work continually surprises me. Although women's access to ICTs is limited in some contexts across the continent, you can't go in with the assumption that if you travel to Lusaka, for example, people won't have access to iPhones. Because you'll go and sit in a workshop full of extremely linked-in young women, all of them tap-tapping on their BlackBerries and connecting with

people all around the world. I think that's huge, the idea that a woman in rural Zimbabwe can communicate with another woman halfway around the world and find resonances across language, across the tangible and intangible borders that separate us. That's a powerful, powerful thing [SM interrupts … I agree]. It can be quite a scary thing too. But I think it's exciting in terms of organising and in terms of the reach that we can gain, and the kind of solidarity that we can build that completely surpasses anything that people might think we are capable of.

Back to the challenges … I always think the internet is a corporate-driven space [SM agrees … yes … yes]. If you are using Facebook or Google or whatever it is, you need to be mindful that first and foremost, those exist in a neoliberal paradigm and they are corporate-driven. We can use them as resources, we can use them as tools, we can use them as weapons to fight patriarchy and various oppressions, but we need to use them with our vision clear and understand strategically how we can take advantage of them.

SM: Would you mind sharing some of the strategic ways JASS has taken advantage of ICTs in its work?

MM: At JASS we use ICTs in a variety of ways. Over the years we have done several trainings with community-based women activists from across the region, mainly from Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Some of this training is about sharing tools – so cellphones for mobilisation, Facebook, email, how to get and stay connected. Another layer of our work has been about politicising the understanding and usage of these tools, really grappling with what it means for a woman in a particular context to do activist work using an ICT tool or tools.

But we have always been mindful of the fact that some women won't have access all the time in Lilongwe where airtime is expensive as it is to make a call, let alone connecting to the internet service provider. So it's also about assessing your context and your resources, and finding ways to harness tools that work best and strengthen organising. Having said that, women activists are using mobile phones in Malawi to organise around the issue of accessing alternative ARVs [antiretroviral drugs], and have been doing so long before JASS started to support and bolster their work.

As an organisation we are also very big on safety and security. How do we make sure that we, as women, know how to protect ourselves if we do choose to use ICT tools? And so we share skills and tools that help to think about

this more deliberately, the Association for Progressive Communications [APC] is one of those really great resource organisations that does work on that. As women go around recording 60 interviews a day with positive women in their communities who are advocating for better ARVs in their local hospitals and are uploading those interviews online so that they can share with the world exactly what's happening on the ground, we talk about the potential dangers. And there's a political consideration in there too, a personal one about how we share stories, how we protect ourselves as activists when we choose to tell our stories.

SM: I do appreciate your point about safety and security, but I was just wondering... in authoritarian contexts, wouldn't online spaces be "safer" for activists compared to offline spaces? I do understand that the authorities can hack into networks and so on... what are your thoughts?

MM: I was just in Zimbabwe for the elections, and watching that unfold was interesting. Seeing how it was reported not just on the news (local, regional and international) but online spaces, the blogosphere, the infamous Baba Jukwa – I think the online space presents a real opportunity in such contexts. There are dangers there too, depending on how tightly wound the fist of control over access to online spaces is, but definitely there are opportunities. And the anonymity that you can get in such a space, the fluidity and relative "freedom," can be effective tools.

SM: Still on working in restricted contexts... from your experiences... has e-space made a difference to organising?

MM: Online spaces have definitely made a difference to activist organising not just in the southern African region. We see this in Honduras and Mexico, across our work in Mesoamerica for example, where we work with women human rights defenders who are using ICTs to connect, to share information and to protect themselves. Women human rights defenders or WHRDs have built a powerful and broad network that allows them to respond quickly, critically and effectively in situations where activists are at risk.

SM: I always hear friends telling me of the latest "apps" on their smartphones or the latest gadgets; evidence of the ever-changing world of ICTs...

MM: And it's exciting! Women are using Whatsapp [a cross-platform instant-messaging subscription service for smartphones with over 325 million users worldwide] and so on, finding more accessible ways to communicate and use technology for less cost.

It can be worrying to think about the depth and breadth of information we're exchanging online, and the security concerns that come with that. How does one protect themselves? You have cases like a young woman who was filmed having sex with her partner without her full consent, only to have a video posted online sans her permission and huge backlash against her because of it. I think there's something to be said about the commodification of women's bodies, and how that takes on different forms online and the marketing of sex and sexuality for profit – what does bodily autonomy mean in an online space? What does consent mean? Choice?

SM: Those are really important questions you are raising. It is always sad that some people find forwarding rape videos entertaining. A colleague of mine told me about a campaign in APC called, "I don't forward violence." I really think that this is a really good campaign. [SM pauses]. Going back to the issue of the ever-changing technologies... do you as JASS feel the pressure to be playing "catch-up" all the time with the technology?

MM: I think it has to be quite balanced because at the heart of JASS's organising agenda and strategy is the idea that movement building happens on the ground, it starts with people and it sits in women's hearts. While ICTs are very, very useful and powerful tools particularly in our context, there needs to be a connection to actual people living in communities for sustained movement building. I think the use of ICTs is made more powerful by grounding it in the needs and realities of the people who are building the movement.

Grassroots movement building is made more powerful when you have ICTs and various platforms in which to amplify the issues that are being expressed by people. At the same time I think ICTs are made more powerful when they are connected to the heart of what's going on in people's lives. We can see that clearly in cases like the Arab Spring, with millions of people mobilising on the street and the ways in which ICTs spread the word so to speak. But we have to acknowledge the years and years of deep, grounded organising that people had been doing at the community level. ICTs may have been a "spark" for revolution in some cases but there wouldn't be any revolution without a movement on the ground.

SM: Tja... it is not always easy to clearly say if it was ICTs that made a campaign successful or if there were other factors...

MM: I think there is room for different kinds of organising. There are so

many issues and there are so many levels on which we need to be tackling issues. It is understandable and I don't want this to come across as if I am discounting organising that happens predominately online because at the end of the day, it is all about issues that are sitting very much in women's bodies and women's hearts and women's minds. And the world is changing, so who knows what things will look like, even tomorrow.

SM: I agree. Even when a campaign mainly takes place online, it is not always easy to plot out the path that the campaign took to make it successful because many people in disparate locations might be involved in the campaign. Sometimes activists work together with other activists, but sometimes they organise separately. I remember that at one time on the GWS Africa listserve [a listserve, also known as a mailing list hosted by the African Gender Institute]; feminists were incensed by an organisation in the West that was collecting used undies for Africa as their contribution to "stop rape in Africa." The assumption was that rape was common in Africa because most women didn't have undies. Many activists wrote to the organisation, some wrote articles that were published on online news sites; there was a lot that happened. In addition to discussing what was problematic about the undies for Africa initiative, there was a discussion on the listener that was triggered by one activist who decided to "document" what had happened in the campaign. This attempt at documentation came under fire because it tried to plot a linear path in which a few people were recognised as having been key in protesting. One activist highlighted the dangers associated with a single story and the fact that there were multiple and concurrent organising that took place online in relation to undies for Africa.

While the above issue raises challenges associated with organising online, some donors still insist on organisations including in their reports the numbers of people that took part in a campaign as well as the numbers of people who were impacted. Has this been an issue for you?

MM: JASS works very hard to ensure buy-in from the communities with whom we work. That doesn't happen in a day, or even a month. In the case of Malawi, we have been working with a group of HIV-positive women activists for nearly five years, women leaders who hold an analysis of their lives, their context that's more nuanced than anything you'll find anywhere else. These women *know* what they need, they know the issues, they have distinctly feminist politics even if they might never call themselves "feminist." I think

it's important if you're going to do any sort of campaign, to work within the communities and support communities in giving voice to the issues they care deeply about.

The Malawian activist leaders are campaigning for better ARVs and healthcare. Prior to July this year, the majority of the country only had access to ARVs that contain a drug called Sustained, which comes with a lot of side effects – some painful, some visible and irreversible such as dystrophy. These side effects are affecting women's daily lives, their own vision of themselves, and many women experience stigma in their communities or the workplace due to forced disclosure because of the visible side effects and how they are interpreted. One chief denied positive women access to land and food, deeming them, "already dead" and therefore undeserving of the right to life. The access to alternative ART is an issue that starts with women's bodies and resonates with every area of their lives – it's not just about antiviral therapy, it's also about women having adequate food, access to land and other resources to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. So that's how the "Our Bodies, Our Lives" campaign for better ARVs was born.

I think there are lessons to draw from that for any sort of campaign effort, particularly in a context where there isn't extensive access to online organising, where online organising isn't really a factor at the local or even national level.

SM: Moving beyond the ways JASS has used ICTs... what is your general assessment in terms of how other NGOs (especially in southern Africa) are using Its in their work... what is your general impression on use of Its in women's organisations?

MM: I think people are excited and rightly so. The one thing we just have to remember is to have a critical analysis of the tools, why are we using them, why are we using this strategy, what does it mean for our political understanding of the work we do, is it safe and if not, what strategies can we use to be as secure as possible and still do the work? And also, if we are in the project of building movements, how can we use technology and communications to bolster that work?

SM: On one level, I do agree with you that there is so much excitement around the use of ITs for activism. I however, also think that the full potential of ICTs is yet to be explored by women's organisations and activists alike. When I look at Twitter for example, I only see a handful of organisations and activists using it.

Maybe it is just a case of Twitter not working for them... I don't know.

My other comment is that... most NGO-based projects in which ICTs are prioritised are linked to donor money. Given the reduction of donor funding towards women's organisations particularly in South Africa, I am a little concerned about the life of those projects in which activists make use of ITs. Having said that, I also think that there is a lot of organic use of Its by individuals. In South Africa for example, young people are using Mxit [a social-networking platform] and in most African countries people are using Facebook to connect with their friends and family.

MM: That's always the challenge, isn't it? How to think beyond donor funding. I would definitely agree with you, we haven't even begun to tap into the full potential of ICTs as women's organisations, as activists, as women and the reasons for that are complex and layered given the contexts in which we work and our needs. But I am hopeful and I guess all we can say is: "Watch this space to see where we go next...."

In Conversation: Jennifer Radloff and *Jan Moolman* on technology-related violence against women

Jan Moolman is a feminist editor, writer, trainer and activist with extensive experience in the South and southern African women's rights sector. Her entry point into women's rights has been through media – she is a former editor of *Agenda*, South Africa's longest-surviving feminist journal; newspaper columnist; and contributor to a number of publications dealing with women's rights issues. Previously, Jan guest edited an *Agenda* journal edition on technology with a team from Women'sNet, where she worked as the Media and Information Manager. Women'sNet is a southern African organisation that promotes the strategic use of ICTs amongst women, girls and marginalised groups for social action. Through her work at the Southern African NGO Network (SANGONeT), Jan conducted training and capacity building for South African NGOs in the use of social media to deepen and support their work and managed an information portal. Jan works in the Women's Networking and Support Programme as the Women's Rights Project Coordinator where her work focuses on the intersection of violence against women and technology. Jan is also a digital storytelling trainer and is currently working towards a Masters in Media Studies.

JR: Tell me a bit about why the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) started its work with technology-related violence against women (VAW).

JM: APC's work with technology-related VAW started in 2005 before I had joined APC. APC's interest in this work was sparked when we began to hear stories from our women members and partners about misogynistic and violent, usually sexually violent, threats that were happening to them. APC has a global membership, mostly based in the global South and the stories that were being reported were coming from various regions. The reports included threatening SMSs from blocked and unidentifiable numbers, women being tracked and the harassers seeming to know where they are and what they are doing. So this work started with stories, as most things happen,

and we began to investigate more and uncover ways in which violence was manifesting through technology platforms and tools.

As access to broadband increased and the cost of access decreased and more women were getting online, the more stories we heard and the stories began to have more detail and texture to them. A large number of the cases related to blackmail and tracking, mostly via mobile platforms but increasingly misogynistic and violent threats were being made towards women bloggers, usually anonymously. APC started putting together the experiences of women and the different technologies being used. It was not only threats made via technology but also how men were controlling and abusing women through women owning for example mobile phones. For example, in Uganda in December 2008, there were two reports of men who murdered their wives after accusing the women of receiving love SMSs. APC began to document these stories and to start theorising around this in order to better understand these trends. Two issue papers were written through this theorising and are very useful pieces of work.

Initially what we found both interesting and disturbing was (and still is!) the paternalistic development theory related to ICTs for development that said if you provide women with access to technology "they" are automatically empowered. Apart from this being a gender-blind approach, there was no connection or acknowledgement to the threats to women's online safety and security and the growth in technology-related VAW. We also began to hear stories of women being abused because they had access to or ownership of technology. As related in the Uganda story, the mere fact that women had a cell phone could put her at risk. This flew in the face of the theory that ownership of technology represents power and access to a whole range of information she never had before. We began to trouble existing theories around technology as **only** empowering for women. Whilst our work absolutely acknowledges that access to technology is critical for engaged citizenship, access to communication, information and a range of rights for women and men, women were at particular risk and exposed to a range of forms of violence. The internet and technology clearly creates so many opportunities for women and women's rights and also presents a particular kind of experience for women using technology. People started using language about technology like it is "two sides of the same coin" or technology-related VAW being "the dark side of the internet." We saw this as problematic as some women were

withdrawing from the potentials of technology and the consequence of that is to withdraw from immense opportunities that the internet and mobile phones have for advancing women rights. When we attended the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women earlier this year, we prepared a statement which is useful to reference here:

> These technology related forms of violence against women cause psychological and emotional harm, reinforce prejudice, damage reputation, cause economic loss and pose barriers to participation in public life. Reporting and responses of these violations are generally limited and the harm and abuse are poorly understood. (Association for Progressive Communications, 2013)

JR: So what were some of the issues you've uncovered as you began to explore technology-related VAW?

JM: We began to acknowledge that the internet has some unique characteristics that add to this complexity in a context of women's rights and access. Using language of the "dark side and the good side" is simplistic and unsophisticated. It is complicated. We talk about VAW in a context of technology and these conversations happen in a world where VAW is a huge problem and one of the biggest challenges and concerns around the world. We cannot separate VAW and technology as VAW happens in context of power, is often normalised and happens with impunity. These three things continue online. So we realised that it is not useful to have online and offline comparison as it could have consequence of relegating technology-related VAW as "not so important." The approach and idea that VAW happening online is "not that serious" is one of the reasons why technology-related VAW is so rampant. It is seen as not important or not as serious as "offline" VAW. We know that the characteristics of the harm caused by these online violations are serious and valid and we should not make comparisons as we then take seriousness out of it. The violence, harm and the consequences for women is similar and as damaging and dangerous. But the characteristics of the internet add layers of complexity to the debates. First is the notion of private and public which is at the very core of feminist struggles in Africa and everywhere. What constitutes private and public? On the one hand we are in an era where so much is public. We see women (and men) "performing" on Facebook for example in a public way often representing and reflecting what we perform in private. So for example,

taking the idea of "selfies," meaning a preoccupation of taking and publishing pictures of ourselves. There is much critique around why this is (or is not) a problem. Young people are not using the internet necessarily for activism but taking and publishing photos of themselves thus creating a sense of individualism. So the response is that what the internet does in terms of young people is problematic. Young people are saying "Look at how amazing I am" and representing how they want to be seen.

