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THE WORLD WIDE WEB OF WOMEN: A CASE IN FAVOR OF GLOBAL FEMINIST
COALITIONS IN THE INFORMATION AGE

A Thesis
presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

HANNAH PHILLIPS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to argue that online feminist coalitions can be both locally specific and globally accessible. Postcolonial feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her 1984 article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” argues that there is no real evidence to classify all women as a “Woman” because cultural differences and imbalances of power create a myriad of experiences that cannot be homogenized. However, Mohanty is not arguing that women do not have individual experiences with gender injustice. On the contrary, all women have experiences with gender injustice; these experiences are simply all not the same. It is actually more recognizable now with the inception of and wide use of the social internet that women experience imbalances of power in different ways. The social internet cannot replace grassroots movements and real-life interaction, but it can be used as a tool to spread information and to foster global interconnectedness. This thesis will conduct case studies of two active, online, notably modern feminists of color, Mona Eltahawy and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, to prove that online feminist coalitions can be locally specific, globally accessible, personally defined, and irrefutably positive in the fight against gender injustice.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the people who have always supported me in my spirit of learning; most notably my parents, my professors, my family, and my life-long friends. This work is also dedicated to the women who have encouraged me and inspired me in my life - they are stronger than they know.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The world in which I feel a moral pull to intervene is the world of the privileged in which I participate as an equal, not the world of village women elsewhere. . . Others may choose differently. But I hope that it will be on the basis of careful analysis, critical self-reflection, and constant recognition of our common humanity, a humanity subjected to different forces and expressed in different registers.”

- Lila Abu-Lughod, Do Muslim Women Need Saving?

In June of 1975, women leaders from all over the world gathered in Mexico City, Mexico for the first World Conference of the International Women’s Year held by the United Nations. National governments and NGOs alike gathered for the two-week conference to end global gender discrimination and better the involvement of women in global politics. Following the conference, the United Nations published a “Report of the World Conference of the International Women’s Year.” The first chapter of the report, titled “Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and Their Contribution to Development and Peace, 1975,” lists the intentions and recognitions of the conference. The report includes a recognition of the one glaring similarity between all women:

Women of the entire world, whatever differences exist between them, share the painful experience of receiving or having received unequal treatment, and that as their awareness of this phenomenon increases they will become natural allies in the struggle against any form of oppression, such as is practised under colonialism, neo-colonialism, zionism, racial discrimination and apartheid, thereby constituting an enormous revolutionary potential for economic and social change in the world today. (United Nations 9)

The belief and the claim were that all women of the entire world innately share the experience of receiving unequal treatment as compared to men, and the hope of the IWY conference was for women to become aware of their oppression and come together to create a global revolution of women. This recognition was easier said than done.

The conference became better known for its problems; centrally, a dispute between American feminist icon Betty Friedan and Bolivian labor leader Domitila Barrios de Chungara. Barrios de Chungara allegedly criticized Friedan for prioritizing the Western feminist ideal and homogenizing all women. Domitila Barrios de Chungara was a leader in the Bolivian anti-junta movement of the 1970s and led the Housewives' Committee of Siglo XX union. Siglo XX is a tin mine in Bolivia that was directly victimized by a Bolivian military regime led by President René Barrientos. The Housewives' Committee of Siglo XX was founded by wives of imprisoned striking miners, and its goal was to protect the rights of miners and their families who were living in poverty and in fear of Barrientos' regime. According to the article titled "Recasting Global Feminisms: Toward a Comparative Historical Approach to Women's Activism and Feminist Scholarship," "Barrios de Chungara had been jailed and tortured and lost four children to state violence as a consequence of her activism," so Barrios de Chungara was (and is) unarguably a live-or-die activist for human rights (Lal 13). What, then, is the difference between *human* rights and *women's* rights?

According to Barrios de Chungara, the two are interchangeable. Barrios de Chungara, as a woman justice leader in Bolivia, was invited to the IWY conference, but notable, non-governmental Western feminist Betty Friedan, was said to have undermined Barrios de Chungara and the work of the Housewives' Committee of Siglo XX for being too male focused. Barrios de Chungara is quoted as saying that Friedan "asked us to stop our 'warlike activity' and

said that we were being ‘manipulated by men,’ that ‘we only thought about politics,’ and that we’d ‘completely ignored women’s problems’” (Barrios de Chungara in Lal 14). Barrios de Chungara goes on to argue that women’s problems are not separate from men’s problems - on the contrary, human rights issues are just that, *human* rights issues; in calling for equality, women’s rights cannot be separate from men’s rights when they are both being dehumanized by an abusive capitalist power.

Barrios de Chungara is not the only one who reportedly criticized Friedan for her miscalculation of women’s rights versus human rights; American WIN News leader and NOW member Fran Hosken is quoted as saying the following to Friedan in a letter prior to the IWY conference:

It is utterly irresponsible that you muscle in and begin to shout at an audience that, had they wanted you to speak, would have asked you. This kind of behavior is intolerable internationally and you must consider that you do not speak for yourself: there are a majority of American women who do not want you to speak for them; and you are not doing yourself or feminists or the feminist movement any favor at all. . . . You should also finally realize that the position of American middle class women or their views of ‘liberation’ including yours are entirely irrelevant to the majority of women around the world and simply have nothing to offer to their way of life, culture or well being. You should LISTEN and not shout at them. (Hosken quoted in Olcott 119)

Friedan fell into the trap of believing that the “painful experience of . . . unequal treatment” prescribed by the United Nations meant “unequal treatment” is created equal. “Unequal treatment” is a vague, loaded term that can encompass any number of situations. “Unequal treatment” could, in a certain context, be objective, but in the global context of individual

women's lives it is also *subjective*. Human interaction, no matter the context, is complex, and it is especially difficult when the people involved are seemingly similar only because of their gender identities.

Jocelyn Olcott, professor of history at Duke University and author of the historiography of the 1975 IWY conference titled *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History*, tries to reframe and refocus the inevitable divide of the conference to argue that "arguments," such as the one between Friedan and Barrios de Chungara (between Global Southern and Western representatives), should not have been the focal point of the conference and do not have to be proof that global coalitions of women are not possible. Olcott argues in her historiography that the resounding result of the IWY conference was not the negative propaganda claiming that women cannot work together and global gender issues cannot be cooperated; the real, resounding effect of the conference was about finding the similarities amongst the differences. I am interested in how we can specify differences in order to theorize universal concerns more fully. What are 'universal' feminist principles and what are 'differences' that may make us posit the 'wrong' feminist principles? How and why was Friedan wrong and Barrios de Chungara right? Can it ever be quite that *simple*?

It is not wrong to claim that reproductive rights are feminist principles. It is, arguably, not even wrong to claim that reproductive rights are 'universal' feminist principles rather than simply a 'Western' feminist principle. I do not think that we can claim that any feminist principle is wrong or short-sided. Progress is progress no matter what form it takes. Progress, though, is not necessarily linear. Bolivian wives and mothers fearing for the lives of themselves and their families during the military takeover in the 1970s were, I'm sure, not unconcerned with their reproductive rights. But they were arguably *more* concerned for their human rights to life, work,

and justice. Human rights are always women's rights, and, through the process of *listening*, Friedan could have realized that. In fact, you and I can realize that as well through *listening*.

The question remains, however: How far have we come since 1975? How can we learn from Betty Friedan's mistake at prescribing what feminism can and cannot be. While there are still conferences and trans-national gatherings of leaders in gender politics around the world, everyday ordinary women do not have to be political leaders or world-renowned activists to interact. On the contrary, the internet has allowed for interactions between people from all over the world. The problem being that these relationships are parasocial to a degree, but that is not an excuse to disregard online relationships completely. It is possible to create deep, long-distance friendships with other feminists around the world. To LISTEN, as Hosken tells Friedan to do, to what others have to say. However, scholars and activists alike have argued for decades - in fact, for centuries - that there is not a universal standard of womanhood; that there is no universal concept of feminism; that it is impossible for coalitions of women to come together over gender.

