African Women in Digital Spaces Redefining Social Movements on the Continent and in the Diaspora by Msia Kibona Clark and Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers Ltd, 2023

Amanda Odoi

Social media activism has become a pivotal global tool in recent decades for pushing and extending the feminist agenda, particularly among young feminists. With the widespread availability of smartphones and easy access to social media platforms, users now have access to a plethora of information on subjects ranging from news and gossip to fashion and social issues. Such platforms have also become a hub for socialisation and timely updates on social issues. These technological advancements have provided feminists with opportunities for activism previously unavailable to them. With the presence of these spaces, feminists have a wider audience, a community for mobilisation and a reach to push an agenda in a shorter period than before. While young feminists largely dominate the use of these tools and spaces, the affordances that come with them transcend these demographics. Digital spaces offer a lot of room for activists, young and old, and (non) feminists to share, learn, offer support, and build community. It is well documented that activists in several countries on the continent have used these digital spaces to mobilise and build movements for interrogating systems and structures and strongly promote change on and off social media.

As a nascent field of activism and research exploration globally, however, questions are still raised about the sufficiency and effectiveness of using these spaces for feminist activism, especially on the continent. This review does not, therefore, seek to extend this debate or critique the book on the grounds of its utility, but rather to highlight its importance to the existing conversations around digital space feminist activism in Africa. Various sections of this book iterate the utility criticisms against digital space media activism. Yet there is also evidence from previous works mentioned in the book, and from contributors' own research, on the usefulness of digital space activism for mobilising to confront

systemic discrimination in general and for extending the work of feminists in particular. I believe, therefore, that what is imperative now is for feminists to extend the debate by looking at how we can enhance these spaces and harness the opportunities therein. This book offers us the space to begin such conversations from a wider scope - exploring a connection between experiences on the continent and others elsewhere.

While there is some literature on digital space activism on the continent and in the diaspora, the unique feature of this book is that it connects the continent with the diaspora, teasing out the similarities and nuanced experiences and the unique communities Africans are building among themselves to challenge the status quo, create safe spaces, and sustain their identities. It thus offers readers and feminists a broader perspective on the issues and room to draw lessons from digital spaces activism for the feminist community and agenda. The book brings together authors from diverse backgrounds to explore the "intersectional experiences of African women"(1) and how African women and activists use social media platforms to build communities and mobilize to interrogate injustices, highlight and gain recognition on various issues of interest to feminists. This grounding of the book in the deep and rich perspectives and experiences of African women makes it an invaluable and contextually relevant contribution to the ongoing discussions across the continent. At the same time, the authors draw connections between their work and transnational digital resistance to oppressive social structures. They acknowledge the impact of international and regional hashtag movements such as #metoo, #Balancetonporc, and #menaretrash on building effective communities around issues in the digital spaces. Hashtags have become the fastest means to make a topic of interest visible in social media engagement. They allow users to connect and group conversations around specific issues, making the problems brief and concise for an audience to locate and articulate. Given the sensationalism of hashtags, they offer feminist digital activists a lot of leverage. This book and the work done by the various contributors and activists, their successes and failures, offer readers who are new to digital activities the resources to engage in online activities and ways to navigate such spaces effectively. It opens new doors to conversations while offering the tools for enhancing the utility of social media activism.

The chapters employ diverse online and offline feminist-centred theoretical and methodological approaches (and data sources)— poems, personal essays, digital archives/netnography, and interviews— to document and share their observations and experiences of how African women within and outside of the continent challenge and mobilise for social change. An intriguing feature of this text is that the authors are themselves either active users in the various spaces they used as data collection sites or are actual participants in the movements they documented. These digital spaces they engaged also served as the points of recruitment and engagement of authors and reviewers by the editors as well as respondents by authors, thereby making the shared experiences on the successes and failures in using digital spaces for feminist activism relevant for building on the lessons learned and theories developed around feminist digital activism on the continent. Their experiences and how they navigate these spaces as feminists and activists are also important for other activists working and writing about such spaces. A concentration on the use of African feminist theories also addresses a critical concern in feminist literature on the continent.

The book's content is categorised under three broad themes: (1) identity: race, gender, sexuality, religion; (2) African feminist voices in protest; and (3) cyberfeminism through African feminist and black feminist lenses. The texts presented under these main ideas are further categorised along the lines of issues reflecting the themes and methodologies employed by the authors.