But this is not the only thing that is happening. Taking selfies is not only narcissism but can be a powerful act of resistance. For example, someone who I know, a black African feminist, took a "selfie" of herself naked using her body to cover parts of herself that she did not want to show. The act of taking the photo and sharing was an act of absolute resistance on a continent where women are repeatedly told that we should be ashamed of our bodies. Cover yourself if you are a woman and this is how you should be. The act of the "selfie" becomes an act of resistance. This is the nuance that the internet enables and why the internet should be cared for and it is why we should protect it and our right to perform, with caution as with any new thing.

Again in Africa young girls are taking photos of themselves, with their breasts exposed, posing seductively and sending to friends. A positive performance of sexuality of young people. The internet has given us the power and possibility to represent ourselves. This is driven from an idea of redistributing power from concentrated points to a multiplicity of points. This becomes more powerful when we recognise where the internet came from and why it happened in the first place. Women are using the internet from multiple places, using a range of technologies and re-representing themselves in ways that were unimagined before. Women are so used to images given to us by people who have power and now many women have access to technology to represent themselves that are different from the mainstream. The internet enables young people to play with their sexual identities often in ways which they cannot do or be offline. It is often too dangerous or too difficult. We can represent ourselves.

My colleague jac SM Kee speaks of the body being material, discursive and digitised. She speaks of the body that goes beyond the physical and how representations of ourselves are already digitised e.g. biometric cards. Digitisation of the body makes the body more real. When we talk of harm via the internet, we hear people say "she wasn't really hurt," even if the abusers

say they will rape her, people interpret this as "she wasn't really raped." If we understand that our digitised body is still part of us, then we can begin to understand the type of harm that is caused.

JR: How has APC responded to all these cases, debates and dialogues around this issue?

JM: Well, one of our first responses was to create a global campaign and platform called Take Back the Tech. We started this in 2006 wanting to create a space where women, organisations and networks could write, report, share, create and engage across countries and regions, on their experiences of VAW and ICTs. So we chose the dates of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence and created daily actions where people could engage, contribute and at the same time learn how to use ICTs. So for example, one action was for people to draw, paint or photograph how they would use technology to combat VAW and then upload that image or image and text to the platform. Some beautiful images and dreams were uploaded. Another was to create radio spots on VAW and ICTs to play on community radio stations to raise awareness of the issues. The campaign aggregates activities of organisations in many languages so there is a central space to share and learn. But we also wanted this to be a way of women and girls to use ICTs to fight and resist online VAW. The campaign has been hugely successful and now includes a map where incidents of online VAW can be reported.

From 2009 to 2011, we worked with partners from eight countries in a project which researched how technology is being used to perpetuate violence against women. We learnt so much from this and were able to develop policy advocacy strategies, award small grants to enable local innovation around the issues, built the capacity of women's groups to both combat online VAW and use technology strategically in their activism. This project lead to further funding for our End Violence: Women's rights and safety online where we are (among other activities), gathering further evidence from seven countries, building women's capacity to be safe online and build the leadership and institutional capacity of women to influence the telecommunications industry.

JR: Why should feminists be concerned about technology-related VAW? How does it impact our rights, freedoms and activisms?

JM: Our starting point in relation to our work as feminists, including our work in technology-related VAW, is that ICTs are not gender neutral but are produced, used and distributed in a context of unequal power relations. We cannot get away

from the deep gender divide of who has and who does not have access to ICTs. For marginalised groups who have access, it gives us the possibilities to construct, deconstruct and reconfigure our own identities and the structures within which they live. By structures, 1 mean for example the government and media. At same time ICTs enable new forms of discrimination, violence and exclusion. Online misogyny and abusive comments is one form of technology-related VAW that has received a lot of focus and there is a publicness about it and increasingly is being confronted by different kinds of people and the responses have been interesting. It show us the slipperiness of it. For example, one of the things the internet allows us to do is to be anonymous. It is a powerful notion, especially for people who are at risk. It gives us safety in some way. It is also critically important as it allows women in abusive relationships to get help anonymously and to search for information without revealing their identity. In online chatrooms and special focus groups, women can ask a question they would never ordinarily ask. This inserts a sense of power for people who have little power. And as feminists, we know how important this is. We see how power circulates and how anonymity is an important tactic in that regard. You can ask a question of a president for example if you are anonymous, or if you are on a forum where there is a doctor you can ask intimate questions which you may be too afraid to ask as "yourself." This shows us why anonymity on the internet must be preserved and respected.

So as feminists, we need to acknowledge and also to explore the complexity of the internet in relation to the debates around anonymity. At the same time as it gives power to survivors, it is used by abusers. If we look at the Twitter abuse case, Anita etc. there have been calls to say we need to know the identities of these abusive people to call them to book. But if we do this to everybody else, then what happens when no one has anonymity. The power it gives to the marginal, is taken away again. So we need to be careful, as feminists engaged with the internet, what we call for. Anonymity also allows a particular kind of organising and solidarity and there is a flattening out of things. A counter argument could be the Syrian example of a white man, Tom MacMaster, pretending to be a lesbian Muslim woman, Amina Abdallah Arraf al Omari. The blog purportedly by "Amina's" cousin claimed that Amina had been abducted on 6 June 2011 which sparked a huge outcry by activists. But it was all a hoax (Wikipedia, 2013). Our relationship to privacy and by extension our security, has been challenged by the internet.

The privacy of our data and our information that we share about ourselves online is being used by private companies to market products. We ordinarily are reasonably careful about what kind of information we share publicly when we fill in a paper form. We think about what does that giving up of responsibility and private detail mean when we tick boxes on forms. Online and in particular, with social media, we tend to agree to terms and conditions that we do not read. We usually read every word of a paper form but there is a glazing over of the consequences when we are online. It is out there but it is not out there, it is who you are.

The research and experience of the APC's Women's Rights Programme we integrate into our advocacy strategy which is crucial if we are going to see changes in policy and in law. Two forums in which we have consistently engaged in and raised issues of technology-related VAW and sexuality and the internet are the Internet Governance Forum and the UN Commission on the Status of Women. We know that advocacy around these issues are critical. One recent success of the advocacy of activists is the South African anti-harassment law which now enables people to take out restraining orders against people who harass them via electronic means (SouthAfrica.info, 2013).

Earlier this year, we presented a statement to the 57th Commission on the Status of Women and this is how we explained and described the characteristics of the risks of women's participation online which I think are important points to describe here. But again with the caveat that these points are complex and need engagement and debate by feminists to make sure that we are clear about what we are calling for in any policy changes.

Anonymity: Widespread usage of digital technology has increased the potential for an abuser to remain anonymous. An intimate partner, acquaintance, work colleague or stranger can commit abuses without physically entering public spaces.

Automation: The automation enabled by ICTs allows abusers to check their partners' mobile phones for SMSs, monitor social networking activity, check their browser history and log into their personal accounts with little effort in ways that do not require any special knowledge or skills.

Action at a distance: ICTs permit sexual harassers to send abusive messages from anywhere in the world to anywhere in the world. This makes it more difficult for a survivor to identify and take action against an abuser. An example of this are cases where abusers morph the faces of women onto pornographic

images and post them online with personal information. This violation is a result of multiple actions done at a distance without contact with the victim.

Affordability: New ICTs have also significantly reduced the difficulty and cost of production and propagation of information. In particular, Web 2.053 is a platform that supports interactive information sharing, user-generated content, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Anyone with a mobile phone can take and upload images or videos. One-to-many and many-to-many distribution through one click in an email application, Facebook or YouTube allow the images to be replicated thousands of times at no cost.

Propagation: In cyberspace settings, abuse can happen every day, all year round. The internet "records everything and forgets nothing." The continuous traffic of harassing text and images makes it hard if not impossible to track down and stop further circulation. Moreover, the propagation of texts and images re-victimises women. It can follow victims/survivors everywhere – at home, at work and at school, whenever their computer or mobile phone is turned on, without relief and often without recourse.

JR: Tell us about some of the cases of technology-related violence in Africa and the debates and issues framing these cases.

JM: An organisation we work with in the Democratic Republic of Congo is a group of young feminists, many of whom are journalists. They tell about how one of the first things that happens in situations of war is that communication channels are closed down. This means that organisations can't ask for global solidarity which increases the chances of things happening with impunity. SMS services, the cheapest way for women to mobilise and reach constituencies, often in remote areas, are cut. The media programmes made in the capital of Kinshasa to raise public awareness against violence against women were cut off, not reaching women who were at risk. This strategy was used recently by the M23 rebels when they took the city of Goma. The first thing they did was to cut all radio signals emitting from the capital Kinshasa.

The experience of Women Human Rights Defenders has revealed how state and non-state actors use technology to de-legitimise and spread false rumours about women leaders. This is done through uploading images out of context of women leaders for example in a bathing costume on the beach which, given the social norms of a particular culture, would call into question the leadership of women. So questions around sexuality are still used, now as "digital strategies," to denigrate and harass women leaders.

A particularly pernicious form of technology-related VAW are viral rape videos. There have been many cases reported in South Africa. Most recently the case of a group of men who gang-raped a mentally challenged teenager and distributed the rape via mobile phones. Given the nature of technology and what is known as a digital footprint (basically the trail one leaves when using the digital environment), once a video has been sent from one mobile phone to another or uploaded to the internet, the control of what happens to the video, who views it, sends it on, is forever lost. In rape cases there is continued trauma and secondary victimisation experienced through the first telling of the rape, reporting to the police, the judicial system etc. With rape videos which go viral, the victimisation goes on for perpetuity and is forwarded, shared and the survivor never knows if the last copy has been taken down or if it may still be stored on someone's physical digital device and appear again in the future.

The positive reasons that it is now possible for anyone to be a filmmaker or distributor, is precisely because of the opportunities that technology provides, which again upfronts the complexities, opportunities and potential dangers of technology.

Something about the ubiquity of ICTs means that as feminists they are an important site of both struggle and opportunity. That they are a reflection of the power relations and inequalities is itself reason enough for us to pay attention to the debates and decisions about privacy, security and surveillance which are going on without us and which are framed in a discourse of gender neutrality which masks women's specific experiences. However we might feel about ICTs, the fact is that they change the world and how we see ourselves in it.

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In Conversation: In conversation with *Blessol Gathoni* of the Utata Collective in Kenya. Interviewed by Hakima Abbas, November 2012

HA: You started off doing studies in computer science in Kenya. What drew you to organising work and the development of your political consciousness?
BG: I studied Information Communication Technology (ICT) to earn a living. I managed to secure a job as an ICT specialist in a corporate company but was fired after the company read articles I had posted on the internet about being queer. I began getting involved with formal/structural social justice activism and organising in response to the personal injustices that I experienced and those of other lesbian women where I grew up and lived.

For the past five years, I have been involved in organising around issues of class and economic oppression within my community and trying to make links to broader struggles in Kenya. I have participated and facilitated human rights, sexual and gender diversity advocacy trainings and spaces. I come from the struggles at the grassroots and that is where I focus my work. I am concerned with acquiring an in-depth understanding of the extent to which class determines the capacity one has to exercise one's freedoms and sexualities.

My personal experiences of what it means to be African, woman, queer and being brought up in an economically marginalised community in Kenya defines and informs much of my thinking. However, the political definitions and concepts came to reinforce my actions much later with the learning and critical consciousness I was exposed to through my activism. Since then, I have been able to define my politics around the understanding and deconstructing of the multiple levels of oppression we have to endure from owning these identities in the structures and societies that continue to uphold white supremacy, patriarchy, sexism, heterosexuality and classism.

My understanding of the intersectionality of social, cultural, political and economic oppressions, across the issues of minority groups, such as LGBTIQ persons, women, sex workers, children, persons living with disabilities,

influences the discourses in my work. For instance, the latest initiative that I have been involved in was born out of an alliance with a comrade from Disability Focus Africa during the Fahamu Pan-African Fellowship Programme. The project on disabilities and sexualities was initially aimed at identifying and mapping the issues of persons with disabilities that identified as LGBTIQ in Kenya for advocacy and action. The project is ongoing and is now focused more broadly on sexualities in relation to PWDs.

HA: How do you feel your African Queer Feminist politics have informed your tech-activism?

BG: These politics have informed what I want to be involved in, when it comes to technology, particularly Information Technology. It has also informed how much technology I use in my offline activism since I have mostly worked in economically oppressed communities where technology is not a huge contributor to organising.

My politics have also shaped the spaces I choose to publish my work in or to contribute to. These are mostly social justice networks and medias that provide platforms to deconstruct the westernisation and commodification of our queer struggles. I am active in various mediums, contributing to discussions, articles, conversations, blogs and listserves using my African Queer Feminist politics.

HA: In 2011, you developed the Watetezi-haki platform with Alan Muhaari (currently at UHAI), could you tell me about the origins of the platform, its purpose and where you are with it now?

BG: The Watetezi-haki platform was started during a Movement Building Boot Camp (MBBC) organised by Fahamu and UHAI with a group of LGBTIQ grassroots activists from Eastern Africa. Many violations that happen in the "streets" against sex workers and LGBTIQ persons go undocumented and unreported. Most activists have to work on word-of-mouth information to respond to and assess situations, which hasn't always been reliable nor has it enabled rapid response.

After a session during the MBBC on tech in activism lead by Infonet, we felt that Ushahidi, the open-source web platform that allows people all over the world to create their own platforms to suit their community needs, would provide us with the space, both online and offline, to report, map and create an alerting system for efficiency in our activism and reporting.

With Watetezi-haki, activists would be able to know what measures to

take after an incident or what help to deploy once an attack occurs. The platform is currently set up and we are looking for funding to facilitate and run the process of domesticating and entrenching it as a security tool amongst LGBTIQ and sex-worker communities in Kenya.

HA: What do you see as the impact and prospects for using technology in Queer African feminist organising and action?

BG: Technology is a huge asset to bringing like-minded activists together, unite concepts, ideologies and struggles or even create spaces to air critical African Queer feminist perspectives. On the other hand, I believe technology privileges structured, NGO-ised, middle-class forms of activism and leaves out a big chunk of grassroots ideologies, concepts, ideas and people since most grassroots activists in Africa have little or no access to technology. One of the biggest challenges is connecting online and offline activism. A lot of offline activism is groundwork that needs tools, information, connections, funding and support that is mostly accessible online.

HA: How could the challenges of access be overcome for strengthened use of technology in grassroots Queer African feminist organising?

BG: Grassroots forms of organising, concepts, inventions, ideas, need to be included in future development and use of technology. This could be done by advancing the use of mobile phone technology as a means of activism, because it is often more accessible to people than other forms of technology. This includes, for example, examining how to use mobile phones for community organising and resource mobilisation. Or by facilitating innovative grassroots approaches that use technology, for example the recent development of a mapping manual in Kibera (http://www.mapkibera.org/blog/2010/01/12/some-notes-on-map-kibera-mapping/) that could be used in identifying risk areas for queer community organising. And most importantly, we need to develop and utilise technology with the purpose of advancing security in our communities, creating efficient response systems and maximising on upcoming innovations.