Chandra Mohanty and Early Postcolonial Feminism

In the 1980s, just a few short years following the IWY conference, feminist scholarship was turning a corner towards postcolonial feminism. Transnational and global feminisms emerged in the context of second wave, mostly white, feminisms in the United States beginning in the 1980s, but global feminisms at the time assumed that all women around the world experienced all of the same problems (as Friedan assumed). That being said, some feminist scholars and theorists criticized the concept of a "global feminism," and argued that such a global, transnational, unionizing feminism was not possible in reality.

Before considering specific feminist theorists, it is pertinent to include some definitions and frameworks of transnational feminisms. Firstly, this chapter will focus on Chandra Mohanty

and her work in feminist theory beginning in the 1980s. During the 1980s, *intersectional feminism* was beginning to be defined. In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectional feminism. Crenshaw recently defined the term in a *Time* interview as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Crenshaw in “Intersectional Feminism”). People experience overlapping forms of expression and overlapping identities, and each cannot be separated from the other. In the 1980s, feminist scholarship was not only considering these various, overlapping identities on a local scale in the United States, but also on a global scale.

This thesis will refer to intersectionality as well as transnationalism, globalization, and postcolonialism. I will mostly use “transnational,” “global,” and “postcolonial” interchangeably in this project, but each term does have separate meanings and histories in the field of academia. According to Revathi Krishnaswamy, postcolonialism and globalization theory developed separately in academic discourse, but are often lumped together. Krishnaswamy gives a detailed explanation of the history and use of both theoretical fields:

Postcolonialism evolved mainly in the humanities, whereas globalization theory evolved mainly in the social sciences. Postcolonialism focuses largely on a Eurocentric colonial past and examines how subaltern practices and productions in the non-Western peripheries responded to Western domination. Globalization theory concentrates largely on a post/neocolonial present and examines how contemporary Western practices and productions affect the rest of the world. (Krishnaswamy 2)

For the purpose of modern day feminist theory and activism, ‘postcolonialism’ and ‘globalization’ both serve the current conversation because feminisms often happen at the *intersection* of the humanities and the social sciences. Additionally, sociopolitical movements

cannot be separated from the past *and* are being created in the present, so postcolonial feminism and global feminism can be one in the same. Movements are now often transnational in that they cross geographical and imaginary national boundaries (i.e. through the internet), so transnational feminism can also be synonymous with postcolonial and global feminism. The question remains, however, does a transnational/postcolonial/global feminism actually exist, or is it simply theoretical?

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's groundbreaking gender theory article, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," which was first published in 1984, considers the subject of the "Third World Woman" in Western feminism. Mohanty, essentially, is taking up the problem of homogenization in feminist studies. Mohanty focuses her argument around writings from the *Zed Press* because, at the time she wrote this article, the *Zed Press's* "Women in the Third World" series was the "only contemporary series. . . which assumes that 'women in the Third World' is a legitimate and separate subject of study and research'" ("Under Western Eyes" 355n9). Mohanty uses these writings as an entrypoint to make her argument that "Third World women" are not a homogenous group. In fact, she argues that there is not a universal homogenous group of "women" at all. There is no real evidence to classify all women as a "Woman" because cultural differences and imbalances of power create a myriad of experiences that cannot be homogenized under one umbrella, let alone one universal concept.

Mohanty supports her argument that "'women' as a category of analysis, or: we are all sisters in the struggle" is a false, misguided concept by breaking down the assumptions of what *all* women experience. She dismantles the concepts that "women are victims of male violence," "women are universal dependents," "married women are victims of the colonial process," women are undermined by familial systems, women (particularly Third-World women) are

affected by religious ideologies (particularly Islam), and, finally, women are affected “positively or negatively by economic development policies” (“Under” 337-343). Mohanty elaborates upon how women in the *Zed Press* writings are defined as “victims of male violence,” “victims of the colonial process,” “victims of the Arab familial system,” “victims of the economic development process,” and “victims of the Islamic code” (“Under” 338). Mohanty is not saying that these are not experiences of *some* “Third-World women” (and even some women outside of the Third-World/Global South), but she argues that it can be harmful to the actual women to define them as a “unified ‘Powerless’ group prior to analysis in question” (“Under” 340). Mohanty argues that the problem in defining all “Third World women” as “victims” of x,y, or z is that it assumes an “ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination” (344).

Mohanty goes on to argue that the way to avoid these generalizations is to look at women as members of “socio-economic political groups within particular local contexts” (“Under” 344). I must pause here to elaborate on how capitalism and colonialism are two of Mohanty’s primary subjects, and note, as Mohanty does, that both capitalism and colonialism reinforce power hierarchies that affect people’s individual experiences. The geographical locations that are considered “Third World” have specific socio-economic histories that cannot be separated from the history of imperialism. Most “Third-World” countries in the Global South were once colonized by a “Western” power, and the aftermath of colonialism still affects the economy and the political climate of these countries. Most of these countries do not (and cannot) participate fully in a global economy because they are not capitalist powerhouses such as those associated with the West. The West/Third-World binary is primarily based on economic systems and

economic success, which cannot be separated from colonialism. Mohanty, however, is championing a de-colonized feminist scholarship.

Simply because Third-World women are considered impoverished, Western feminist writers and theorists cannot assume that all Third World women are the same and live the same experiences. In the same manner, simply because Third-World women might identify as women, it cannot be assumed that they all live the same experience. Mohanty suggests that “some writers confuse the use of gender as a superordinate category of organizing analysis with the universalistic proof and instantiation of this category” (“Under” 348). Gender analysis is misunderstood for cross-cultural work. Here she is not arguing that there is no such thing as gender, but that the male/female binary is not a clean cut distinction, particularly when structuring the male/female binary as also powerful/powerless. The powerful/powerless binary can also be applied to the West/Third-World: “In other words, only in so far as ‘Woman/Women’ and ‘the East’ are defined as Others, or as peripheral, that (Western) Man/Humanism can represent him/itself as the center” (353). Historically, the West has been gendered male, and the Third-World has been gendered female. This binary also falls into the man/woman, West/Third-World, powerful/powerless binary, which has been a pivotal argument for postcolonial feminist theorists since “Under Western Eyes” was published in the 1980s.

Mohanty realized that much changed during her career, and in 2003 Mohanty published a response to “Under Western Eyes” titled “Under Western Eyes Revisited.” She makes it clear at the beginning of “Under Western Eyes Revisited” that colleagues encouraged her to support her original argument and also adjust it to fit the contemporary feminist movement as of 2003. That being said, she makes sure to highlight the differences of academic feminisms between 1986 and 2003 and recognizes that her original thoughts have shifted over the course of almost two

decades. Mohanty refers to the scholarly reactions to “Under Western Eyes,” and states that she argued for “grounded, particularized analyses linked with larger, even global, economic and political frameworks, and drew “inspiration from a vision of feminist solidarity across borders, although it is this vision that has remained invisible to many readers” (“Revisited” 501-502). As previously mentioned, Mohanty argues in “Under Western Eyes” that women cannot be grouped together, and that there is no real, homogenous signified for that one signifier.

However, Mohanty does suggest that she believes that there *can be* a real category of “Woman” and that “women,” actual individual humans in the world, can be brought together through *some* similarities even if they cannot be brought together through every aspect of their lives. The category of “Woman” must be a flexible, all-inclusive category. The following passage from “Under Western Eyes Revisited” is a pivotal one to read in conversation with what has already been said about “Under Western Eyes” :

In 1986 my priority was on difference, but now I want to recapture and reiterate its fuller meaning, which was always there, and that is its connection to the universal. In other words, this discussion allows me to reemphasize the way that differences are never just “differences.” In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. *The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully.* It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders. (“Under Western Eyes Revisited” 505, emphasis mine)

Mohanty suggests that differences do not hinder a global feminism, but the differences allow us to see the similarities that are actually there. She suggests that *One-Third World* women can build coalitions with *Two-Thirds World* women (terms that focus on quality of life over geographical location) (“Revisited” 506). She argues specifically that feminists can come together to organize against capitalism. Since women and girls are those most affected by capitalism, Mohanty argues that “It is especially on the bodies and lives of women and girls from the Third World/South—the Two-Thirds World—that global capitalism writes its script” (“Revisited” 514). However, by really giving voice to the women and girls in these communities and taking a look at their daily lives, we can “demystify capitalism as a system of debilitating sexism and racism and envision anticapitalist resistance” (“Revisited” 514). This restructuring happens in the classroom as much as it does in feminist networks, and Mohanty argues that a comparative feminist studies model will breakdown the West/Third-World binary, and will make the One-Third/Two-Thirds model make sense because in showing *differences* we can better understand *commonalities* (“Revisited” 522). Mohanty’s work in postcolonial feminism was not and is not created in a vacuum, and it is necessary for scholars, educators, artists, and activists to provide momentum for action to put postcolonial feminist theory into practice. Mohanty seems to hope that there could be a global feminist coalition, but it has to be one that is brought together through small similarities between people’s lives, and not solely situated around biology or an imaginary “womanly” experience.