Identity: race, gender, sexuality and religion (33-81). This theme sets the tone for the book and highlights the unique but connected experiences of four young African women who confront and deal with the challenges of race, religion and the colonial legacies of belonging, as well as the appropriate presentation and performance of sexualities and beauty standards. The authors share their exploratory journey of challenging systemic racism and oppression, sexual norms and hair standards, and finding community through them. These texts show how social media has become a mobilising, learning, unlearning, and sharing space where people deepen their knowledge of issues they struggle with, build a community around the issues, understand the struggles of others, and, in turn, build homes and offer support in activist circles. The texts show that social media is a promising space for challenging the lingering effect of the deep-seated colonial body and sexuality standards and for continuous

reflection on our histories, challenging such norms and generating new areas of knowledge. For example, readers may find the text "Navigating the Desire for Cultural Belonging Using Digital Queer African Communities' Addresses" useful in the current dispensation of pushback against LGBTQ+ persons on the African continent. Knowing alternative ways in which queer persons can build community amid legalisations against them would be useful for LGBTQ+ persons and allies. This resource can be very helpful for minority groups, activists, and advocates who have not yet considered creating their own safe spaces. It is worth exploring the opportunities available to them and tapping into existing spaces to build communities, create safe spaces, and advance their work. The section on African Feminist: Voices in Protest (85-215) documents empirical research on digital space gender-based violence (GBV) protests. African feminists have always employed diverse tools and spaces, including media, to protest, build community, and sensitise the public on women's plight. While these have always made an impact and garnered a laudable reach and response, the discussions in these chapters highlight an additional benefit: the ability to easily send messages across different geographical locations and gain support for their agenda in a short period of time. This flexibility has proven to be a valuable asset in advancing their cause. The literature shows the mobilising strength of social media platforms and the effectiveness of hashtag campaigns in raising awareness and achieving social justice. The chapter entitled "Stoking the Fires: Black Feminist Activism in the 21st Century and the #MuteRKelly Movement" documents how Tasha K, through her YouTube platforms, shifted the discourse on R. Kelly's sexual abuses and sustained public scrutiny of him and possibly contributed to his incarceration. The "Not Your Colour, Not Your Size, Not Your Spec: Marching Against Market Harassment and Molestation in Nigeria" shows how, through the #MarketMarch2018, women in Nigeria mobilised to raise awareness on sexual harassment suffered by market women in the country. The images shared garnered support beyond the country. This section will resonate with those struggling against GBV in every country across the continent. It is also a great resource on how those in the field of GBV on the continent can sustain conversations on the issue and work to secure justice.

Cyberfeminism: From African Feminist and Black Feminist lenses (219- 352) takes up the debate on the utility of digital space activism for feminists. The text examines the social and physical status of rural and queer women, as well as the feminist work undertaken online. It explores the opportunities and challenges of connecting digital and grassroots feminist activism. The literature reveals how these two spaces connect to shape activism and achieve social justice by showing their interdependence and its usefulness for successful feminist advocacy. For successful activism, feminists and activists in the stories shared how they employ multiple methodologies, including building allyship online and on the ground. The discussion on "Digital Activism: Centering Marginalised Voices in Activist Work" and "Um Sabe Kem Mi Eh *I Know Who I am* Transnational Kriolas" shows how feminist understanding of power and cultural capital was important in online feminist work. The chapters also show the "cultural influence on digital" activism. For example, the discussions highlight nuanced ways in which misogyny and patriarchy transcend the physical space into digital activism spaces, exposing women and LGBTQ+ persons to oppression and discrimination in such spaces. Finally, the contributors acknowledge that social media activism has its limitations and should not be solely relied on for bringing about change. The section is useful for feminists, activists, academics, and researchers who wish to effectively navigate social media spaces for activism and for research.

Overall, this rich and insightful book is an excellent reference point for feminist activists on the ground and is well-placed to contribute to debates about African feminism and social media. A focus on the campaigns on the ground makes this relevant to activists across the continent. It is a useful resource for enhancing and expanding feminist activism and research. The themes explored and gaps identified offer researchers, activists and advocates a view into the shifts occurring in the activism ecosystem and new spaces requiring attention. The shift to social media for community building and learning requires advocates and service providers to shift their knowledge creation and capacity-building activities to such spaces for a wider reach.