HA: If people would like to know more about Watetezi-haki and/or contribute to the initiative, how can they do so?

BG: For more on Watetezi-haki visit: https://watetezihaki.crowdmap.com/. Or email us on: watetezi2011@gmail.com

In Conversation: Jane Bennett talks with *Sally Shackleton*, director of Sweat (Sex Workers' Education and Advocacy Taskteam, Cape Town) about her work with Women'sNet, the first feminist e-technology hub in South Africa

JB: I was trying to think the other day about when I first began to understand what the World Wide Web was maybe about 10 years ago no maybe a bit longer 15 (mmm) I can remember the office I was in, and I can remember Jenny [Radloff] saying, "There are things called search engines, Jane," [both laugh], "here they are! Yahoo, …" [laughs]

SS: Remember when Yahoo was the major…. things have transformed quite a bit; I remember when I was at POWA, I had the email account for the organisation, so I ran the research centre, and that's what we also used to do, we did press-clippings, we cut things out of newspaper and stuck them onto pages [both laugh] for people to refer to.

JB: And that was when, that was in the '90s?

SS: Ja, that was in the '90s, the early '90s, and the Resource Centre was only established in about '95, and we had only one email address for the whole organisation, and you printed out the email and got it to the right person, and I also remember when the possibility of communicating with someone who needed assistance or who was someone helping someone changed, that was pretty incredible, it was possible to communicate really fast with information, and cell phones also changed all that.

JB: Yes!

SS: We used to work with a pager. (JB: Yes! I remember working with Rape Crisis, we also had pagers); we had the pager in a little suitcase which had a reference list in it, and a file so you could give people a number of a shelter, or whatever they needed, and you had to be near a landline, so if you were on duty, you had to stay home all the time (JB: and you couldn't take your pager out, say, into a restaurant, because you were afraid you might not be able to hear it, there was no technology that said: hey! Someone's trying to get you!)

SS: It was quite an elitist thing those pagers [JB laughs]; I always felt quite sophisticated when I was carrying mine (JB: I was terrified of mine); I do

remember the little heartbeat when you heard it, and you would think, is there a quiet place, or I used to live in a cottage outside the house, and I used to have to creep in so I wouldn't wake everyone up, so I could make the phone call, and sit in the passage, with someone at 3.00 in the morning.

JB: And all those calls which were at 3.00 in the morning! I remember sitting with my back to the wall. And you were there for a couple of hours. (SS: [laughs...] and your ear got all warm and sticky [both laugh] JB: and you were terrified to move the phone from one ear to the other in case you missed something... so you started at POWA, but then, when... because Women'sNet started in the mid-'90s, '97?

SS: Ja, I was peripherally involved with Women'sNet then, because Women'sNet initially aimed to be a kind of clearinghouse for information (JB: that's right, that's right; I remember the first banner, with the sun); ja, wasn't that great? It was the sun, bright yellow; so because I was the information officer and managed the resource centre at POWA, I was interested in the establishment of a women's clearinghouse for information. And of course organisations then didn't have websites, their own websites, so they needed a space to send information to, information that could become part of the World Wide Web, and be available to others. And they could advertise their services, put up their "lessons learned" for others to read and think about...

JB: And my memory is, we were still in that space where there was a tremendous amount of not simply goodwill but absolute commitment to the new government, and there was a sense that if people were working on issues of women's rights and gender equality (SS: ja, ja), there needed to be hubs for information. I remember... do you remember Michelle Friedman and Phelisa Nkomo, and later Sisonke [Msimang], doing a fantastic job running a programme on Gender and Organisational Development and the idea was to have a radical engagement with government on setting up policies around employment equity and gender justice, gender and race... (SS: you didn't need to convince anyone. And now it's completely different. Now we have to work on transformation in those spaces), yes.

SS: Whereas then we thought people were transformed, the whole government was "transformed," and what was needed was information and opportunities to connect and spaces to work things, to collaborate (JB: and Women'sNet was right in the centre), and Women'sNet was a real hub. (JB: So Women'sNet was you and...?)

SS: When I joined Women'sNet, it was Sonja Boesak and Rebecca Holmes and Women'sNet was based in SANGONET. So when Natasha Primo joined us as Coordinator, we decided to separate from them and become an independent organisation which was a difficult process, it always is when baby organisations leave the nest of being hosted by another organisation. But how it started for me, really was that I joined Women'sNet on a project, putting online a manual that the Foundation for Human Rights had developed called *Making Women's Rights Real* and I coordinated that, I loved that manual, it was so nice to be part of a product, something concrete, and my job was to put that online, I had to think about how it the logic of that could unfold, how it should look online, I dreamed in HTML.

JB: How did you learn HTML? Did you teach yourself?

SS: Ja... (JB: Wow) Everyone at Women'sNet did that! Because everyone at Women'sNet was a gender activist. We were not ICT people; what we had to do was have a real affinity for the work of creating spaces for women to collaborate together. So we just had to learn the technology as a tool to be able to do that, not to engage with it just for its own sake. It was the tool we needed to get the job done. But we also had insight into what it would mean for individual organisations to do the same thing; we knew that getting used to e-communication was a difficult task and that it took up a lot of time, that it required a certain kind of thinking and that it required help, and that you needed to collaborate in order to put things into the WWW that worked. And we also had insight into how gender affected your ability to take up the technology, that it was harder if you were a woman to get access, to get the skills. So I think that that was made the difference at Women'sNet: we had insight into what it was like to learn from the ground up, from scratch, how to use the thing. And what that thing meant, how it affected your work. So I became the Information Coordinator after I worked on the manual, I think we called it the A-Z of Women's Rights, and Jenny Radloff was on the board as were a whole lot of other interesting people and we got to work to work with APC [the Association of Progressive Communicators]. And that was important for thinking through the fact that the WWW was global; we had to learn to think "globally."

JB: And learn how to imagine the "global" as a horizon. Because it is almost unimaginable. It's about huge pockets of privileged "knowing" and massive "emptinesses" where people's experience is lived, and about multilingualism, and policies about the ownership of cyberspace...

SS: Yes, and that gave us, working with APC, immense opportunities to work with different people across the world who were facing exactly those challenges – about privileged access, and who owns what – and we were sharing those challenges.

JB: And Women'sNet always had a very strong commitment to maximising the use of e-space around challenging violence against women, yes? It's been one of its core activisms – I know there has been a range of themes around which projects were organised – the Rights one for sure, and information about Sexual Health – but the ways in which Women'sNet thought through the meaning of violence against women on the ground, and the potential for violence against women in cyberspace, while still working **for** the value of ICTs as part of feminist work are powerful; I'm thinking of the Take Back the Tech! campaign…

SS: Ja, I think that coming from POWA, it was easy to see how Women'sNet could be part of a real response to violence against women, and it was also possible to Women'sNet to help coordinate engagement with, say, a particular piece of legislation, there was a lot of legal reform work going on in the late 90s (JB: the Domestic Violence Act; SS: the Termination of Pregnancy Act). But the other interesting thing which happened was that, yes you could send out information and so on by email, but email also became a way someone could write and reach out for help. So if you were experiencing abuse, or you had a family member in that situation, you could look online and contact someone; you could find someone to help you, with legal advice. And what informally happened was that I would start replying to some of those emails, and I started to think about both the intimacy and the distance which email gives you. You can write a really intimate letter to someone in the hope that they would respond to you, and you get an answer that was in fact giving you a sense of being heard, and you didn't have to present yourself, your actual body, and your history, and all the baggage that you bring into a space. (JB: and you didn't have to deal with the mobility thing – the how do I get there? How do you get there? SS: Yes)

So, new meanings for safety, and new meanings for finding support and connection. And then, that contradiction arises – there is a lot of fear about young women's access to the internet, even fearmongering, in schools or homes, about limiting girls' and young women's access to the internet for fear that they will come across someone who will abuse them. So just like violence

against women which limits our ability to walk safely about the community, or to be alone, or to occupy public space, the same thing happens in e-space. Women's freedoms are curtailed by people who would close off spaces to them, either through policy – or through practice, harassing women online, the invasion of privacy, just like it happens on the streets in some ways.

JB: And internalised, too… institutionalised. So it happens in families where parents are wary about girls' access to the internet, or schools monitoring what is seen when. And the corollary – schools bewildered by what to do, in policy terms, around cyberbullies….

SS: And some of that is about is about older generations just not knowing technologies and their capacities in the same way as their daughters, sons, nieces and nephews. There's a lot of fear because they are just not in control of the technology, they just don't really understand it, they don't know how their children manage to get the information they do [both laugh]. There is a lot of control exercised over young people, and I think that is not the right way to go; we need to empower, rather than disempower younger people. We need to enable their access to information and their ability to absorb, be assertive. If my daughter or niece was harassed or yelled at on the street, I would want her to be strong enough to have a response, to yell right back, and to seek help if she needed it in that situation. I want want her to stand her ground, and I would want her to be able to do the same online, to activate a response, to join others in response, I love the Holler Back! Online. I love the way young women find to defy, to have a little revolution when they need to, and to find one another, it's really cool.

JB: And Women'sNet itself, it changed? It stopped being a clearinghouse, I would say, round about the 2000s – this is just someone looking in from the outside, as a beneficiary of the work – it stopped being a repository, about holding documents. It became more about campaigns….

SS: Ja, it became a space for initiating and pushing and encouraging people to become interactive, and I think the power of information became more and more sharply focused. And the difference between those who had access to it got wider, it seems, and it was so clear how technology could facilitate a change in that. So if a new piece of legislation was being discussed, or a particular process around women's rights was in play, technology could be used to get people together to build discussion and insight and strategy. It wasn't just that you got to read the document, but that it was possible to

voice an opinion, to suggest a change and strengthen it. You could share what you thought of it and create spaces in which in both a live and an online way you could organise. And we had different processes for that – I think it was in 2004 we started the Digital Stories processes, and that was an opportunity to have voices that were marginalised to take digital shape. We could debunk the myth of the voiceless; I think it's a really ridiculous myth... So the Digital Stories space was a really important innovation (JB: and it also debunked the idea that only sophisticated e-literate people could create a digital, visual, clip of information)... And it was a powerful training tool. We had done trainings before that on, perhaps, how to write your CV, or "the magical thing that email is" but I have never seen people as assertive with technology as when they worked with digital stories. It was really just about the machine being a tool – "I need to tell something really important"; "my voice – that's important." So it was older women, and marginalized women, saying, "Teach me how to do it so it looks like that! That is how I want it to look." And there was also something magical about seeing yourself reflected back at you that way – a different relationship to mirroring, and ownership. And there was so little of that, at that point anyway. Now, there's the "I-Stories" and the "South African narrative" are popular, almost commercialised.

JB: But now, it's also the post-Facebook/Facebook modality of an artificial invitation to "have your story" but of course that story is entirely prescripted in terms of what you can speak, some things matter: where do you live? Are you in a relationship? And when were you born? The moments of salience – public salience – are globalised and you have a timeline, a line! But the Digital Stories have a complete different relationship to the chaos of experience (SS: Mmmm).

SS: If I think about it now, and I think back to that time, we were incredibly arrogant about technology! There was nothing we thought we couldn't master (JB: well, of course there wasn't [both laugh]!). Because basically Lerato and I went on a course that Engender Health did as part of their programme and they invited us to attend it, and we decided after attending a four-day course on Digital Story-creation that we could do it ourselves, (laughs), and we did. And the difference is that we weren't in the training course as experts; we were with the people who were there, we worked it out *with* people. Of course we had more advantage with other people in terms of familiarity with computers, but we had had to learn that, it wasn't a "naturalised" skill for

us and we could show other people how it worked. I just think now that my focus isn't exclusively on ICTS – well I guess it never was exclusively on ICTS – but I think that the fact that Women'sNet was a *women's* organisation helped us to keep the role of the technology in the right place – it was a means to a feminist end.

JB: But you haven't lost that by moving into Sweat [Sex Workers' Education and Advocacy Taskforce]?

SS: No, in fact, I think lots of organisations have learned from Women'sNet about how to integrate ICTs into their work and I see how important and integral e-space has become to our strategies that we hardly even notice how far we've travelled. We use SMS-technology here to reach out to sex workers, we use a website, we have an internal communications platform, we manage our organisational accounts using ICTs, we don't even think about it any more. But in those days, it was really about helping organisations be conscious about the meaning of technology and helping them make decisions about that which made sense in relation to their own goals... and also decisions about information, and communication... and the politics of communication are part of all our work – who is speaking, who is in the room and who is not, what is the language in which we are expressing our ideas, what level of privacy is required and how should that be shaped, who has access to this space, and is it safe... We consider all those things when we talk directly to people. And those are the things relevant to online communication. The same level of political consciousness we use about direct communication is what is needed when we use technological tools. I think it is interesting how technology differently enables people – so that with sex workers, I have noticed that cell phones carry a value which can be exchanged for something else – someone needing resources such as food or transport can use access to the phone for the exchange.

The other thing is that access to a communication tool, in the work I do now, can be a matter of life and death. We've gotten calls (we have a 24-hour helpline service and a "please-call-me service" so you can communicate for free if you have a cell phone) from the back of a police van, saying that they are being taken to a police station, that they have just been beaten, that they are afraid. And we are able to respond. We can be with that person, in that way. Sometimes it's frustrating, we have little information; just previously to getting that call, we had heard of a case where a sex worker died in the

back of a police van, and the police were not taking the sex workers into the station, they were holding them in a shed behind the police station, so we knew she was on her way there, and we were phoning but they were saying, "No, no-one's been brought in here" but we knew she was en route, that she might be at the back, so we phoned the connections we have in the Ministry of Police and she was released. Because we knew. Just somebody knowing that that was happening to her made a difference. So I think that the awareness that we have about the possibility of communicating when we are in trouble, whether that trouble is emotional or immediate physical danger, being able to say so, is important; the technology puts people within earshot of you even though you may be so isolated where you are.

JB: But it's the same principle as you were working with at Women'sNet – that it's about the fundamentals of feminist work. Because you could be in the back of the police van, and calling, and unless you are calling somebody who understands the value of who you are, the meaning of the brutality that happening, unless that's someone seeing you, really seeing you, that call goes nowhere (SS: ja)... there are a lot of people you could call, and they would say, "Okay, fine, you stay in that van!" The call has to be to someone who already has the political consciousness about what is going down and why the call matters.

SS: Ja, ja. I think that looking at Cape Town NGOs, there's so much innovative and feminist use of technology. Rape Crisis uses technology as a marketing tool; you can go to their website and buy the little hearts, it makes philanthropy a little easier especially for South Africans who don't have much of a culture of a philanthropy (JB: [laughs] Yes, it's 'Where is this money going to go if I give it to you?" SS: (laughs): "You can't buy a drink with this!" JB: [laughs] Or, even more weirdly, if I give you this today, you'll just ask me again tomorrow! As if that's a bad thing! [Both laugh] SS: You will need it tomorrow... it's not like the five rand is going to go that far; perhaps if you don't want them to ask tomorrow, you should give a bit more today [both laugh]).