Under what conditions can global coalitions of women be created separate from power structures, colonial hierarchies, capitalism, and cultural differences? Mohanty offers this hope for global coalitions of women:

A transnational feminist practice depends on building feminist solidarities across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on. In these very fragmented times it is both very difficult to build these alliances and also never more important to do so. Global capitalism both destroys the possibilities and also offers up new ones. (“Revisted” 530)

Here, Mohanty was referring to the “very fragmented times” of the world just two years following the events of September 11, 2001, but the times today are also still fragmented. It remains just as important to build alliances, possibly even more so, today. Mohanty suggests that global capitalism can destroy the possibilities of solidarities, *but* it can also offer new opportunities. Global capitalism and the process of globalization have opened up a number of possibilities for solidarity including interdisciplinary feminist scholarship and, significantly, the internet.

The Information Age

Mohanty’s theory and academic work has grown since her 1984 article as a young academic. In 2018, Mohanty and Linda E. Carty edited an anthology titled, *Feminist Freedom Warriors, Genealogies, Justice, Politics, and Hope* inspired by an online, digital video archive of the same name that began in 2015. Ultimately, this project is about hope and features talks by women who are powerhouses of interdisciplinary feminist work around the globe including Angela Y. Davis, Himani Bannerji, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Amina Mama, Barbara Smith, Aída Hernández Castillo, and Zillah Eisenstein. The first line of introduction of the anthology reads, “This book is a labor of love and sisterhood,” which is obviously supporting the concept of “sister-comrades” around the globe (*Feminist Freedom Warriors* 2). Mohanty and Carty go on to say that the women included in the book “speak about their different and similar place-based

genealogies of political engagements in anticapitalist, antiracist, anti-imperialist, LGBT, women's liberation, and indigenous feminist movements in the United States, Canada, Mexico/Latin America, India, and the Asian and African diasporas" (*Feminist Freedom Warriors* 3, emphasis mine). Mohanty's and Carty's decision to list "different" before "similar" here harkens back to what Mohanty argues in "Under Western Eyes" and "Under Western Eyes Revisited": differences can create more of a movement than similarities. The differences can reveal the similarities. The introduction to *Feminist Freedom Warriors* has a header titled "Building Coalitions and Solidarity across Struggles," because this project is ultimately about building coalitions. The first sentence says that "the politics of coalition building is even more necessary now than in the past" because of neoliberalism and militarized regimes, but the present as a time for coalition building is supported by more than political regimes.

The inception of the Information Age and the rise of social media usage and internet access has opened up a new terrain for coalition building. The Information Age opened up doors for information networking and processing that has never been experienced in the history of humanity. According to Manuel Castells, a Spanish sociologist, the Information Age is as important to the human race as past Industrial Revolutions (30). While Castells' three volume analysis of the Information Age focuses mostly on sociological issues such as economy, politics, and theoretical human interaction, it also traces the beginnings of the Information Age and the eventual introduction of the Internet which revolutionized the way information is shared. I will be using the Information Age as a stage for a modern-day feminism, specifically one that takes place via the internet.

Some academics refer to feminism in the current era of the Information Age, the Internet Era, as a playing field for the "Fourth Wave" of feminism (Shiva and Kharazmi). (The wave

metaphor has been used to detail separate eras of the feminist movement in the United States, but it has often been too recursive and too limiting to be useful on a grand scale.) However, referring to modern feminism as the “Fourth Wave” of feminism reduces it to feminism in the United States, as has always been done with the history of feminism. Feminist scholarship has, in the past, analyzed women’s rights through how women in the West have fought for their rights, but this project repeatedly argues that feminism(s) should not be defined by Western gender politics. In referring to the feminist movement during the Internet era as the “Fourth Wave” of feminism, feminist scholars are falling into the same pattern of forcing Western ideals on all women and ignoring cultural differences and colonial power structures. Championing the wave metaphor is simply an example of neo-colonialism. I prefer to refocus modern feminism away from the wave metaphor, and instead recognize the potential for multiple, diverse feminisms as opposed to a one-size-fits-all feminism made in the United States. One such feminism is “cyberfeminism,” a forum for virtual, online politics.

According to Anne Sisson Runyan and V. Spike Peterson in their book *Global Gender Issues in the New Millennium*, transnational feminist movements in the new millennium have been both helped and hindered by the social internet. They argue that the internet has “created a lively world of virtual politics that is having major material effects on offline worlds and is more accessible to more and more women” (Runyan 246). The internet has made it easier to “occupy” places even if one is not physically present, so online movements have a place to take hold. While Runyan and Peterson acknowledge the successes of cyberfeminism, they also argue that “it is important to refrain from imagining that social media are sufficient for building inclusive and sustainable social movements” for a number of reasons including the fact that English is the hegemonic language of the internet as much as it is the hegemonic language of the real world,

there is still a large digital divide between men and women in the Global South, and nation states still monitor and police online spaces (247-248). Unfortunately, the internet has the ability to mimic the marginalization and depoliticization of the real world, but I would like to argue that, especially for women and feminists of color, it has the potential to be used positively by and for justice coalitions.

Regardless of title, the Information Age has revolutionized activism in the world through the spread of information, the use of social media, and the emphasis of group involvement. Such examples include the #MeToo movement, the #BlackLivesMatter movement, the #SayHerName movement, and the #YesAllWomen movement. Notably, all of these movements begin with a hashtag since they have primarily taken place via social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. *Feminist Freedom Warriors* cites the Black Lives Movement as a framework for activism, and it is well-known that the #BlackLivesMatter Movement was begun through social media interaction. Mohanty and Carty recognize “the ability of all oppressed groups to see their common struggles that will further strengthen the understanding of the need to come together” (*FFW* 10). It has been seen through the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements that these coalitions can be built through social media and online projects. Mohanty and Carty are employing this tactic in their own projects through the online *Feminist Freedom Warriors* archive. While their project is in the form of an academically produced website with a sister anthology, other postcolonial feminists are taking to social media and newsletters to build their coalitions from the ground up.

The internet, becoming more and more accessible everyday, is a space for the academic feminist and everyday feminist alike. While Chandra Mohanty is one of transnational feminisms greatest critics *and* greatest contributors, she is, notably, an academic feminist who has dedicated

her life to the study of gender, race, and nationality as sociopolitical forces. It is important to note the difference between progress in the academy and progress in society, but I would like to mention that progress in the academy and progress in society do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. The first Women's Studies program began at San Diego State University in the 1970s, and ever since, higher education institutions have adopted Women's Studies, and more recently Gender Studies, programs in which students can study and explore between disciplines to make a difference both on the public and the private level. As I stated previously (refer to pp. 6-7), feminisms often happen at the *intersection* of the humanities and the social sciences. Academic feminists put actions into words and activist feminists put words into actions. The internet, then, as a place to store and share information, can help, I believe, combine the words and the actions within one transnational space.

Where to start?