But I think Rape Crisis have also used technology in a innovative way; they've created a video tool to help people find their way through the criminal justice system. I remember doing court support at POWA and how difficult it was to tell people what it was actually like to be in a court room, where do people sit, what do you call people, where do you wait, how do you negotiate

your way through an alienating and traumatising system? So I find that organisations have found really interesting technological ways of doing things that they used to do anyway, but with safer, more comfortable approaches, and that is the thing to note: we know what needs to be done, we have the skills – technologies offer us a little bit more, it gives us an edge, it means we can work with people in a way that is really prepared and respectful and real. You can print out the forms someone needs to get a protection order, so that when she sees them again, they are familiar, she's in charge of what needs to be done. The control is with her.

African feminist uprisings: Getting our knickers in knots

Sarita Ranchod

> Imperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as object of protection from her own kind.
> – Gayatri Spivak (1988: 299)

The power politics of daily life that find expression in practices of inclusion and exclusion, participation and marginalisation (classed, gendered and raced, among others) that define our lived realities often seamlessly transfer into online spaces as our contemporaneous continuum. As feminists and largely herstorically colonised peoples, we have learnt to be wary and to question how and who documents our (her)stories (translating them into "truths") and from what perspectives; and the power politics inherent in how we (or others) may write, record or claim attribution, authorship or ownership of (our) words, actions and bodies.

The power dynamics of who authors and "owns" feminist knowledge vis-à-vis those who give voice and content to what is known as feminist knowledge; who speaks and who is spoken for in feminist research and knowledge production processes, and how all of these factors so powerfully came together in this organic African feminist encounter, entirely facilitated by online spaces and tools – has made this standpoint contribution a difficult one to write.

Late in 2012, a private company, Nectar Lingerie, based in Canada – acting on the misguided notion (at best) that wearing underwear improves African women's social status and protects us from rape and disease – initiated their "Undies for Africa" marketing campaign. Customers were encouraged to drop off their used underwear at Nectar Lingerie in exchange for discounts on new purchases. The used underwear would be shipped to "Africa," allowing the women who donated their used underwear and bought new underwear

to make a contribution to improving the lives of African women, including preventing rape and disease transmission through this consumptive act.

A counter-campaign emerged as a simultaneous outpouring of outrage as soon as online African feminists and their allies became aware of the "Undies for Africa" campaign. Enabled by the immediacy of internet access, social networks and feminist mailing lists, feminists and their allies voiced their strongly held objections to the campaign.

Nectar Lingerie was slated for trivialising (and attempting to profit from) structural sexual violence, asserting colonial "civilising" and paternalistic relations between the global North and South, evoking enduring representations of "savage" African masculinity, and the continuous association of Africa and African women with disease-ridden bodies, casting the citizens of the global North as our knowing saviours – even in the underwear department.

Discussions about taking issue with the "Undies for Africa" campaign organically shifted between individual conversations and across and between online spaces, including via individual postings on "newer" technology – social media sites – and the Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) in Africa mailing list (used by academics, researchers and activists involved in feminist, women's and gender studies to share and exchange information and opportunities), an "older" and robust email-based technology medium.

The catalytic power of the GWS mailing list with its broad, yet specific reach, emerged as the fulcrum of counter-campaign voices and mobilisation among African feminists and their allies. The campaign elicited a deep well of responses, in many instances from heretofore silent voices on the GWS list, that on *this* topic found it necessary to break their silences and make their voices heard.

The multiplicity of voices, actions and responses generated by African, diaspora and other feminists in solidarity, proved central to making (positive) change happen – the withdrawal of the campaign following the direct engagement of African women (and their allies) with the company and its campaign – by asserting our rights and responsibilities to make our voices heard on matters that affect us transnationally. Vocally asserting our rights to define and speak for ourselves, using our collective and individual agencies to reject negative stereotypes that define us in homogeneous portrayals and re/presentations, and challenging shop-soiled, meaning-laden uses of our bodies as feel-good marketing tool for (private) financial gain formed some

of the content of our multiple acts of subversive silence-breaking through the counter-campaign.

The simultaneity and multiplicity of responses that the online spaces so speedily enabled, and the multiple non-linear actions of individuals and groups of individuals across disparate locations and time zones highlighted the messiness of definitively recording a chronology or timeline – and by extension, authorship and ownership – of the multi-layered counter-campaign's efforts (and other similar forms of online activism).

The danger of creating a singular "timeline" of events was that it would risk excluding so many of the prior, simultaneous and multiple voices and actions that took place in several spaces, in the process of capturing (wittingly or unwittingly) one particular version of a herstory, timeline or chronology. This realisation was a powerful reminder of the subjectiveness inherent in pronouncing a chronology or chain of events involving many people – and in our era – events that involve simultaneous, technology-supported or enhanced social mobilisation.

Reflecting on my responses to efforts to record this particular chain of events, and trying to make sense of all of the elements of the campaign and counter-campaign that contributed to so deeply unsettling me, I recalled the experience of being taught history during my apartheid-era schooling experience. I was reminded of the authoritative perspective from which histories (including chains of events resulting in specific outcomes) were portrayed; the "facts" and "truths" of our school curriculum, from the perspective of the "victor" (oppressor) versus our diametrically opposed daily, lived realities of being black under apartheid.

Subjected to apartheid's versions of history and its limited engagement with a broader world, through a curriculum whose ideology was rife with crafty inclusions and visibilities and exclusions and invisibilities, supported by state-controlled propaganda media, Bob Marley's dictum that "half the story has never been told" held currency. Similarly, Marley's words apply to the "Undies for Africa" campaign and the need for its counter-campaign.

The outcomes of the campaign – both in the deeply engaged feminist responses and in that of Nectar Lingerie (withdrawing their campaign) – had barely unfolded when it was evident that this transnational African feminist "story" would be documented.

In navigating this reality I was concerned (and shared my concerns) about attribution and authorship of the counter-campaign, the people involved,

their words and their actions, and the erasures that (can) take place when a collective and organic effort whose success lay in its multiplicity, is written up, inevitably by one, or a few people.

My concerns were about the danger of singular versions of events and what is or can be excluded in efforts to document, record, author and re/write herstories, and the complexities of creating timelines and herstories that will inevitably exclude parts; fragments, of a whole and complex story (even when attempting to include).

The discussions on the GWS list prompted me to return to and deepen my reflection on the politics of feminist research in relation to feminist activism; the relationship/s between the researcher and the researched; who writes or records what, for whom, from what perspective/s, and the potent inherent power dynamics, not unique to online spaces. It got me thinking about what "the most respectful or ideal feminist way" would be to record such an uprising.

Discussions profiled the complex tensions between feminist activism and feminist research; the politics of location and the spaces and places from which we speak (as diaspora, "Northern" or "Southern" feminists); the power dynamics inherent in being the researcher – no matter how sensitive and committed to inclusion, participation and making herstorically silenced voices heard – and uncomfortably for me, be(com)ing the researched.

Realising that in the instance of "Undies for Africa" I was part of the "researched" (not a position I have much direct experience occupying) led to a fair amount of discomfort and reflection on my feminist politics and ways of being and becoming – reflections that are always in process, and necessarily, incomplete.

It also surfaced structural and postcolonial discomforts and dilemmas embedded in being a feminist of colour – located in the global South – armed with ease in the most commonly used language of globalisation and unfettered access to online media.

Accustomed to thinking about issues of inclusion and exclusion, participation and marginalisation in my engagements with the worlds I find myself in, I was keenly aware throughout that the voices of the recipients of the used underwear, and women who lacked easy access to connectivity were not part of our engagement. I was also very much aware that the spaces in which we engaged, certainly the GWS list, by virtue of its purpose, included

women like me – (largely) women of colour who had either transcended class boundaries through our education and skills, or had entered the world with the accoutrements and privileges of being born middle-class.

Given all of the complexities and the power issues inherent in this process, how *does* one document a feminist uprising such as this one? How does one "do it right" and respectfully?

Feminist standpoint approaches, in being able to capture and validate personal experience, position and responses to an event or situation, and acknowledging that it is indeed subjective – one standpoint among many – from which to understand and analyse a situation, provide a way to understand one contribution, or perspective, towards a greater whole. We can therefore claim to have participated, but the activism (and its outcomes) cannot be claimed by any one person or group. This is the strength and beauty of the parts contributing to a whole, revealing collective ownership in and through individual stories. It also reminds me of the moral responsibility we have, as feminists, to create and sustain spaces for making herstorically marginal voices heard.

This approach enables a grappling with the power differentials embedded in each of our positions – influenced by class, location, sexuality, age, colour, education, caste, ethnicity and more – and what they mean and imply for how we practice feminism.

Grappling and navigating daily with the politics of power, knowledge and ownership and how this triumvirate complexly functions in all aspects of our lives means a feminist's work is never done. It is always in process.

The Undies for Africa counter-campaign eloquently reflects how positive change is possible. It is one victory. Many struggles remain.

Aluta continua.

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EROTICS: Sexuality, freedom of expression and online censorship

Caroline Tagnay and jac SM Kee

The internet has quickly become an important emerging public sphere where citizens, corporations, governments and non-state actors engage actively in discussions, debates and deliberations on a multitude of topics. For activists around the world, online spaces have also opened channels to amplify the voices of the marginalised, express dissent and channel counter-power. While women have been historically disadvantaged in terms of access and control of technology, feminist activists have taken advantage of the internet to organise, inform, mobilise and take action. In addition to obstacles to access and accessibility to information and communication technologies, feminist activists in Africa are increasingly facing a backlash in the presence of growing conservative forces often led by, or supported by, the religious and the traditional right. Sexual rights activists, like LGBTQI or reproductive health defence groups, are increasingly concerned by attempts by state and non-state actors to define and censor "harmful content" on the internet.

The EROTICS (Exploratory Research on Sexuality & ICTs) research project undertaken by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), focused on marginalised sections of society who use the internet in the exercise of their sexual rights in Brazil, Lebanon, India, South Africa and the USA in its first phase from June 2008 to June 2011. The APC is currently engaging in the second phase of the project which, informed by the previous research, aims to build networks of internet and sexual rights activists involved in the exercise of sexual rights and citizenship on the internet and that can respond accordingly to attempts to regulate or censor internet content. Although on the African continent, with the exception of "Arab Spring" countries, there have been few attempts by state actors to implement censorship or regulation of sexual content on the internet, states in sub-Saharan Africa have been

proactive in restricting access to some websites or to mobile network services since the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings. In addition, some religious right and children's rights lobby groups for example, have already tried to encourage legislation that would in effect ban access to all sexually related online content which they define as "obscene" or "pornographic" – irrespective of its "harmful or "pornographic" nature or conversely its educational or life-affirming content.

This paper looks at the first and the second phase of EROTICS through the specific lenses of access to information on sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights and the freedom of expression of marginalised sections of society, such as young women, transgender communities, lesbians, queer activists and feminist activists, more specifically in the African continent. This paper reflects on the research previously done in this project as well as our experience and discussions with sexual rights activists throughout our burgeoning network.

EROTICS in South Africa

In the first phase of the EROTICS project, researchers in five countries, including South Africa, have been attempting to define how "emerging debates and the growing practice of regulation of online content either impede or facilitate different ways women use the internet and the impact this has on their sexual expression, sexualities and sexual health practices, and assertion of their sexual rights" (Kee, 2010: 2). The South African research, conducted by Jeanne Prinsloo, Relebohile Moletsane and Nicolene McLean focused particularly on lesbian and transgender people, their use and understanding of the internet to negotiate and perform their sexuality, as well as their understanding of the regulatory framework that could impact on the freedom of sexual expression (Kee, 2011). The research presents how transgender people converge at a popular transgender site to share their struggles in transitioning, including treatment options, unlearning dominant gender norms, celebrating achieved milestones and exchange experiences of discrimination faced.

Although South Africa enjoys a liberal constitution, non-heteronormative positions are often met with intolerance and violence. Prinsloo, Moletsane and McLean observed interactions in Gender Dynamix forums[1] which aside from providing a site for the exchange of information, is also a space where people can try out identities as well as perform and practice new gender identities.

Further interviews conducted with male-to-female and female-to-male respondents found that the internet is a crucial space for individuals to find more information and create a sense of community and solidarity in contrast with the "freakish" representation in mainstream media of transgender people. The researchers also looked at online lesbian communities (with mostly white respondents) to find that most online activity revolved around dating and lifestyle websites. As access to the internet in the country is closely linked to class and race as a result of apartheid, the researchers attributed the little participation of black lesbians to several factors, including less access to the internet and the greater risk of being outed in black communities. Overall, the South African EROTICS research shows contradictions between a progressive constitution which guarantees equal rights for the LGBTQI community and fosters freedom of expression, and punitive and censorial policies and regulations coupled with increasing violence towards sexual minorities.

Access, censorship and freedom of expression

The research undertaken by Prinsloo, Moletsane and McLean, although restricted to South Africa, pinpoints important barriers for sexual rights activists in sub-Saharan Africa, starting with extremely unequal access to the internet and telecommunications in general. The continent still faces enormous challenges in terms of telecommunications infrastructure, which is concentrated in urban centres. Access to technology and more specifically internet access is limited by income, literacy and education but also gender (Gillwald *et al*, 2010). Mobile phones are increasingly pervasive on the continent (in general more than 40% of the population owns a mobile phone in Africa) and are considered a key entry point for internet access as owners of "feature phones" or smartphones are more numerous, with the use of social media platforms, such as Facebook often superseding or on the verge of replacing email (Stork *et al*, 2012). However, the lack of access for most of the continent to a broadband connection brings into question the type and the quality of content that sexual rights activists are able to access. Access to the internet primarily through mobile phones brings also important limitations, as websites are often not mobile friendly, and it might therefore be difficult to access content or to create content that goes beyond short messages. In addition, closed network infrastructure and "walled gardens" – when mobile service providers or governments either restrict access to the whole internet or

shape what content the user can see while using a specific provider – are on the rise. While limits to access curtail the freedom of expression of everyone, they impede more particularly the ability to access information related to sexual minorities or reproductive rights. In a continent where many countries have identified, for example, homosexuality and abortion as illegal, and where women are often subjected to patriarchal authority, the potential of the internet as an alternative public sphere where identities can be reinvented and taboos circumvented is out of reach for most grassroots sexual rights activists.

While most African countries do not have a history of internet censorship, the continent has experienced media censorship and restriction to freedom of expression despite constitutions guaranteeing these rights. In recent years, often on the pretext of national security, governments have shut down telecommunications networks to thwart dissent and protest actions. For example: in September 2010, unable to stop mass protests against rises in the cost of living, organised through SMS, the Mozambican government requested that mobile phone operators shut down SMS services (Gaster, 2011). In Cameroon, fearing protests that are organised yearly since 2008 when violent protests shook the regime of Paul Biya, the government asked one of the main mobile phone operators in the country to suspend its SMS-to-Twitter service for 10 days in February 2011 (Siyam *et al*, 2011). Increased control of the internet and mobile phone networks have also been observed in Ethiopia, Uganda, Burundi, Ivory Coast, Zambia, (York, 2011; Heacock, 2009). Although these examples of state repression of activism do not relate to sexual rights, the potential effect of state control over freedom of expression, and the surveillance of activists through online platforms or mobile communications is worrying. The previous examples also show that it is increasingly easy for governments to shut down mobile networks which points out the precariousness and limitations of relying solely on mobiles as a key entry point for internet access in the continent.

Threats, pornography and obscenity: Upholding morals?

As the use of social media platforms in activism has blurred the conceptual distinctions between the public and the private spheres, the politics of the personal have scaled the ramparts of tradition online. This online public sphere has also become a reflection of society where sexual rights activists can face harassment and intimidation. In the ongoing second phase of the

EROTICS project, where we are working to foster networks of advocates on internet regulation and sexual rights, learning how to curb cyber-harassment and communicate online securely has been one of the main concerns expressed by the participating activists. A youth and sexual rights activist in India for one said:

> Ever since we started advocating for sexual education stuff... on our website, I get death threats saying that we are spoiling Indian culture. I keep ignoring, but I wonder if there is a time one should turn around and say something. (EROTICS India workshop, February 2013)

As much as the Web has allowed for the expression of multiple identities and online anonymity, security is often crucial for sexual rights activists who face arrest, prosecution or persecution if their identities were to be exposed. The murder of David Kato in 2011, a prominent gay rights activist in Uganda, following the publication of his name in a tabloid under the headline "Kill the Gays," is an illustration of the risks that sexual rights activist face in some countries of the continent. Although there is no clear report of internet censorship or surveillance in Uganda, the current proposed "anti-gay bill" that is before parliament seeks to further criminalise the LGBTQI community in the country. In this context, it is not irrational to fear that the ongoing harassment and criminalisation of sexual rights activists can be transposed to the online environment.

Furthermore, policies and regulations that aim to censor pornography, often brought by children's safety advocacy groups or law enforcement groups on the basis of morality, often end up restricting content of a sexual nature. Defining what constitutes pornography and harmful sexual content can be extremely difficult and varies according to culture, values and traditions from one country to another. When discussing censorship of sexual content, it is more helpful to frame the debate based on a framework of rights where a balance between rights, interests and recognition and protection of the rights of the diverse groups that constitute our society and our world including the rights of the marginalised – as opposed to a protectionist framework which can act to further disempower those who are already marginalised. In the framework of the EROTICS research, Kee questions the assumptions of the harmful nature of pornography:

> Is it the exploitative dimensions of the pornographic industry that is problematic, or is there something inherently harmful in the explicit depiction of sexualised bodies? How then do we draw the line between, for example, artistic expression (which has a long history of censorship), fantasy (the Children's Internet Protection Act in the US also prohibits illustrations and animation), and potential harmful representation? (Kee, 2011: 14)

In the context where culture and social norms surrounding sexuality are often regulated by states and non-state actors who act as protectors of public morals with the frequent support of the religious right or conservative groups, a feminist critique of the gender normative order must challenge these different stakeholders. Corporate actors such as internet service providers or social media platforms, who often take the side of internet freedom in public discourse, have often censored sexual speech for questionable reasons. Feminists are increasingly challenging Facebook's content policies (see for example Nickerson, 2013), where pictures of women breastfeeding or graphic educative illustrations of genitalia has been censored while pornographic pages or pages promoting violence against women are deemed acceptable. Censorship of internet sexual content, deemed as pornographic by conservative stakeholders can, as the case illustrated above, restrict access to sexual education and hampers women's rights of control over their bodies while supporting a mysogynist discourse.

Towards an online sexual citizenship

Despite the threats and obstacles discussed in this article, we strongly believe, supported by our research findings and by the ongoing discussions that we have with our partners in the EROTICS project, that the internet is a crucial space to advocate for the advancement of sexual rights, towards ending discrimination and violence against women and sexual minorities and to foster public participation in various democratic debates. Sexual rights and internet rights activists do not often cross paths in their areas of work, and we do see a need for a better understanding of the area of technology and sexuality to foster strong democratic debates combining the issues of internet governance and social justice that respects sexual diversity.

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1.   Available at <http://www.genderdynamix.org.za/>.

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Supporting Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex human rights defenders in the digital age

Dan O Clunaigh

Introduction

The widespread diffusion of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) has empowered activists and minority communities to spread information, campaign, build communities and challenge injustice in new and powerful ways. The LGBTI activist community has been no exception to this, as the increased potential for communication beyond established social channels, less confined by social norms and geographic isolation has facilitated LGBTI people's expression and development of identity and ability to join forces to challenge the dangers and injustices faced by the community.

However, the spread of ICTs have also created new opportunities for antagonists to subject human rights defenders' to entrapment, control, intimidation and harassment. This has led to the need for an awareness-raising and capacity-building effort in order to strengthen Human Rights Defenders' (HRDs) capacities to react against emerging threats to their wellbeing from the digital space. Over the past decade, Tactical Technology Collective (Tactical Tech) has been at the forefront of this movement. Working with actors in the field of Human Rights, including Front Line Defenders, Tactical Tech's effort has spawned the development of a range of toolkits and guides, awareness-raising and training initiatives in order to build capacities among HRDs in terms of their wellbeing, the security of their communities and the safeguarding of their information and privacy.

Over the past year, Tactical Tech has begun a process of further deepening our efforts to raise awareness and inspire behaviour change among HRDs through further integrating digital security practices into the contexts of specific communities at risk. This article details the development and content of the first such materials to be developed with this in mind – a digital

security guide for the Arabic-speaking LGBTI community – the first version of which was launched in September of 2013.

Digital (in)security, activism and the LGBTI community

The ascent and spread of the internet and ICTs over the last two decades has had a profound impact on the promotion and defence of human rights on a global scale. As perhaps most profoundly evidenced by the rapidly changing political landscape in the Middle East and North Africa since 2011, along with many other countries, HRDs – journalists, lawyers, whistleblowers, students, the unemployed, political dissidents, and a wide variety of other social and political groups – have taken to ICTs as a potent tool in campaigning, researching, spreading information, organising and communicating.

In parallel, the diffusion of ICTs through global society has had a profound impact not only on LGBTI activism, but in many cases the establishment or development of LGBTI communities themselves, particularly in closed, repressive and heteronormative societies. Indeed, the world over, the internet often provides the first exploratory path or even "refuge" for young LGBTI individuals exploring or affirming their identity; this is perhaps due to the sense of "safety" and relative anonymity provided by the experience of browsing the internet for information, exploring online communities, chat rooms, dating sites, and so on, where people often feel that simply employing a pseudonym precludes them from being identified.

However, in spite of the progress achieved by progressive elements of civil society thanks in part to these tools, the continued repression faced by HRDs in the sites of some of the most turbulent uprisings of the last couple of years – Bahrain, Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia, to name just a few – is sad testament to the fact that along with new opportunities for organising, communicating and fighting for recognition, ICTs also provide new opportunities for the surveillance, entrapment, control and persecution of HRDs.

It is becoming ever clearer that social networking, media and communication tools, perhaps most notably Facebook, Twitter, and Skype among others, are now routinely being utilised as particularly rich "honey pots" for the surveillance and information-gathering on progressive elements of civil society. The surveillance of HRDs' activities or compromising of their accounts, achieved through a broad range of methods including phishing attacks, installation of trojan spyware such as FinSpy software, legal demands

for information from site hosts or internet service providers, or the widespread collection of account metadata, can and have been used against HRDs in order to expose their networks, access their information and identities, discover their location and plans, and subject them to juridical harassment.

Similarly, notwithstanding the vital outlet it provides for LGBTI individuals in repressive societies to reach out to one another, connect, establish relationships, friendship and community, the information vulnerabilities in the architecture and use of ICTs have unfortunately become a tool in the repository of antagonists to the LGBTI community – whether agents of the state, religious or political groups, or homophobic elements within local communities, clans and families.

The spread of social networking sites has brought a number of benefits to LGBTI individuals in terms of access to alternative information, speed of communication and community building. However, due in part to the architecture of such services, which tend to guide users towards oversharing and making public of information by default, has also led to the exposure of LGBTI individuals to homophobic elements of the state and society. In May of 2013, two men in Algeria were reportedly jailed on accusations of "breaching public morality" and "incitement to debauchery" because they allegedly announced their marriage on facebook and addressed one another there as "husband" and "wife," which was seen by people from the community who reported them to the police, who in turn acted upon the report.[1]

A further means by which LGBTI individuals have been exploited through ICTs is through their use of LGBTI dating sites. In relatively liberal and deeply heteronormative countries and regions alike, LGBTI people take to these sites as a place where they can express their sexual or gender identity in a supposedly secure environment, and seek personal connections. In contexts where people cannot safely engage in this activity in their public lives, such sites are quite naturally understood as something of a refuge, both in terms of the external search for friendship, sexual encounters, romance and so forth, as well as no doubt a comforting antidote to discourses which encourage people to think that LGBTI individuals – much less an LGBTI "community" – exists in the first place.

Sadly, homophobic agents of the state, religious groups and communities have taken to these sites in order to exploit, entrap and attack the vulnerable. The practice of setting up fake profiles on such sites and using them to lure

vulnerable individuals into meetings where they can be then subjected to physical attacks, blackmail, arrest, detention, torture, sexual assault and rape is extremely widespread and utilised by a wide range of actors, most notably the Egyptian police, who in the years following the Queen Boat incident in 2001, began a campaign of entrapment, arrest and torture of LGBTI individuals through dating sites. While this widespread practice poses a threat to all users of LGBTI dating sites, individuals engaged in activism are naturally at higher risk, particularly if they maintain a public profile as an element of their activism.

As with social networking sites more generally, this is in part due to a lack of knowledge and thus ability to think critically about the architecture of such sites on a technical level. However, a significant vulnerability to such attack lies in behavioural aspects of using such sites, such as having a publicly accessible profile with an identifiable face picture, registering under a real name, agreeing to meet hastily or in an unsafe environment such as a private home without having first verified the *bona fides* of their potential new contact. At times, digital security doesn't relate to technology but rather the decisions we, as users, make about our interaction with it.

Aside from surveillance and entrapment, ICTs have also been used as a direct means of attacking and stigmatising LGBTI individuals, which could be seen as an extension of the issue of technically mandated violence against women. A very public example is demonstrated by the vandalisation of the website of the Tunisian LGBTI magazine *GayDay* in 2012, when a group of malicious hackers defaced the website with homophobic slurs, and also gained access to the magazine's Twitter profile as well as the email accounts of contributors (Amaya-Akermanns, 2012).

Security in context

It is in this context that, in early 2012, Tactical Tech was contacted with a view to creating specific digital security materials aimed at the LGBTI community – in the first instance, focusing on the Arabic-speaking region. Over the past decade, Tactical Tech and our partner organisations including Front Line Defenders, have developed a wide range of awareness-raising and capacity-building materials, along with direct trainings and curricula, aimed at the human rights community worldwide. In 2012, over 6 000 activists, HRDs, journalists and communities at risk were exposed to our awareness-raising

and direct training interventions worldwide, and our online digital security learning resource, *Security in a Box: Tools and tactics for your digital security,* now averages around 250 000 unique hits per month.

The request to create materials for a specific community coincided with a process of reflection, re-evaluation and refinement of our approach to digital security awareness raising and capacity building: in particular, we have noted problems with the adoption of a tool- or technology-focused approach to digital security which tends to encourage HRDs to fight technology with technology, and reify a false distinction between digital security and "security" more generally, as well as its other elements, including personal, organisational and psycho-social security.

This is leading us to shift towards what, for now, we're calling "security in context": that is to say, placing information and digital security within the context of HRDs' broader context, in terms not only of their missions, work, and personal lives, but also within the broader context of security planning – personal, organisational, psychological, and so on - as an aspect of the work of HRDs.

This process – while it's just starting – will take shape in the development of materials which will give specific communities at risk context-relevant entry points to *Security in a Box* as well as other awareness-raising and capacity-building materials, and help us identify areas where the technical guide could be expanded. These guides should represent the answers to a number questions HRDs may ask themselves upon discovering *Security in a Box,* such as *"how would I take all the material from Security in a Box and use it in a practical sense? What is my practical motivation for doing this? What are the most important elements in this for me? How does it relate to my work? How does it relate to my security in general?"*

This initial request gave us our first opportunity to test this approach. So, in February 2012, a team of trainers from Tactical Tech organised a training for 10 LGBTI human rights defenders from the Arabic-speaking region in Istanbul, Turkey, designed both as a "regular" training as well as a springboard for sourcing material that the first guide might include. In the 15 months that have followed, Tactical Tech worked with Fadi Saleh, a participant in the training and LGBTI activist from Syria, to research and write the first version of what is now called "*Security in Context: Tools and tips for the Arabic-speaking LGBT community*" (Tactical Technology Collective, 2013).

This version of the guide – which, we hope, will be expanded upon and further refined with time and feedback from the community – includes a context-setting visualisation which explores the legal situation for the LGBTI community in each country, as well as highlighting individual demonstrative cases of digital attacks, such as those mentioned above. Regarding the latter, a challenge was posed by the simple lack of data available in some countries, where LGBTI-related information is, due to the severity of the social context, kept quiet.

Of course, one of the key principles of "security in context" is that HRDs need to carry out a "risk analysis" in order to determine which digital security practices are necessary in their situation: some digital and information security practices may be of vital importance in one situation, and entirely counterproductive or even insecure in another. Therefore, we included a short guide to risk analysis which gives readers the basic tools and concepts necessary to think critically about digital security risk in their context.

Participants at the training in Istanbul also – maybe unsurprisingly – requested a guide to how to use dating sites safely, which looks both at technical and behavioural considerations to take into account. This includes advice ranging from simple things, like having a first meeting in a safe, public location or verifying someone's *bona fides* through shared contacts within the community, to slightly more complex, but still quite user-friendly options like connecting to the sites anonymously through the Tor network. Participants also requested a chapter on how to remove hidden information, known as metadata, from files – particularly photographs, which can often include sensitive information such as GPS locations inside them. This chapter is accompanied by a hands-on, step-by-step guide for an image metadata removal software.

As an alternative to using commercial, heavily surveilled social networking sites for organising and collaborating, we also wrote a hands-on guide for the use of RiseUp.net's "Crabgrass" online collaboration platform which – while not necessarily perfect in every situation – offers activists an opportunity to remove their sensitive work-related collaborations from the servers of the likes of Facebook and Google.

As mentioned above, we hope that this initial set will be expanded upon in the future, in accordance with the community's needs. Moreover, in the coming months and years we hope to make a number of similar *Security in*

Context materials for other communities at risk: among those currently being sketched is a guide which will look at digital security in the context of women HRDs (WHRDs), which may explore the role played by ICTs in facilitating acts of violence against women; and the specific dangers faced by WHRDs in the context of their work and their implications for their use of ICTs in that context.