This introduction began with an epigraph from Lila Abu-Lughod, renowned anthropologist and gender studies scholar. I include this quote to recognize the privileged world in which I live, and to remind myself that, regardless of the reach and scope of my work, "I hope that it will be on the basis of careful analysis, critical self-reflection, and constant recognition of our common humanity, a humanity subjected to different forces and expressed in different registers" (Abu-Lughod 227). I do not live and breathe and work and walk in anywhere in the world other than where I am right now. My physical, real location is in the United States of America. My lived experience is that of a cis-gendered white woman. However, I believe that I can be a member of a coalition with another woman from Egypt and another woman from Nigeria and another woman from Venezuela. I recognize our differences, but I also recognize our shared humanity. I also believe that I can be in coalition with a man, a person of color, someone

who identifies as non-binary, someone who is trans, someone who is queer, someone who speaks a different language, etc. Feminism is not reliant on gender, but on empathy and a dedication to justice, liberation, and human truth. I do, however, think that differing experiences should not be overlooked, but should be recognized and dealt with head on. Equality has no meaning if we do not first consider where our differences lie and if those differences are ultimately harmful to and/or dismissive of human rights.

We must ask questions separate from the limitations of the past including asking how are political movements today any different from political movements of the past? Has the world really gotten smaller due to globalization? How can scholars, educators, activists, artists, and real people in their real lives, provide momentum for action? Does the medium, the form, and the means of activism make a difference of how effective activism is? I believe that there are women (and others) right now doing real work in the world to create online coalitions of women and allies that work. This thesis will focus on two such women: Egyptian-American activist and author Mona Eltahawy and Nigerian artist and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. These immigrant women of color reconcile with speaking to and speaking for people who look like them and people who don't; people who have the same experiences as them and people who don't. I hope to prove that their work and their different versions of feminism can be both specific and culturally grounded while also still being able to speak to a global audienc

CHAPTER 2

“TL:DR THE PATRIARCHY IS FUCKED”: A CASE STUDY OF MONA ELTAHAWY

We are living in the midst of a time when hashtags are transformed into a call to arms and social media posts give voice to the foot soldiers of revolutions. Women have, historically, been the unsung heroes of social movements and political revolutions, but, recently, women have been given the opportunity to take credit for their actions in modern political and social movements. For example, amidst the #MeToo Movement and the #BLM movement, one Egyptian American woman, Mona Eltahawy started the #IBeatMyAssaulter movement on Twitter in 2018. Eltahawy, 50 years old at the time, was in a Montreal nightclub dancing with her partner when a man groped her, and, in her own words, she “beat the fuck out of a man who grabbed [her] backside” (@monaeltahawy). Eltahawy says that once she found her assaulter, she grabbed him and punched him over and over again. According to Eltahawy’s account on her online newsletter, two men tried to intervene to stop *her* from beating the man, but her partner stopped them because ““She’s got this”” (“I Beat My Assaulter”). After this incident, Eltahawy tweeted about the experience and began a hashtag that elicited hundreds of personal stories from women around the world about the time that they beat their assaulter. One such personal story from Twitter user @zippyapplelips says “#IBeatMyAssaulter Standing at the bar waiting for my drink. Guy reaches between my legs and strokes my crotch. Was frozen for a second before I grabbed his glasses, flung them across the club, and rained punches on his head. His friend comes between to shield him.” Another woman, @Crumbsey, also uses the hashtag to tell her story, and says “#IBeatMyAssaulter - Man with a knife followed me home one evening in China, overpowered

& attempted to rape & strangle me, I managed to free an arm & grab a sharp piece of shale, struck it across his face, he toppled over, I ran. My white blouse was red of blood & it wasn't mine." These are just two examples of stories that #IBeatMyAssautler awakened, but there are hundreds of other responses like this from women all over the world.

Eltahawy not only created one trending awareness-raising campaign, but *two* in one week. The #IBeatMyAssaulter hashtag became trending during Eltahawy's ongoing campaign for #MosqueMeToo, an outlet for women of color to share their stories of sexual assault within the Islam faith and, specifically, on pilgrimage or worshipping within a mosque. Eltahawy, sporting her iconic flaming red hair, cat eye glasses, a necklace fit for Cleopatra herself, and a black turtleneck, posted a video to her Instagram and Twitter accounts on March 2, 2021. She begins the video with her signature phrase, "I'm Mona Eltahwy and as always fuck the patriarchy" ("After I beat up the asshole in the club..."). She goes on to share how, within one week, she started two hashtags that went viral. She shares in the video, as well as in her books, newsletter, and interviews, that she was fifteen years old in 1982, wearing a hijab on pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia with her family, when she was sexually assaulted twice.

Eltahawy had not publicly spoken about her assault on hajj until a Pakistani woman named Sabica Khan posted a Facebook post about how she was sexually harassed at Mecca (Opinion: #MosqueMeToo). Khan's post was shared over 2,000 times on Facebook, so, in support of Khan's story and inspired by the #MeToo movement, Eltahawy started the #MosqueMeToo hashtag on Twitter and told her own story about how she was sexually assaulted during pilgrimage. According to Eltahawy, within two days, her tweet "had been retweeted or liked thousands of times. It was shared in Indonesian, Arabic, Turkish, French, German, Spanish and Farsi" (Opinion: #MosqueMeToo). This list of translations alone shows that Eltahawy's

influence reached a large part of the globe. *The Washington Post* published an article about Eltahawy and #MosqueMeToo with the title, “The #MeToo movement has shaken the world. Can #MosqueMeToo shake Islam?” The title of this *Washington Post* article clearly says that #MeToo has shaken the world, which, arguably, it has, but online movements and revolutions are novel to the world we live in. Hashtags have, in the grand scheme of things, quickly become the Information Age’s picket signs.

We must ask: can the #MeToo movement and submovements like Eltahawy’s #IBeatMyAssualter and #MosqueMeToo inspire women across the world and cultivate global change? Eltahawy passionately believes that it can, and she embodies a dream of global feminism that can and will make a difference. Her dream of global feminism, however, is in contention with her postcolonial feminist precursors, such as Chandra Mohanty’s earlier work, who argued that, no, there is no possibility of one singular global feminism. This chapter will conduct a case study of Mona Eltahawy and detail her particular “brand” of modern feminism. This case study will answer questions about the role women of color play in global feminisms, the importance of empathizing with other women, and Eltahawy’s use of radical rhetoric in her feminist campaigns.

Mona Eltahawy’s Brand of Feminism and Possible Blindspots

Mona Eltahawy is an Egyptian-American journalist, public speaker, author, and activist. The brand of feminism that Eltahawy has created through her life and through her work is complex and action-based. It is also removed from academic feminist theory (which is often left with no practical application.) Nevertheless, feminist movements and activism are grounded in the legacies that feminist theorists started in academic communities, as we have previously seen through Mohanty’s own work. Grassroots movements grow out of academic theory, and

academic theory, even if it is removed from practical application, still has a place in answering some of the big questions of “why do we do this?” and “has this been done before?” Eltahawy’s brand of feminism is inspired by revolutionary grassroots movements, and creates a virtual space for online community activism. Therefore, how does Eltahawy’s anarchic feminism fit into the groundbreaking theoretical work that Mohanty did before her? Does it? Yes, because Mona Eltahawy has built a particular women of color feminism and has built coalitions that respect cultural differences while still confronting a “universal patriarchy.”

Eltahawy became a radical global feminist icon after her arrest during Arab Spring in 2011 by the Egyptian authorities. According to a *Guardian* interview with Eltahawy, she was arrested while she was covering the revolution, and was “detained for 12 hours, sexually assaulted, and threatened with gang rape. Her left arm and right hand were broken” (Kale). During her 12 hour incarceration, Eltahawy borrowed another activist’s phone and tweeted to her 5,000 followers this short message: “beaten, arrested, interior ministry” (Kale). She says that, almost immediately after her tweet, the *Guardian* newspaper and *Al Jazeera* had reported about Eltahawy’s tweet and arrest. In fact, the State Department tweeted back that they heard her and were looking for her, and within fifteen minutes of her tweet, #FreeMona was trending globally (Eltahawy 39). Within 12 hours she was released.

Eltahawy speaks openly about her arrest, and writes about it in her 2019 book *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls*. This book is broken into 7 chapters - one for each of the 7 necessary sins for women and girls: anger, attention, profanity, ambition, power, violence, and lust. *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls* further defines the type of feminist that Eltahawy is and the type of feminist she believes all women and girls should become. Essentially, *The Seven Necessary Sins* is a feminist manifesto that defines Eltahawy’s anarchical

feminism. Vulgarity, profanity, and violence are just a few of the sins necessary for Eltahawy's feminism.

To begin an analysis of *Seven Necessary Sins*, I will begin with a look at Eltahawy's chapter on attention. In her chapter on attention, she uses the tweet that helped free her from an Egyptian jail as an example of the power of attention. Eltahawy says that the patriarchy labels women as "attention whores" when they command attention either towards their bodies, their words, or their work. However, Eltahawy says that "attention is power. When you command attention, you command power, and so patriarchy has muddied the waters around attention with the word 'whore'" (Eltahawy 37). Eltahawy suggests that, even though the patriarchy criminalizes attention, without attention she might not have been released from that Egyptian prison alive. She says her "fame saved her." *Twitter* is a platform where you can tweet directly to your followers, but tweets can quickly be retweeted and shared to reach an exponential amount of people. Eltahawy's experience is atypical for a prisoner in a foreign jail, but it is a convincing one nevertheless. Eltahawy's tweet helps her say "I count." Eltahawy cites the revolution that she was covering in Egypt at the time of her arrest as an example of the power of people saying "I count," and she believes that one of the factors that led to that 2011 revolution in her home country was the "increasing ability - facilitated by blogs and social media - of young people to say 'I count'" (Eltahawy 48). Social media can serve as a platform to help cultivate revolutions. Eltahawy makes a point to say that one tweet or one blog post cannot possibly cause a revolution all on its own. On the contrary, she says that revolutions take people and take "courage and risk and feet on the ground" (Eltahawy 48). Social media can, however, be used to bring together and identify the foot soldiers of revolutions, which will be considered further below.

Later in the book, her chapter on violence paints a picture of an imaginary underground movement called Fuck the Patriarchy (FTP) in which members would “keep killing more and more men until the patriarchy sent a representative to talk. . . Its ultimatum: begin dismantling patriarchy or we will continue killing more and more men every week” (Eltahawy 136). This proposal is very manifesto-esque and Eltahawy is not necessarily arguing for mass gendered genocide, but she is saying that women should “declare war” and be violent (Eltahawy 137). Women are told not to be violent and use self-defense as a last resort. Women are stereotypically “innately” gentle and men are stereotypically “innately” violent. Eltahawy, on the other hand, says that women are also innately violent and should harness that suppressed fire to resist oppression.

As previously mentioned, in 2017 Eltahawy was groped by a man in a Montreal nightclub, and, in her own words, she “beat the fuck out of the man” (141). Women are caught up in a never-ending cycle of being sexually assaulted, harassed, beaten, abused, and killed. Eltahawy pulls a statistic from Georgina O’hara’s work on domestic abuse that says that “three women are killed every day in the United States as a result of intimate-partner violence” (142). Black women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse in the US. According to the World Health Organization, “the prevalence estimates of lifetime intimate partner violence range from 20% in the Western Pacific, 22% in high-income countries and Europe and 25% in the WHO Regions of the Americas to 33% in the WHO African region, 31% in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region, and 33% in the WHO South-East Asia region” (“Violence Against Women”). In high income countries, the percentage of intimate partner violence is almost 10% lower than countries in the Global South/”Third-World.” These levels can be attributed to a number of factors including, class, religion, culture, and justice systems. Being assaulted,

violated, or even killed is obviously more prevalent when there is no one to advocate for you, not even yourself. Therefore, Eltahawy says that women should become violent in order to self-advocate and self-adjudicate.

Social Media as Platform

As of March 2023, Mona Eltahawy has 365,500 Twitter followers, a following that has grown exponentially since that first viral tweet in 2011. Not only does she have a large following on Twitter, but she also has 51,400 followers on Instagram and 21,000 followers on Facebook. Twitter is the platform she is most active on, but she is also fairly active on Instagram, posting short video blogs of herself, pictures, links to her online newsletter, and news about international activism. Eltahawy is 55 years old, and is constantly creating new content for her followers. Her social media presence is quite literally a facet of her job, and, more importantly, how she shares information about her activism and the global fight against the patriarchy. She serves, in her identity as an Egyptian-American woman, as a connector between the Arab and American world. She can identify as a Muslim woman, a woman of color, and a woman over the age of 50. Verified Twitter followers of Eltahawy include Kenyan poet Shailja Patel, Nigerian writer and speaker OluTimehin Kukoyi, British YA writer Holly Smale, Iranian journalist and activist Masih Alinejad, and (ironically, considering Eltahawy is a self-proclaimed LGBTQ+ advocate) J.K. Rowling. Eltahawy has thousands of other Twitter followers from around the globe including American followers such as myself and followers from Arab countries, India, Australia, Europe, and Africa. She does seem to, truly, be a connector of women of color, white women, young women, menopausal women, trans-women, men, and non-binary activists through her Twitter following alone.

Before we get into what Eltahawy's specific brand of feminism does well, we must contend with what it misses out on publicly through her Twitter account. For example, in December of 2015, Eltahawy posted the following tweet: "My feminism is global and I hope that list inspires you, TwitterLand. I'll do another list soon. Now: who's going to make me coffee?" This tweet is a reply to a series of tweets from Eltahawy where she posts a list of feminist readings for her Twitter followers. Her exhaustive list includes *Bareed Mista3jil* by Meem; *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* by Patricia Hill Collins; *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* edited by AnaLouise Keating; *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Moraga and Anzaldúa; *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* by Martha A. Ackelsburg; *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* by Amina Wadud; *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* by bell hooks; *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader*; *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* by Fatima Mernissi; *The Riot Grrrl Collection* edited by Lisa Darms; *Women Writing Resistance: Essays on Latin America and the Caribbean* edited by Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez; *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde; *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa; *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*; *Doria Shafik: Egyptian Feminist* by Cynthia Nelson; and, finally, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* by bell hooks. I recreate this exhaustive list here to show that Eltahawy, even though her work and activism do not focus on feminist theory as much as political activism, does have a vast knowledge of feminist theorists and postcolonial feminisms. However, she does not give specific information about the *arguments*, the *contexts*, or the *authors* of these texts. This is simply a crowd-sourcing TBR list for her followers. What, then, is the point? Is it to prove the scope of her own reading or to

spread awareness of helpful, respectable work done by women scholars and artists? I like to think the point is, hopefully, the latter. Does this mean that Eltahawy's brand of feminism is complete and exhaustive?

Eltahawy states in the previous tweet that her "feminism is global," but one of Eltahawy's followers in this post points out that her list is not representative of women from every part of the world, and Eltahawy replies with a tweet that states: "I would love to add feminist titles to my list from South Asia and West, East and Southern Africa. Suggestions would be most welcome." One of her followers, @_RumanaBegum, replies with a suggestion to read Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak among other South Asian feminist writers. I found this tweet specifically when I cross-searched "Mona Eltahawy" and "Chandra Mohanty" on Google. This one tweet was one of the top-two results for that cross-search (the other being a 2015 student study from a University in Denmark titled "Complicities of Western Feminism: A Case Study of - 'Why Do They Hate Us? The real war on women is in the Middle East'" in which the group of students argues that Eltahawy falls into the trap of Western feminism that Mohanty warns against in "Under Western Eyes." I ask a similar question below.). These meager results for "Mona Eltahawy Chandra Mohanty" cross-reference suggests that the relationship between Mohanty and Eltahawy has not been considered on a broad, academic scale. Additionally, Eltahawy's tweeted reading list suggests that she *possibly* might not have read Mohanty prior to 2015 or at least did not consider Mohanty's theory to be significant enough to include. It is also possible that she simply did not have a copy of any of Mohanty's work since Mohanty, at least up until now, was strictly an academic feminist theorist and not a theorist known to the common feminist activist. Eltahawy does not have to cite Mohanty, and I am not criminalizing her for doing so, but the fact that Mohanty doesn't appear in these lists suggests something important about both cultural

memory and the specific genealogy that intersectional feminism creates. Nevertheless, it seems that Eltahawy, in her activism, believes in feminist coalitions across borders. Does she, however, not take into account what Mohanty was first saying in “Under Western Eyes?” Does Eltahawy homogenize Third-World women? Also, does she identify as a Third-World Woman? I think she would. However, does she homogenize women in general? Does she homogenize the patriarchy? In her introduction to *Seven Necessary Sins*, she says that “patriarchy lives everywhere” (5). That statement is bold, and, more importantly, broad. Can gender hierarchy be exactly the same across the globe? No, but, as Mohanty points out, differences can reveal similarities, and I think that Eltahawy recognizes differences without blatantly acknowledging them. In fact, she does not acknowledge them which at times weakens her argument, but, nevertheless, her social media presence and newsletter do unite people through individual shared experiences across borders. It also allows women of color in particular to share their stories.