Input and feedback from the human rights community is essential in order for us to continue empowering HRDs to be defend themselves and challenge injustice in the face of ever-evolving threats.

Endnotes

1. See http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/nas/334385.html (Arabic, accessed on 24 July 2013).

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Mobiles for development in Africa: Are we in danger of losing sight of the bigger picture?

Kutoma J Wakunuma

Introduction

Many of us have come across literature that has rightly indicated that mobile-phone access as a technology has leapfrogged other technologies such as the internet in Africa (James, 2009). That this is the one technology that has spoken to the technological needs of Africa and that there are more people who are able to and have access as well as use mobile phones than there are users of the internet (Rashid and Elder, 2009). In addition, there are numerous examples that indicate that it is the mobile phone that is now getting particular attention in terms of encouragement of its use and access especially in Africa in addition to it being seen as a potential tool for social and economic development and growth. For example, the expenditure on ICTs in Africa was in excess of US$60bn in 2010 (Heeks, 2010). Heeks further reveals that ICT-related investment development, for instance from the World Bank, is about US$800 million per year while that of the private sector in relation to mobile telephony is about US$10 billion. It is clear that mobile telephony is the one technology that Africa as a developing continent has embraced more than any other technology in recent history. For instance, according to the ITU (International Telecommunication Union, 2008), one out of four people in Africa have a mobile phone while the same cannot be said of the internet where only five per cent of the population is online.

For the most part, the mobile phone has gone beyond being used as a tool for easy and everyday communication (de Bruijn *et al*, 2009) to a tool that is service orientated, offering services such as agriculture information (Duncombe, 2012), health care (The Economist, 2011; Fjeldsoe *et al*, 2009; Wakunuma, 2008), civil advocacy and political activism (Ekine, 2010) as well as mobile banking sometimes known as m-banking (William and Tavneet,

2011; Porteous, 2006) as seen in Kenya's M-Pesa and now Zambia's Xapit which enables the quick transfer of funds, enables the buying of credit and paying bills among others. Aker and Mbiti (2010) highlight five possible mechanisms through which mobile phones can provide economic benefits, which include access to and use of information, increased communication, creation of new jobs and the delivery of services.

Gender and mobile phone access

Despite the uptake and seeming ubiquity of mobile phones in Africa, there are evident gender differentials in the access as well as use of this technology. Wakunuma (2006, 2007, 2009, 2012) has highlighted these differences in access, in power and control which in some cases have resulted in violence against women. In writing about shared use, Burrell (2010) shows how while shared use of mobile phones may be practised, that preferential access may still exist, leading to certain groups – particularly women – excluded from having access at all. The reasons for the disparities between women and men's access and use of mobile phones particularly in the developing world include literacy, culture, as well as cost (GSMA, 2013b). Lee and Lee's study (2010) has also shown that there is a higher use of mobile services by men than by women particularly when it comes to services related to business and finance.

To overcome such differences, several initiatives which also show the perceived importance with which the mobile phone is regarded can be seen through international organisations and aid agency projects that effectively promote the use of mobile phones for development, especially for women. For example, only recently the GSMA, a global association representing interests of mobile operators launched an Innovation Fund for NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia offering grants for NGOs and social enterprises in partnership with mobile phone operators. The grants, valued up to about US$140 000 are intended for the participants to design and launch products, value-added services, marketing campaigns and/or distribution mechanisms that will increase women's access to and use of mobile and life-enhancing services (GMSA, 2013a: 10–11). A further example is that of Asiacell's initiative aimed at blocking potential harassers of women and for women to choose suitable off-peak hours or Etisalat's initiative aimed at providing services for healthy pregnancies (GSMA, 2013b). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) capacity-building programme for rural

Pakistani women teachers working in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education who have resources uploaded to the Nokia Education Delivery platform is another initiative to promote women's use of mobile phones (UNESCO, 2013).

Are we being too narrow in focus?

When we look at the above analysis and consider the fact that by and large mobile phones are being touted and seen as tools with the potential to drive economic development and growth for Africa and overcome gender disparities, are we losing sight of the bigger picture or being too narrow in focus? Of course the author appreciates the importance and capacity of mobile phones but is fearful that we are becoming too fixated on this one technology and limiting our focus to encourage and expand initiatives to other technologies and aspects that should go in tandem with mobile phones. Consider the importance of having internet access which is crucial for economic growth (Koutroumpis, 2009) or the need for having access to computers. Granted, a mobile phone is a computer but the author is looking at computer access in the conventional sense; such as a laptop or a PC in this regard, or being able to effectively partake in social media by all, whether women or men or whether in a rural or urban setting. Should the focus not be multidimensional, in which case we have to look beyond the mobile phone and its perceived potential? For example, as is noted by Czernich *et al* (2011), the internet is important for economic growth and robust internet broadband infrastructure has had an impact on the economic growth especially of OECD countries. If this is the case, Africa has a long way to go, particularly when we consider that mobile-broadband penetration "only reached 4%, compared with less than 1% for fixed-broadband penetration while that of the developed world especially Europe leads in broadband connectivity, with fixed and mobile-broadband penetration reaching 26% and 54%, respectively (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2011). In addition, ITU states that internet speed also matters. For Africa, which according to the ITU has 2 000 bits per user compared to around 90 000 bits of bandwidth per user in Europe may prove problematic and potentially hamper its economic growth. Admittedly, Ndung'u and Waema (2011) point to a rising internet use via mobile phones, however, this is nowhere near enough if Africa is to strive for economic growth such as that enjoyed by more developed countries. This is more so when we also consider Eagle's (2010) reasons for low mobile internet

penetration as being due to the high cost of internet access and mobile phone gadgets that can enable mobile internet platforms. As the ITU (2011) further attests, "the availability of bandwidth and capacity will increasingly determine the use and beneficial impact of ICTs" (p.iii). For this to happen, a few things need to be addressed, which include cost, education as well as infrastructure among others.

Curwen and Whalley (2011) suggest that communication infrastructure development has to move beyond the urban setting to the rural setting as well without which there will be limited penetration of services needed for growth. In sub-Saharan Africa, like in Zambia for example, the development and as a result penetration of mobile internet infrastructure is almost always concentrated along the line of rail, which mainly caters for the more developed urban areas. This, the author imagines, is the case for most African countries and as a result could impact on adequate internet mobile penetration particularly for rural areas.

The role of gender in the midst of it all

Having considered the above, the role of gender cannot be over-emphasised. It is an important one which needs to be looked at beyond mobiles for development alone to a multidimensional focus. Various reasons account for gender differentials in accessing and using technologies. For women in particular, they are more impacted by the lack of proper education and training in the area of technologies, the high costs of such technologies, concern for other more pressing issues such as food, education and shelter. These issues are ingrained in the existing social, economic, political and cultural structures that have resisted gender equality for a very long time.

The fact that cultural values and practices are often biased towards men (Gurumurthy, 2004) and men's assertion of power and control by deciding when women can use mobile phones or even whether they can at all (Wakunuma, 2012) suggests a need for concerted efforts beyond mere mobile phone initiatives. Resolving such imbalances will require a political change in attitude simply because it calls for a reflection of and subsequent change in power relations in order for women's needs, aspirations and interests to be realised. In reaching a similar understanding about women and technologies, Bhattacharjea (2005) points out that women's lack of access, particularly in developing countries, is partly a result of poverty and the unequal status of

women to men. Therefore, in order to overcome this situation and improve women's access and use of technologies like mobile phones and other aspects, their situation needs to be understood as a linkage between women's human poverty, globalisation as well as gender inequality. For women, especially the poor and those in rural areas to seriously participate in mobile phone access and use beyond mere social function, such as simple communication, but also to have a sense of the economic potential that such technologies have, much lies in the inclusion of their experiences and needs in ICT policies (Jorge, 2006).

So although there is evidence of projects specifically targeted at women, there also ought to be robust regulatory policies that can ensure that women can afford the mobile technologies that allow them to move beyond mere communication to education as well as to those aspects that can lead to the creation of jobs. Jorge (2006) has also pointed to the need for "licensing regimes that favour companies with gender-equality policies, and programs that consider women's needs and realities" (p.74). These should be seen as important and non-negotiable considerations in not only ICT policies but in education access, job availability, health and even recreation so that women can be a true part of economic development, including that of the mobile phone development process. The problem though, as Jorge concedes, is that although policies may mention gender equality concerns, in most cases they are not followed through at the regulation and implementation stage and thus remain merely as desirable add-on. Take the example of the 2003 African Information Society Initiative (AISI), which sets a framework to develop and establish a sustainable information society by the year 2020, and in the process sets out its gender concerns across different points. Point H (40) for instance reveals how women generally have more limited access than men when it comes to technology as well as information, media and other communication facilities. Point H (41) goes on to state the opportunities that may come as a result of using technologies. The AISI resolution indicates that women's rights can be improved and that equity between men and women can be a possibility if and when ICTs are used. In a similar fashion, the Zambian ICT policy as an example also makes a case for gender equality in the use and access of ICTs. However, what is not explicit in both AISI's resolution and Zambia's documentation is what measures policymakers will put in place in order to ensure that gender concerns are met (Wakunuma,

2010). Merely outlining the gender problem, especially, as it relates to women and the advantages that technologies can bring to them, does not seem adequate enough. The policies do not indicate how a gender balance will be mainstreamed in order to overcome the problems women face so that they may subsequently enjoy the perceived ICT advantages and other elements that are needed for economic growth that include health, education, shelter, food among others.

As such, it would seem that more needs to be done to achieve the desired potentials of ICTs which as an umbrella term encompasses mobile phones, internet, mobile-broadband, social media and many more. This is more so if we see such technologies as playing a major role in meeting some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that count the inclusion ICTs in the achievement of the MDGs as we count down to 2015. As the United Nations (2013) MDGs report indicates, when it comes to the use of ICTs like the internet in the developing world, the gender gap is far more pronounced than the rest of the world with 37% of women and 41% of men using the internet globally while only 29% of women in the developed world use the internet compared to 41% of men. The report goes on to state that fixed broadband penetration is below one per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. In their review of ICTs for development and in particular mobile phones, Hossain and Beresford (2012) fear that although there may be a concerted effort to deploy ICTs, particularly in rural areas, if the efforts do not address the causes of gender inequality, ICTs like mobile phones will fail to lessen and/or end the gender divide because the technologies are usually beneficial to men. This is more so because marginalised groups in rural areas of Africa for example account for 65% of the population of which 50,9% are women. In this regard, it will be interesting to see how technologies like mobile phones can help lessen the gender gap as well as improve social and economic development.

Conclusion

Although there may be potential for social and economic growth in Africa as a result of mobile phones, the focus needs to be broadened to include other factors such as gender equality in access, improved internet broadband and computer access, robust regulatory policies that can be fused together in order to have a more comprehensive and realistic social and economic growth outcome. In addition, there ought to be more emphasis and effort

by international organisations and aid agencies to move their focus beyond a single technology and combine other elements to alleviate the economic difficulties faced by people in Africa, especially women. The alleviation of problems like poverty and hunger, education, health, shelter, jobs among others will need much more than a fixation on one technology just because it appears fashionable and the "in thing" to concentrate on. It will need a multidimensional effort that includes and speaks to other factors beyond the mobile phone and the initiatives in place because the old traditional social inequalities persist despite technologies like mobile phones being somewhat ubiquitous. Thus, issues of gender remain implicated and important in discussions beyond the potential of technologies like mobile phones in achieving the development agenda. In addition, issues such as access and use are much more complex than often imagined, hence the need for a multidimensional view.

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Panty-slapped: Cyberactivism and African feminism join forces

Bella Hwang

> In many parts of Africa women go without bras and panties because they simply can't afford them... In many parts of Africa, simply wearing underwear can reduce the instances rape and helps stop the spread of infectious diseases. Underwear is not considered a necessity, so by having underwear it raises the women's social status making her less likely to be raped.
>
> You can get involved by bringing us your grumpy bras and helping us spread the word. What better reason to clean out your underwear drawer? Gently used bras and new underwear can be dropped off at Nectar Lingerie during regular store hours. As a thank you for your support in our cause, Nectar will offer 10% off items purchased during a fitting on the day of your donation.
>
> - Nectar Lingerie, Undies for Africa Campaign

On the evening of 29 October 2012, this email came through my inbox from a Canadian friend who has spent her life building community-based, women-centred programmes in rural Uganda with the subject heading "My Fav Corporate Marketing Campaign Yet" highlighting her outrage at this undignified corporate marketing campaign.

This marketing ploy disguised as a "warm-hearted" campaign was conceived by a company just 50 kilometres from my hometown in Canada, on the opposite side of the world, some 16 400 kilometres away from the place I now call home, South Africa. Shocked, offended and upset, being a Canadian-born, Chinese woman living now amongst powerful, but all too often disempowered African women the path of my response was not yet clear to me. As a seemingly thoughtless gesture, I forwarded the message to

a friend in Johannesburg who I knew would understand the irony. Little did I know that the power of the electronic world and online spaces would be able to spread this message far and wide, across the reaches of this continent, across the world, and back again in a matter of hours. Before I woke up the next day, simultaneous actions and multiple responses and outcomes had already taken place.

Shared online communities and virtual networks have gained tremendous momentum over the past couple of years, and have changed the ways society operates unlike anything before. It has not only supported businesses financially but has become a powerful engine in driving fundraising and mobilisation in advocacy campaigns. These communities and networks are a medium where ordinary people, experts, and reporters can debate ideas, motivate each other to take action, and trade ideas. Social media campaigns are tricky to intentionally launch because unlike traditional marketing tactics of "pushing" information to the audience, it is based on a "pull" approach. The participants are invested in the campaign and end up adopting it as their own. This story, one of many others that happened in parallel, is my firsthand experience of what a powerful tool online advocacy can be to mobilise women and men across the globe, with a common goal. Twenty-four hours of "armchair" activism is just what the doctor prescribed!

After receiving the email, my Johannesburg-based friend shared the "Undies for Africa" campaign on Facebook and upon reflection; this became the ignition point when the counter-"Undies for Africa" campaign began its journey. Multimedia and online platforms acted as a catalyst and cascaded to reach many individuals transnationally creating discussion, debate and most importantly action. The following day, the strength of collected voices, acting through the modest technology of email, became clear; people worldwide had written to Nectar Lingerie. The original campaign had provoked strong and diverse responses directed at the "Undies for Africa" campaign, calling for apologies and an end to this corporate ruse attacking basic human dignity. Many noted the structural issues inherent in rape, and suggested alternative campaigns that could be supported that address the roots of gender based violence as well as poverty. The counter-campaign was described by one participant as "certainly a transnational African feminist story, in the multiplicity of voices, responses and actions it invoked." By midday, the power of this type of activism was apparent and included discussions on multiple

private and public online spaces. One example included the blog entry "Africa does not need your (dirty) underwear."