Feminist Giant

Eltahawy, with help from her journalism career and her large internet following, began to publish an online weekly newsletter titled *Feminist Giant* in 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Under the “What is Feminist Giant” tab, Eltahawy explains what the newsletter is and how it will work:

Every day on Twitter, I curate news of patriarchal fuckery and feminist resistance to it from around the world. I am moving that curation here, where twice a week - Wednesday and Friday, paid interns—younger feminists I am delighted to work with and to share my platform with—will collect global feminist news and weave it with brief commentary. And every week, you will get an original essay by me, on the feminist issues of the day, exclusive to this newsletter. I often publish two articles a week because there is much

patriarchal fuckery to counter! FEMINIST GIANT Newsletter will be the place where you can catch up with global feminism. (Feminist Giant)

Eltahawy is essentially expanding what she does on Twitter and is moving her social media activism to a place where there is no firewall, no paywall, and no discrimination, gendered or otherwise. As of February 2023, the newsletter claims to have over 22,000 subscribers.

Each week, Eltahawy posts an article herself and has interns compile exposés called “Global Roundups” to give glimpses into global gender movements. Global Roundups are not reserved for news about cis-women around the world, but cover many stories of LGBTQ+ rights activism globally. Feminist Giant is largely inclusive of all people, and does not discriminate against subjects or readers regardless of gender identity, but each Global Roundup post does include at least one story of feminist struggles around the world. The Global Roundups are interesting for a number of reasons: 1) This is a newsletter that resembles the form of a blog, which in and of itself can be an example of how the internet and social media are an avenue to creating global feminist coalitions. 2) The Global Roundups often directly quote or link to social media posts and hashtags. For example, a Global Roundup posted on September 22, 2021 covers a number of global news stories, and is titled “The Fight to Educate Girls in Afghanistan, Body Positivity in Uruguay, NYC Protests for #MeTooInChina, Sudani Superhero, Ukraine Pride.” The article covers a Central Park protest by Chinese Feminists in support of the #MeTooInChina movement. Inaara Merani, the intern who wrote this Global Roundup, states that “In 2018, Zhou Xiaoxuan, also known as Xianzi, came forward and accused television personality Zhu Jun of sexually harassing her while she worked as his intern in 2014. Zhu denied all the allegations, and this case quickly went viral when Xianzi sued Zhu for damages and also demanded a public apology” (Merani). Xianzi’s case was dismissed in China, and these Chinese feminists came

together in Central Park to protest. The article says that “online discussion of the case was censored in China, which only highlights the fear of feminism in the nation” (Merani). This fact does complicate the extent of social media feminist coalitions because China is not the only country that has online governmental censorship.

A more recent example from a Global Roundup post from January 30, 2023 details online censorship and abuse of Myanmar women. The post, titled “Global Roundup: Myanmar Women Online Abuse, Spain Feminists vs Far-Right Party, Intersex People & Reparations, India Women Hip-Hop Group, Queer Muslim Memoir,” summarizes a number of topics to give more of a global glimpse into what is going on in the world surrounding gender rights. In this January 30 posting, the first story is linked to a January 26 article from *Al Jazeera*, the first English language news source out of the Middle East. The article is titled “Myanmar women target of online abuse by pro-military social media,” and explains how women in Myanmar who speak out against the military-controlled government on social media, primarily Facebook and Telegram, are being harassed and threatened by pro-military users. This study, according to *Al Jazeera*, was conducted by Myanmar Witness, a self-proclaimed group of researchers who “collect evidence of human rights incidents in Myanmar to hold those responsible to account” (Myanmar Witness). The military seized control of Myanmar in 2021, and people, particularly women, who speak out against the military regime on their social media profiles, are being targeted by “male-presenting profiles supportive of Myanmar’s military coup” (Myanmar Witness in *Al Jazeera*). The Feminist Giant Global Roundup quotes the original Myanmar Witness study, *Digital Battlegrounds: Politically Motivated Abuse Of Myanmar Women Online*, as saying “Online abuse and doxxing attacks are having a silencing effect and causing women to retreat from public life...Survivors report attacks on their views, person and dignity, and threats of rape, death and

violence with severe emotional and psychological impacts.” Myanmar Witness, as reported by *Al Jazeera* and Feminist Giant, argue that “social media platforms need to be more accountable, should work with women’s rights organisations in Myanmar and devote more resources to monitoring the local language content they host” as well as holding abusive account accountable for their actions (“Global Roundup: Myanmar Women Online Abuse. . .”).

By agreeing with Myanmar Witness about social media platform interference, Feminist Giant is second-handedly recognizing the economic, privatized middle-man of online social movements: major internet companies. I will, however, be considering social media platforms as mediums for activism and a space for women to come together. I choose to focus, for the moment, on the positive impact the social internet has on women and activism, including pointing out that women, despite persecution, are still standing up for what they believe in in Myanmar, and there are other women and activists around the world who choose to support these women in not letting their voices be stifled. That is what Eltahawy is trying to accomplish through Feminist Giant and Global Roundups in particular - awareness, support, and empathy.

Digital Divide

I have, so far, analyzed Eltahawy’s coverage of other women’s online activism, but I do think it is necessary to begin this section with the following questions: Is Eltahawy falling into a trap of homogenization which has only become a problem since the beginning of the Information Age - the homogenization of women who have internet access and do not have internet access? In essence, a new kind of “Third-World” is created through the digital divide; there is the half of the world that has internet access and the half of the world that does not. Does internet activism have to be global for it to make a difference? Can the lives of women in the “digital Third-World” still be improved through activism of women in the “digital West?”

On May 21, 2021, *Feminist Giant* posted another Global Roundup titled “Peru Forced Sterilization, Violence Up for Sex Workers in UK since BREXIT, Women for Digital Equality, Miss Universe Contestant Raises Awareness for Myanmar, Black Trans Model Joy.” A section of the article exposes the gender gap in technology access specifically in Africa, and the article covers *BBC* interviews with African women who are fighting for digital equality. Regina Honu, the founder of a tech school for women and girls in Ghana, has helped girls get access to simple flip phones since they are cheaper and easier to operate (Hossain). Boutheina Guermazi, director of digital development at the World Bank, “is helping women in India get connected through her work for a social-media network run by tech firm Gram Vaan. . .to boost women’s confidence using mobile phones” (Hossain). Lastly, the article mentions Jannat Fazal who “manages a cyber-harassment phone helpline in Pakistan. . . the first of its kind in South Asia” (Hossain). Hossain, the intern who wrote this article, and Eltahawy argue that digital literacy, and thus digital access, should be a human right in the Information Age, but nevertheless it currently is not. There are people who are fighting for equal rights to digital access for women across the world, but because of the digital divide there are still millions of women in the dark.

In light of the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the internet has taken on an even more important role than it had prior to 2020, and according to an April 2020 article from the World Economic Forum, the Coronavirus has “exposed the digital divide like never before.” Douglas Broom, a senior writer for the World Economic Forum, begins this article with a few bullet points:

- Billions of people are going online to stay in touch during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- But almost half of the world’s population has no access to the internet.