Success... almost. By late afternoon, the Nectar Lingerie webpage was inaccessible and this apology email was issued.

In light of the recent barrage of incensed and rather threatening emails and Facebook posts regarding our Undies For Africa campaign, we would like to make it clear that we had no intention of offending anyone.

There are many reasons to have comfortable, quality undergarments and we are happy to reword things to reflect some of the other benefits. The information that is presented on our website was not only relayed to us in good faith by numerous individuals who live and work with women in various communities in Zambia but also from several other sources through research as well.

There is absolutely NO profit for us in this campaign and we, in fact, lose money in continuing with it. We will gladly post the hand-written letters we have collected in the past from women who have received the garments showing their appreciation.

Because of this, we have no intentions of ending this campaign as it has benefited hundreds of women over the last 2 ½ years. In the meantime, we will edit the mission statement so as to more accurately define the campaign and its goals.

Kindest Regards,

Nectar Lingerie

October 31, 2012

Part of this armchair revolution included mobilisation from Zambian women but as one campaigner pointed out "the issue is not specific to Zambian women, it is an insult to all of us African women, trivializing rape and violence against women, through populist marketing of their products." In support of this idea, this was my response:

Dear Shona,

It is nice that the recipients of your donated products enjoy them. I don't doubt that. Thank you for reconsidering your mission statement and purpose. I want to highlight some of the concerns with your campaign and why the West 'aiding developing countries' needs to be done with careful consideration of what the impact might be.

Making the oversimplifying claim that by providing underwear will reduce rape and infectious disease does help continue to disempower and build racial stereotypes. If there was a campaign from let's say South African women collecting gently used bras and new underwear for Canadian teens to help prevent STD, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse, I'm very sure there would be an outraged community of Canadian women upset that their complex issues where whittled down to such a simple answer. This is just one of many reasons why there are outraged African women upset with your campaign.

You are simply donating gently used and new undergarments to women in Africa. No doubt there will be people who enjoy free handouts. And also, as you can see, your CSR campaign does benefit your profit, when people come into your store to make a donation, your store receives marketing exposure and donors receive 10% off which they might use to spend money at your store.

Finally, one last note, there are multiple published reports about the detriment of sending charitable clothing to Zambia. Yes, people are able to receive virtually free or very cheap clothing, but over the last few decades, clothing sent from the west has completely collapsed the indigenous Zambian clothing industry. Handouts are not necessarily the answer to helping worldwide inequalities. 'Give a woman a fish and you feed her for a day. Teach a woman to fish and you feed her for a lifetime'. Please reconsider the campaigns and organisations that you choose to support and their impact and message that you send. October 31, 2012

Within just a few hours the campaign was taken offline, their email address was deleted, and their Facebook promotion for "Undies for Africa" was taken down. "Undies for Africa" was no more, thanks to the power of social activists around the world harnessing the power of the internet to act independently, but at the same time as a collective.

Nectar Lingerie is, granted, a small two-women show in an obscure part of Canada, but astoundingly they are not alone in their disregard of how these well-intentioned actions continue to heighten global racial and gendered inequalities. There are many others, such as

"Knickers For Africa," from New Zealand company Hotmilk Lingerie:

A wonderful woman whom we had the good fortune to cross paths with, ex-pat Zimbabwean, spoke with a local priest in Zimbabwe on one of

> her trips to her home country and was dismayed to hear of the ongoing sexual abuse suffered by thousands of women and young girls there, particularly in the villages. When the priest explained that by simply owning and wearing a set of lingerie the perceived status of women is elevated, she was determined to do what she could. And so were we!

A funeral company in the UK sending panties for their "Knickers 4 Africa" campaign:

> We read about women and girls in Africa who cannot afford underwear, which is considered to be a luxury, leaving them vulnerable to sexual abuse.

These campaigns completely fit with colonial discourses as another online activist pointed out. While poverty and violence may affect the lives of many women, the additional burden imposed by these campaigns is fundamentally, an attack on people's human dignity. Lucky for us, one tool against this indignity will no doubt continue to exponentially grow as digital mediums and virtual communities continue to organically generate collective parallel, transnational change.

Digital security as feminist practice
Jennifer Radloff

In the beginning

For years communication rights activists encouraged women to get online, to use the new technologies that could be used to connect, mobilise, advocate and bring worlds together in quick and responsive ways. We lobbied via the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), motivated for more language in Section J of the Beijing Platform, hosted workshops to teach women's rights activists to build websites, create and maintain mailing lists and manage digital archives of information. Discussions were included in regional and global conferences on information and communications technology (ICT) for development to insist that the gender digital divide had to be addressed. Gender was raised by women's rights activists in forums as technology was considered "the domain of men." Progressive institutions encouraged women to register for computer degrees and women started creating their own networks of women "techies."

These networks and organisations had as their core work the connection between activism and women's rights work. They were trying to demonstrate that ICTs were not necessarily the preserve of urban, middle-class, resourced people but that it was retrogressive not to engage with the new communication technologies. Although African feminists debated new communication technologies as potentially divisive to the movement, given unequal access and all the "offline" social exclusions which were replicated "online"; we are now seeing appropriation, adaptation and creative engagement with and the use of ICTs.

With the introduction of mobile phone technologies and their increasingly ubiquitous reach, more activists began to see the possibilities of using the internet and digital channels for advocacy, communication and information sharing. ICTs are now being used to advocate, to meet, protest, communicate and interact with new speed and with positive results.

In the mid-1990s we saw the creation of Women'sNet[1] in South Africa, Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)[2] in Uganda and Linux Chix Africa to name a few. Beijing +5 was a particularly interesting time. FLAMME, a network of African women online, committed to strengthening the capacity of women through the use of ICTs to lobby, advocate and participate in the Beijing +5 process was established. What was particularly powerful was the methodology used to develop this platform and network. Women from organisations across Africa gathered together and were trained in various technology skills whilst they built the website. The African initiative was part of a global network called WomenAction[3] whose mission it was to develop a communications network and information-sharing strategy to allow women in every world region to participate in and impact on the five-year review of the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.

And then comes social media

As Web2.0 (Wikipedia, 2013b) and social media use became commonplace, more and more women ventured online and took to digital communications easily. Blogs proliferated and citizen journalism became a popular way for women to write and self-publish on a range of issues. Facebook became not only a social connecting space but a way for activists to reach a wide audience at very little cost. Twitter enabled activists to share, almost in real-time, updates from meetings and conferences and include links to videos, websites and online petitions. People not able to attend important policy spaces could comment and include their opinions. YouTube facilitated the instant uploading of video clips which, for activists on the frontline, enabled violations to be made visible, often being picked up by mainstream media. Photo and music sharing sites gave rise to mashups (blending information from different sources) and challenged traditional notions of copyright. Online conferencing connected people in a virtual space and global organisations can now meet regularly using digital platforms. Skype and Voice Over Internet Protocol enables inexpensive voice and video connections which creates a sense of closeness and deepens virtual relationships.

A parallel phenomenon was the huge increase in the development of mobile applications (apps) which are being used for anything from checking weather, to banking (look at the quick uptake of M-Pesa) to safety apps etc. Cultural theorist, Donna Harraway, one of the first feminists to engage with

the question of cyberspace and the implications of technological advances, published her seminal work "The Cyborg Manifesto" (Harraway, 1990). This prompted academics to begin theorising about the digital body as they saw virtual and physical identities becoming blurred. Women were using technology with more confidence and curiosity and forging spaces to discuss, theorise, train and share skills.

All of this excitement, connectivity and engagement with the positive and creative aspects of communications technology has led to many women using ICTs and social media confidently.

Big Brother's watching and there are monsters out there in cyberspace

What is now increasingly obvious is that the internet and digital tools and spaces have a profound impact on the magnitude of threats and have simultaneously broadened and increased the kinds of surveillance and harassment to which human rights defenders, both men and women, are being subjected. Attacks against women are invariably sexualised and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are often more at risk online (as they are offline) than their male counterparts. Invariably WHRDs can experience more hostility, and at the same time lower levels of protection, compared to their male colleagues.

As Joy Liddicoat says:

> Because they are women, women human rights defenders face many unique threats and obstacles. The reasons include the nature of patriarchal systems for subordination of women, various socially constructed gender roles and norms, and religious and other fundamentalisms which seek to constrain women's public and private lives. This results in restrictions on women's autonomy, freedom of movement, freedom of expression and freedom of association, constraining their activism and their right to be human rights defenders. (Liddicoat, 2013)

Digital threats and combinations of offline and online issues are seriously compromising women's rights activists' freedom of expression and association and their right to participate actively as citizens. This happens in different ways, from monitoring of internet and email traffic, virus and spyware attacks, filtering, censorship, contenting blocking and receiving unwanted emails. These digital threats are not only happening online. Confiscation of computers and corruption of document archives can be as vicious and damaging as online attacks.

One such case which illustrates how offline digital attacks can be damaging occurred in Uganda on 7 May 2012 when police authorities in the Ugandan city of Gulu – a city located approximately 320 kilometres north of Kampala by road – raided a sex-worker drop-in centre. They arrested two staff and three members of the Women's Organisation Network for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA), the organisation that runs the centre.

The raid is in direct violation of the rights of WHRDs at WONETHA. "We find this to be an attack on WONETHA and sex workers' freedom of association, assembly, speech and expression, and we strongly protest against this," says a release by Macklean Kyomya, WONETHA's executive director. Beyond those rights, the raid also raises the question of digital security. One of the three members who was arrested recounts how the raid took place: "They started searching our office in every corner including the dust bin. They connected the computer and asked me the password, and opened the emails we send to our office in Kampala. They asked me if we have a flash disk which I said we didn't… but we have a modem for our Internet. They took it, along with papers, a printer, the cash book, a stapling machine, a puncher, a computer and a CPU" (FD, 2012).

Confiscating the computers enables the police to access private data on sex workers, their names, health status and their contact details. Demanding the passwords to their systems and opening emails puts many people at risk – not only the sex workers, but people who work with them. As activists, we are individuals and organisations connected to others in online spaces. This means that awareness and practice of our safety means securing our communities. As c5, an activist who trains and capacitates activists in digital security says in all her trainings, "We are as secure as the least secure members of our networks."

A more recent example of a digital attack against sexual rights activists occurred in Quito, Ecuador. The website of the Latin America and Caribbean Women's Health Network's (LACWHN) was hacked and disabled and their Facebook page taken down twice. This happened on 21 September 2013 immediately following the launch of several campaign activities including the #28SAbortoLegal social media campaign, part of advocacy initiatives for the September 28 Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion and September 28 Campaign, Day for the Decriminalization of Abortion in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition noted in a statement released shortly after the attacks:

> The WHRD IC believes the digital attack is a deliberate attempt to silence
> legitimate feminist voices, suppress dissent and stifle women's political
> participation in the public sphere on these issues by stigmatization and
> sabotage. The spaces where we, as WHRDs working on sexual rights
> provide information and communicate from on the right to information
> on health and bodily integrity are being systematically attacked.
> (Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, 2013)

It is not known who orchestrated and carried out this attack. It could have
been state actors or non-state actors, individuals who often constitute into
groups and regularly perpetrate sexualised attacks on women, usually through
social media. "Being safe online is not only about protecting ourselves against
governments and corporates but we need to secure our activism and identities
from individual users" (Radloff, 2013).

In 2013 the Association for Progressive Communications conducted a
global survey (Sivori and Zilli, 2013) on risks facing WHRDs working on
sexual rights, including reproductive health and rights, LGBT rights, access to
safe abortion, sexual violence and rape, and sex education: "99% of activists
stated that the internet was a crucial tool for advancing their human rights
work. And yet, 51% reported receiving violent or threatening messages online.
About one third of the sample mentioned intimidation (34%); blocking
and filtering (33%); or censorship (29%). This resulted in 27% of them
discontinuing the work they were doing online."

Many are familiar with the "Arab Spring" which saw thousands of Egyptians
converging on Tahir square, using social media to organise, mobilise and
report on army and police abuses. A popular platform for Egyptian women
to report sexual harassment is Harassmap[10] which encourages women to
speak up against harassers and report incidents via their map. But there is an
underside. The "digital dangers" are multiple and there is now an increased
focus on digital safety and secure online communications for women and
human rights defenders and their organisations who are invariably the ones
targeted for digital attacks. These attacks directed at activist organisations are
now commonplace. Increasingly the internet, which was a revolutionary space,
mostly ungoverned and open, is now a contested space with governments
regulating through curtailing freedom of expression and association as they
see the power it gives citizens.

To illustrate the lengths to which repressive states will go in using digital
channels to surveil and track and trap activists is the Syrian Electronic Army

(Wikipedia, 2013a). It is aligned to the Syrian President and uses strategies such as Denial of Service attacks, defacement, spreading of viruses and malware (or malicious software) and creating fake Facebook profiles to entrap activists. Razan Ghazzawi, a Syrian blogger, campaigner and activist, was arrested by Syrian authorities and charged with spreading false information and weakening national sentiment. Although she was released after a month of imprisonment, she still could face 15 years imprisonment for her online activism.

Violence against women continues, this time mediated via technology

In the mid-2000s, communication activists started seeing cases of attacks against women via digital channels. Technology was being used as a medium of tracking, harassing and abusing women. Women leaving abusive relationships were tracked using geolocation or the abusive partner was reading their browsing history to find out where they were seeking advice or shelter. It wasn't only online that these abuses were proliferating. In Uganda there were two cases of women being murdered by their husbands who read SMS messages on their wives' mobile phones from unknown numbers and assumed they were being unfaithful (Fialova and Fascendini, 2011). In South Africa, young women are being raped with their rapists recording the violations using mobile phones and sending these abusive videos viral.

In 2012, seven young men were charged with gang-raping a mentally handicapped teenage girl and recording the act on a mobile-phone video that then went viral. This is not an isolated incident. Consensual and intimate photographs are circulated or morphed and manipulated when relationships end and one partner turns abusive. The internet does not forget and once an image or words are uploaded, the control of these is lost. Re-vicimisation is inevitable.

Technology-related violence against women is pernicious, frightening and often treated by police and institutions as "not that serious" as there is no physical evidence of harm. But the harm is profound and damaging. Technology related violence impacts women as seriously as other forms of violence. The frightening part is that often the attackers cannot be identified. In some instances it is state actors using surveillance and monitoring to track and infiltrate organisations or it could be non-state actors who want to take down the digital spaces occupied by activists.

A high-profile incident which illustrates the misogynistic and profoundly violent nature of technology-related violence is the Anita Sarkeesian

case. Sarkeesian is a media critic and the creator of Feminist Frequency, a video webseries that explores the representations of women in pop culture narratives.[13] She was raising funds for a series of videos "exploring female charactersterotypes throughout the history of the gaming industry" (Sarkeesian, 2012). A campaign against Sarkeesian began which included calls for her to be gangraped and emails sent to her that contained images of her being raped by video game characters. It culminated in the "Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian" "game" which allowed gamers to punch her image until the screen turned red with her "blood." This harassment and blatant misogyny would be unacceptable offline but an online culture which is deeply male and accepting of this kind of violence, exposes how people do not take technology-related violence against women seriously.

Although generally, policymakers, police and the justice system lag behind in ways of apprehending and prosecuting abusers using technology to perpetuate violence and intimidation, there are some positive gains. South Africa recently introduced protection orders via the Anti-harassment Law "enabling South Africans to approach the courts for protection from sexual harassment – including harassment via SMS or email. Those hiding behind anonymity to send offensive SMSes will be able to be traced because the Act compels service providers to give the addresses and ID numbers of offenders when asked to do so by the courts" (SouthAfrica.info, 2013).

At the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2013, the Association for Progressive Communications Women's Rights Programme (Association for Progressive Communications, 2013a) presented a statement on violence against women and information and communications technology. They pointed out that: "Since 2006, cyberstalking, online harassment, image manipulation, and privacy violations have increasingly become part of intimate partner violence and sexual harassment. This compromises women and girls' safety online and off-line in many countries (Fialova and Fascendini, 2011). These technology-related forms of violence against women cause psychological and emotional harm, reinforce prejudice, damage reputation, cause economic loss and pose barriers to participation in public life. Reporting and responses of these violations are generally limited and the harm and abuse are poorly understood" (Association for Progressive Communications, 2013b).

They further define how ICTs are changing the way that women experience violence. To summarise what they identify:

Anonymity: Widespread usage of digital technology has increased the potential for an abuser to remain anonymous.

Automation: The automation enabled by ICTs allows abusers to check their partners' mobile phones for SMSs, monitor social networking activity, check their browser history and log into their personal accounts with little effort in ways that do not require any special knowledge or skills.

Action at a distance: ICTs permit sexual harassers to send abusive messages from anywhere in the world to anywhere in the world. This makes it more difficult for a survivor to identify and take action against an abuser. This violation is a result of multiple actions done at a distance without contact with the victim.

Affordability: New ICTs have also significantly reduced the difficulty and cost of production and propagation of information. Anyone with a mobile phone can take and upload images or videos. One-to-many and many-to-many distribution through one click in an email application, Facebook or YouTube allow the images to be replicated thousands of times at no cost.

Propagation: In cyberspace settings abuse can happen every day, all year round. The internet "records everything and forgets nothing." The continuous traffic of harassing text and images makes it hard if not impossible to track down and stop further circulation. Moreover, the propagation of texts and images re-victimises women.

Taking back the tech!

Given the positive uses of ICTs in women's rights activism and the increased access to the digital tools that can create change, how do activists ensure their digital safety? At the core of it is the fact that we are as secure as the least secure person in our networks. Taking digital safety seriously is a responsibility each activist should take to heart. Digital security is now necessarily central to our activism. A mantra we should chant repeatedly! The first step is being personally safe. This will mean that your community will not be compromised through you. If you are part of an organisation or network, discuss issues of digital safety, create a policy for all members to adhere to.

The second step to to build knowledge around digital safety.

- Know how the internet works. This enables you to see where the potential threats come from.
- Keep your computer healthy. Condomise! Ensure that you regularly update your anti-virus package as viruses are dangerous and can contain spyware.

– Protect the data on your computer. Password protect your computer and encrypt sensitive data. Securely delete old files using Ccleaner.
– Search the internet securely using https everywhere and regularly clear your browsing history.
– There are many ways that people can gain access to our private accounts that never entail actual hacking, but one of the most common is our own poor password management. Find out what the risks are, and how to build better passwords and practice.
– Mobile phones are ubiquitous and used by many activists to connect, communicate and to mobilise. They can also be used to track and monitor someone's location or private communication. Learn how to better protect your privacy on mobile phones.
– Social media platforms can create vulnerabilities that we need to guard against. Make sure that you read the privacy statements of platforms such as Facebook and twitter. Do not upload compromising photos and never upload or tag people without their permission. Keep your passwords or passphrases safe, change them regularly and remember to logout once you have finished. (Radloff, 2013)

There are organisations that are developing toolkits and guides for activists to be safe online. Networks are organising digital security trainings and in most ICT capacity-building workshops, digital safety is a core module. Increasingly there is a realisation that there is no "one size fits all" approach that is effective in digital security. Particular communities face different threats. An example of this is the Tactical Technology Collective who have developed a toolkit for Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender activists in the Middle East and North Africa Region. They have named this "security in context" in order to contextualise digital security threats for LGBT persons and human rights defenders from the Arabic-speaking countries, as well as the tools and tactics that can be used for overcoming them (Tactical Technology Collective, 2013). Sexual rights activists and those working to combat violence against women face particular, usually sexualised threats and need the strategies and responses to defend themselves from particular threats.

Feminist agency
Responses to the digital dangers are seeing activists finding new solutions and approaches to the threats. We know that new technologies are changing women's realities and they can be developed and appropriated to support

and facilitate women's rights agendas (Feminist Tech Exchange, 2009). Examples include the Take Back the Tech campaign which "is a collaborative campaign that takes place during the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. It is a call to everyone - especially women and girls - to take control of technology to end violence against women" (Take Back the Tech, no date). The #orangeday campaign organised by the Secretary-General's "UNiTE to End Violence against Women" campaign has proclaimed the 25th of every month as Orange Day to highlight issues relevant to preventing and ending violence against women and girls. ihollaback is a movement to end street harassment with platforms in 22 countries and 64 cities around the world documenting, mapping, and sharing incidents of street harassment.[3] Breakthrough, an organisation in India, is developing a data-driven digital toolkit to reduce gender-based violence to enable anyone to launch an effective anti-violence campaign.

As feminists we need to ensure that these digital dangers don't push us (and policymakers) towards a protectionist stance but that women and girls claim their agency and take back the tech!

Now be Safe! Resources on practical steps to defend yourself

Be Safe – Take Back the Tech resources
https://www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe

Digital Security First Aid kit for Human Rights Defenders
https://www.apc.org/en/irhr/digital-security-first-aid-kit

Security in a Box from the Tactical Technology Collective
https://securityinabox.org/

Endnotes

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2. Available at <http://www.feministfrequency.com/>
3. Available at <http://www.ihollaback.org/>

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Is the success of M-Pesa empowering Kenyan rural women?

Oumy Khairy Ndiaye

M-Pesa ("M" for mobile, *pesa* is Swahili for money) is one of the most celebrated success stories in information and communication technologies (ICTs) allowing poor communities to access a revolutionary bank service. The mobile phone allows immediate money transfers from town to village and vice versa with consequence on time and money savings, rapid solutions to daily problems affecting vulnerable communities, opening up to new ways of managing the cash flows of those whose lives can be improved with very small amounts. At the national level, this technology revolution touches the lives of nearly 70% of Kenyan adults who transfer money to each other via their mobile phones. Kenya ranks number one worldwide in that domain. More than US$320 million is transferred via Kenyan mobile phones each month and this represents roughly a quarter of Kenya's gross national product (GNP). Cash payments are avoided and posters in shops indicate preference for payments via mobile banking.

Numerous videos posted on YouTube show happy rural women using M-Pesa, an illustration of how the change crosses all categories of the population, particularly women who are often left aside by positive technological improvements in Africa. The phenomenon has caught the attention of researchers with an interest in the position of women in the rural economy in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, Danielle White's paper "The Social and Economic Impact of M-Pesa on the Lives of Women in the Fishing Industry on Lake Victoria" (2012) presents an interesting case.

The study targeted communities in Migori County, located on the Kenyan side of Lake Victoria, a population of 1 028 579, relying mostly on fishing in the lake for their source of income. In these communities, the social roles in the artisanal fishing value chain are defined as follow: fishing is considered a

job solely for men. Women may own their own boats but will never partake in fishing. Mostly women do processing and trading, but men are also allowed to partake in this business.

For White, the adoption of M-Pesa has brought significant positive changes for the women.

Firstly, many women now have the ability to save their money in a safe place. They stated that they were much less likely to use their money when they saved it in M-Pesa rather than in their homes. Also, in the past, their husbands often used their money to buy alcohol or other personal items and left them with no money to be able to process fish the following day. With their money saved with M-Pesa, their husbands no longer have easy access to their money. Women now have the ability to save for more costly activities and purchases, helping their families or expanding their business and more importantly, sending their children to school.

Transportation expenses have drastically gone down. This includes the costs of transport and the money the women save since they would have to stop working for a period of time to physically transport the money themselves. They use their money and free time to expand their business and make a greater profit. This most often meant women being able to process more fish to sell, or, for the most audacious, construct their own fishing boats and yield an even greater profit.

White emphasises the case of a college-educated women, very involved in her community. Using M-Pesa allowed her to have better gains and more "free time and since she was well educated and fluent in Kiswahili, Dholuo, and English, she was able to attend different conferences, meetings, and trainings in the area. Not only did she often make a small profit by attending these events, but also she was able to use the knowledge she gained there in her own community. As a local leader, she is experienced in topics from maternal health, to female empowerment, to business strategies and shares her knowledge with the local community" (p.18). The use of M-Pesa makes women more independent (81% of interviewees); they no longer have to rely on others for money.

M-Pesa has changed relations between men and women with more trust between fishermen and processors. Women are saving using M-Pesa and are able to pay for the quantity of fish they take rather than taking on credit.

Gain of confidence among the women of this fishing community is illustrated by the fact that after discovering the multiple benefits of M-Pesa, many women now consider accessing more financial services including a bank account. They see the benefits of combining a bank account for their savings and M-Pesa for keeping small amounts and transactions. Many formal banks offer this option in the very responsive Kenyan banking system. The positive impact of M-Pesa on the women of this Luo fishing community cannot be refuted. As White concludes very correctly, "The study could also be expanded to research the impact of M-Pesa in industries other than the fishing industry."

Morawczynski and Pickens (2009) see women in the position of "rural recipients" in the use of M-Pesa, as opposed to the "urban senders" who are men. The study in Kibera, an informal settlement near Nairobi, gathering more than one million migrants from rural areas, and Bukura a village where recipients of money transfers sent from Kibera via M-Pesa live.

"In Kibera, a majority of customers are young men. Customers deposit money into M-Pesa and transfer money to their rural relatives. In Bukura, a majority of customers are women and retirees" (2009: 1). The two researchers have a surprising understanding of the empowerment of women by mobile banking:

> M-Pesa empowers rural women by making it easier for them to solicit funds from their husbands and other contacts in the city. The mobile phone, in conjunction with M-Pesa, is a powerful tool for mobilizing remittances. Before these technologies were introduced, rural women had to travel to the city or post office by bus to get money. They then had to travel back to the village. This process could take over a week. Now they can use a mobile phone to request a remittance and receive it at a nearby agent, making it easier for rural women to solicit funds from their husbands in the city. It is also easier for them to solicit cash from other contacts when their husbands refuse to make the transfers. This has increased the financial autonomy of the women and has made them less dependent on their husbands for their livelihoods. (2009: 3–4)

Given the rapid development of mobile money solutions, soliciting funds from husbands in the cities makes it impossible for husbands to have an excuse for not sending money when a family member informs them of the need. People know that services are available everywhere.

In the past, it was not rare that women give their money to their husband

to keep for them. Some husbands would return it when they requested it, others would not. M-Pesa is a saving system that gives women the choice of managing their money independently.

It might be convenient to have a good tool to make it easier to solicit funds, but I don't share the view that it empowers rural women. This is because money that women get just by soliciting it, cannot empower women because the person you solicit from may or may not give it. Empowerment has more to do with a training, a loan, or any other opportunity to earn and manage money differently. Plyler *et al* in their publication "Community-Level Economic Effects of M-Pesa in Kenya: Initial Findings" (2010) focus on economic effects at the community level. The survey was conducted in two districts (Murang'a and Kitui) with a large percentage of the population in rural areas and a town centre and also in Kibera, the slum close to Nairobi.

Their findings show that women rank number one in improved money security. With M-Pesa, they can accumulate cash and keep it secure from pickpockets, but also from their husbands. The gain in privacy and control on their expenses is very important.

Also, rural women are more concerned with food security than rural men, but urban men place more importance in it than urban women. This is because women and men have different roles in ensuring that the family is fed. Rural women bear the responsibility of feeding the family; they will produce subsistence crops while men will produce cash crops. The men in urban zones who migrated to find jobs in town usually send most of what they earn to families in the villages and are more numerous than women who migrate from rural zones to cities for the same reasons.

This feature is directly linked to the increased money circulation and expansion of local markets observed since the adoption of M-Pesa. Men and women view health and education as areas where M-Pesa has significantly increased human capital accumulation. This is largely because M-Pesa creates conditions for improving networking and circulation of cash from urban to rural areas which allows for new opportunities in addressing education and health issues.

M-Pesa doesn't only have advantages: the researchers mention that women business owners said that while M-Pesa saved them money by allowing them to send payments directly to their suppliers instead of traveling to Nairobi or another city, it also reduced their control of the quality of goods delivered.

The researchers acknowledge the need for additional investigation to better assess the impact of M-Pesa on food and water security seen as key elements of sustainable community level development.

The review of this sample of publications clearly provides some answers to my initial questions on how M-Pesa increases the empowerment of rural women in the following areas:

- New acquisition of skills
- Control of cash making a difference in their relations with the men
- Capacity of women to voice their specific needs that M-Pesa can solve
- New striking opportunities created for women by M-Pesa

These categories are consistent with the five domains selected by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative for the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WAIE).

The categories of the WAIE are:

- Production (input in productive decisions, autonomy in production)
- Resources (ownership of assets, purchase, sale, or transfer of assets, access to and decisions on credit)
- Income (control over use of income)
- Leadership (group member, speaking in public)
- Time (workload, leisure)

Yes, M-Pesa has shown a tremendous potential to allow rural women to satisfy the criteria of the WAIE and be sustainably empowered, but we need more research to measure more accurately this potential and assess the gaps. This knowledge would provide a solid basis for the design of new field projects using M-Pesa with a distinctive objective of empowering rural women.

Research in Kenya and other African countries where mobile banking is developing rapidly in rural areas should be strongly encouraged to go deeper in the topic and provide a solid base for identifying the real advantages (and possible disadvantages) of the mobile banking revolution on the socio-economic conditions of rural women. Such an appeal targets Universities with Agriculture and Gender programmes, CGIAR Research Centres or service providers, for example International Food Policy Institute, IFPRI, and African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD).

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Contributors

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Jan Moolman is a feminist editor, writer, trainer and activist with extensive experience in the South and southern African women's rights sector. Her entry point into women's rights has been through media - she is a former editor of *Agenda*, South Africa's longest surviving feminist journal; newspaper columnist; and contributor to a number of publications dealing with women's rights issues. Previously, she worked as the Media and Information Manager at Women'sNet and at the Southern African NGO Network (SANGONeT). Jan conducted training and capacity building for South African NGOs in the use of social media to deepen and support their work. Jan currently works as the Women's Rights Project Coordinator at the Association for Progressive Communications where her work focuses on the intersection of violence against women and technology. Jan is also a digital storytelling trainer.

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