- Fewer than 1 in 5 people in the least developed countries are connected.
- This digital divide impacts women more than men. (Broom)

Throughout the article, Broom uses statistics to back up these four absolutes. The digital divide is more surprising than one might think. Globally, only 55% of households have an internet connection. Only 19% of households have an internet connection in developing countries (Broom). Broom states that “In total, 3.7 billion people have no internet access.” According to The World Bank, there were 7.82 billion people in the world as of 2020, and almost half of those people had no internet connection. These statistics beg the question, how much of a role can the internet possibly play in forming feminist coalitions? This is a problem that Mona Eltahawy and her *Feminist Giant* interns have not ignored. However, acknowledging the problem does not necessarily mean Eltahawy can *solve the problem*. Her activism is accessible because it is free and open to the public domain via the internet, but that very accessibility also makes her activism inaccessible for the millions of people who do not have access to the internet. What, then, can be done?

“When Girls Erupt”

In an October 5, 2022 *Feminist Giant* essay, Eltahawy writes the following line: “If women are volcanoes, as Ursula K. Le Guin once said, what happens when girls erupt? TL:DR the patriarchy is FUCKED, that’s what happens” (“Essay: When Girls Erupt”). The acronym “TL:DR” is internet slang for “too long; didn’t read.” It is often used in comments when someone did not read the full post, but it has also turned into an acronym that means “in short” or “in summary” when someone explains what a post says. Eltahawy obviously believes that the internet and social media can play a role in feminist revolutions. Twitter quite literally saved Eltahawy’s life, so why would she not believe that? I am sure, however, that she is also aware of

the limitations of the revolutionary internet. This *Feminist Giant* essay is inspired by Iranian schoolgirls who removed their hijabs in honor of Mahsa Zina Amini, a Kurdish woman who was beaten to death by the morality police for not wearing a proper hijab. Eltahawy's essay includes a picture of a group of schoolgirls raising their middle fingers to Iranian leaders. Eltahawy praises the girls for their anger, their profanity, and their action.

These are young girls who are embodying, possibly without even knowing who she is, what Eltahawy's brand of feminism supports. Eltahawy says "I point to the girls and insist that the revolution is not so much about regime change but about how people have changed. People-change" ("Essay: When Girls Erupt"). It is not faceless AI that creates a revolution or even the faceless people behind major social media conglomerates; it is real, flesh-and-blood people. Eltahawy says that "And I know that every girl and woman in the countries around Iran hears it, and I know it reverberates around the world. The real revolution—the real battle—is between patriarchy—established and upheld by the State and the Street and at Home—and women and girls—who will no longer accept the status quo" ("Essay: When Girls Erupt"). News of revolution has always spread, and the internet simply makes it simpler for the world to know what real people are doing on their own in their lives in their spaces. I think Eltahawy's feminism revises what Fran Hosken told Betty Friedan to do: LISTEN to them and, instead of screaming at them, scream WITH them. That being said, I, a white woman living in comparative privilege in the United States, should not think that women in other places of the world *need* me. They can say "fuck you" to the patriarchy by themselves, but I can see them and recognize that I can support them. I'm not convinced that global feminisms and online feminist coalitions necessarily have to be all-encompassing all at once. Global feminism is a practice in empathy, understanding, recognition, and support. Eltahawy repeatedly proves that women and girls can

handle ourselves, but any feminist, be it other women, men, non-binary people, etc. can listen and fall into step beside someone else - not in front of.

CHAPTER 3

THE IC(ONLINE) ARTIST/ACTIVIST: A CASE STUDY OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

“A feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes, there’s a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it. We must do better.’”

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *“We Should All Be Feminists”*

We Should All Be Feminists, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2012 book-length essay adapted from Adichie’s TED Talk of the same name, is self-proclaimed as “an of-the-moment rallying cry for why we should all be feminists” on the inside cover of the dust jacket of Anchor Books’ publication. The dust jacket description also calls this essay a “unique definition of feminism for the twenty-first century, one rooted in inclusion and awareness.” Adichie has single-handedly become a defining voice of transnational feminism in the zeitgeist since she gave the TED Talk the essay is based on in 2012. The talk was given at the TEDx Euston conference themed around “Inspiring Ideas About Africa.” Adichie begins her talk by revealing that her brother, Chuks, and her best friend, Ike, are part of the organizing team for this conference and asked her to speak (0:15). She goes on to joke that since they were the ones who asked her to speak, she could not say no. It is ironic how casually Adichie approaches this talk considering it is one of the major events that led to her becoming an online feminist icon for the modern age. She simply did not know quite the impact this talk would have on transnational feminism. (To prove the scope of “We Should All Be Feminists,” it should be noted that the TED Talk has 5,068,648 views on the TED website as of March 27, 2023.)

Adichie includes a brief introduction in the *We Should All Be Feminists* essay explaining how it was adapted from her TED Talk and the circumstances of the talk itself. She explains how TEDx Euston is a yearly conference focusing on Africa for Africans and friends of Africa, and she reveals that she was apprehensive about speaking about feminism at this conference. She states that, as she stood on stage that night, she felt as though she was “in the presence of family - a kind and attentive audience, but one that might resist the subject of [the] talk.” However, she goes on to reveal that at the end of the talk, the audience’s standing ovation gave her hope (“We Should...” 4). Considering this TED conference is centered around Africa, Adichie does focus mainly on gender in Nigeria, but she does so while also revealing that gender norms/issues in Nigeria are not terribly different from gender norms/issues in other parts of the world including Western countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. She states that “Gender matters everywhere in the world. And I would like today to ask that we should begin to dream about and plan for a different world. A fairer world. A world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves” (“We Should...” 25). This quote is present in both the TED Talk and the longer essay, but Adichie removes a phrase from the TED Talk that does not appear in the written version of the essay. She precedes the previous quote with a note saying “Gender matters everywhere in the world, but I want to focus on Nigeria and on Africa in general, because it is where I know, and because it is where my heart is. And I would like today to ask that we begin to dream about and plan for a different world, a fairer world, a world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves” (09:56). It is interesting, analytically, to consider that Adichie’s original TED Talk was specifically tailored to an audience interested in African peoples, cultures, and countries, but she did keep a fair bulk of the text from the original TED Talk when she published the essay. It is noteworthy, though, that she does make the printed

version of the talk more accessible to the literal world and not just *her* world. The *we* in Adichie's "we should all be feminists" claim expands over time. In fact, the word "feminist" has also expanded over time.

As has been previously discussed in this thesis, Feminism with a capital 'F' is difficult - if not impossible - to achieve on a global scale. What, then, is the basis of Adichie's argument in this pivotal essay. Are we all missing the mark when we uphold this essay? Even Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, arguably one of America's most notable singer-songwriters of the 21st century thus far, used soundbites of Adichie's TED Talk in her 2013 song "***Flawless." In an exclusive interview with Mazi Nwonwu in 2015, Adichie stated that she was "happy to give [her] permission" to Beyoncé to use material from her TED Talk in the song because she does think "Beyoncé is a cultural force for good" (Nwonwu 116). However, Adichie has been vocal about how she does not feel that she and Beyoncé actually share the same feminism. In an interview with Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* in 2016, three years after the release of "***Flawless," Adichie states that she was not thrilled or even particularly grateful following the release of the song. While the song did bring awareness to Adichie as an activist, she argues that she does not want Beyoncé's brand of feminism to stand in place of her own. She told *de Volkskrant* that "her type of feminism is not mine. . . it is the kind that, at the same time, gives quite a lot of space to the necessity of men. I think men are lovely, but I don't think that women should relate everything they do to men: did he hurt me, do I forgive him, did he put a ring on my finger? We women are so conditioned to relate everything to men. . .we women should spend about 20 per cent of our time on men, because it's fun, but otherwise we should also be talking about our own stuff" (Adichie in Dandridge-Lemco). In arguing that Beyoncé's brand of feminism is different than her own, Adichie is suggesting that every man, woman, trans, or non-binary person has the

ability to define what “feminism” means to them. Adichie is aware that not all feminisms are equal, but she does seem to believe that it is possible for *all* to be feminists. There are popular feminisms, such as Beyoncé’s, and untraditional feminisms, such as Mona Eltahawy’s. Then there are feminisms like Adichie’s. The question remains, what is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s brand of feminism? This chapter will conduct a case study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as a public figure, author, and feminist to attempt to answer the previous questions about how we can all be feminists in the age of information, the benefits and consequences of online feminist orthodoxy, and how feminism is not singular.

“The blog had unveiled itself...”

Adichie did not set out to become a global, widely recognized feminist icon or to dedicate her life to smashing the patriarchy. She, at a young age, set out to write honest, insightful African literature for the transnational reader, and to continue what her idol, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, began during his own writing career. Her novels *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Americanah*, as well as her short story collection titled *The Thing Around Your Neck*, are thematically focused around what it means to be Nigerian in a changing world. Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is simultaneously a *bildungsroman* and a freedom story. Adichie refers to *Purple Hibiscus* in “We Should All Be Feminists” as a novel she wrote about “a man who, among other things, beats his wife, and whose story doesn’t end too well” (“We Should...” 9). (Said man is actually poisoned by his wife by the end of the novel, a very Eltahawyan move if you ask me.) *Half of a Yellow Sun* is set during the Nigerian/Biafran Civil War that raged in Nigeria during the 1960s, and shifts between the focalizations of 5 different characters. This is Adichie’s only novel set during the Nigerian Civil War, but all of her narratives show the effects of colonialism on Nigeria *and* the effects of the Civil War.

Adichie's most recent novel, *Americanah*, is arguably her most autobiographical novel. *Americanah* was published in 2013 and follows two Nigerian emigrants in America and the UK as they navigate race and identity away from Nigeria. *Americanah*'s main character, Ifemelu, is a Nigerian woman who immigrates to the United States and, after facing many trials and realizations, becomes a relatively famous internet blogger. The novel follows Ifemelu as she immigrates to America and learns about race, discrimination, American culture, struggle, and feminism. Ifemelu faces hardships and near poverty during her first few years in the United States, but eventually she graduates from college and begins her blog "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" before receiving a fellowship at Princeton. Adichie weaves Ifemelu's blog into the form of the novel, and allows for the blog to become an entity in and of itself.

Throughout the novel, Ifemelu's blog does quite literally take on a life and a role of its own - speaking for Ifemelu and molding her identity as a woman, a non-American black, an immigrant, and a writer. While Ifemelu's blog posts are most often about race, they are, intrinsically, also about gender. The blog is about what it means to be a non-American black, and, by extension, a non-American black woman. Ifemelu speaks out on issues such as natural black hair, motherhood, female friendship, and former first lady Michelle Obama. "Raceteenth" is inherently a study in intersectional feminism in its undertones. Deep into the novel, Ifemelu states that "The blog had unveiled itself and shed its milk teeth; by turns, it surprised her, pleased her, left her behind. Its readers increased, by the thousands from all over the world, so quickly that she resisted checking the stats, reluctant to know how many new people had clicked to read her that day, because it frightened her. And it exhilarated her" (*Americanah* 303). The narration personifies Ifemelu's blog - it had "shed its milk teeth" and had begun to grow into a person all

on its own - arguably a *feminist* all on its own. The blog has “left [Ifemelu] behind,” and her words online have taken on new meaning separate from her, especially since the blog itself is written anonymously in the novel. However, the narrator says that Ifemelu was reluctant to see how many people had read her that day. Even though her blog has taken on a life of its own separate from her, Ifemelu still merges herself with the blog and sees them as interchangeable. How can this be both? Ifemelu answers this question for herself just pages later:

Comments came from people with similar stories and people saying she was wrong, from men asking her to put up a photo of herself, from black women sharing success stories of online dating, from people angry and from people thrilled. Some comments amused her because they were wildly unconnected to the subject of the post. Oh fuck off, one wrote. Black people get everything easy. You can’t get anything in this country unless you’re black. Black women are even allowed to weigh more. Her recurring post ‘Mish Mash Friday’, a jumble of thoughts, drew the most clicks and comments each week. Sometimes she wrote some posts expecting ugly responses, her stomach tight with dread and excitement, but they would draw only tepid comments. Now that she was asked to speak at round-tables and panels, on public radio and community radio, always identified simply as The Blogger, she felt subsumed by her blog. *She had become her blog*. There were times, lying awake at night, when her growing discomforts crawled out from the crevices, and the blog’s many readers became, in her mind, a judgemental angry mob waiting for her, biding their time until they could attack her, unmask her. (*Americanah* 306, emphasis added)

This passage functions in a few ways. It, firstly, shows the communal, public nature of blogging. The narrator provides examples of callous comments that Ifemelu gets on her blog. Her blog,

while seemingly becoming something outside of herself, had also become herself. This passage, notably, states “she felt subsumed by her blog. She had become her blog” (306, emphasis added). The passage factualizes this - it cannot be argued with. Ifemelu’s voice online and who she is in person are one in the same.

However, in a 2014 interview with Synne Rifbjerg at the International Authors’ Stage in Copenhagen after Rifbjerg asks Adichie why she uses the blog to frame novel in *Americanah*, Adichie states that she wanted what Ifemelu says in the blog to “be said in a voice that was kind of different from her real voice, because the self that is in that blog is different from the self that lives every day” (Rifbjerg 102). Adichie, as the author of *Americanah* and creator of Ifemelu, knows something about Ifemelu before Ifemelu even knows it about herself. Adichie keeps in mind that the Ifemelu in the blog is different from the Ifemelu in the real world (or at least the real world within the fictional world of the novel). Adichie knew that, over time, Ifemelu would come to terms with who she is online and who she is in person. The reader of *Americanah* also knows this because the form of the novel moves backwards and forwards in time, and the novel begins at a point in time farther along than when Ifemelu starts her blog. The novel begins just days after Ifemelu has written her *last* blog post for “Raceteenth of Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes).” The narrator states that eventually, writing made Ifemelu “feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of people’s stories for something she could use. . . The more she wrote, the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false” (*Americanah* 5). Despite her intentions to reveal racism and oppression in America and provide community and asylum for other non-American blacks, Ifemelu began to feel the toll blogging online took on her psyche and her sense of self. How, then, can online coalitions be good?

The question of online coalitions is not this simple. It is not a distinction between *good* and *bad*. Ifemelu knows this - she is not just writing about the difference between black and white, but she is uncovering all of the gray within a global conception of race. What Ifemelu faces in Nigeria cannot be equated to what she experiences in America, and her writing reflects this. It should be noted that Ifemelu does not quit blogging altogether. The novel begins with “Raceteenth” ending, but the novel ends with the beginning of her *new* blog: “The Small Redemptions of Lagos.” At the end of the novel, the text states that “still, she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being” (*Americanah* 475). As a reader, the ending of the novel is validating and satisfying - Ifemelu finds herself again when she goes home. However, as a critic, I am concerned about what this says about online global coalitions. It seems Ifemelu shrunk the global reach of her activism and confined it to Lagos. Or does she?

The appeal of online activism is that it does not have to be confined to one geographical location. There are thousands of online movements from online feminisms to online racial movements to online political movements and so on. It should be noted that online movements and online activism are not to simply remain online, but should make a difference in the *real* world - wherever that might be for the participant. The question is - how can the *real* world become smaller if it is already so big? In other words, can Ifemelu’s blog be specific to Lagos and the Nigerian experience, while still speaking to a ‘global’ experience? Can Ifemelu, and by extension Adichie, represent all sides of themselves while still being inclusive to a wide, potentially global audience? Adichie’s popularity as an artist suggests that it is possible to be both specific and universal. She writes exclusively about the Nigerian experience, but she is a *New York Times* bestselling, award-winning, culturally renowned author. *Americanah* alone has

been translated into 29 different languages (“*Americanah*”). Contemporary literature proves that globalization has cultivated global readerships, so why can’t coalitions do the same thing?

Online coalitions can and should be a space for specific *and* global representation. Adichie’s real-life “brand” of feminism mimics Ifemelu’s and is often localized and specific to the non-American black, but it also has the ability to speak to a wide audience of feminists. Adichie, in “We Should All Be Feminists,” claims that she is a “Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men And Who Likes To Wear Lip Gloss And High Heels For Herself And Not For Men” (“We Should...” 10). Adichie’s brand of feminism is not a burn-your-bra, kill-all-men, refuse-to-wear-what-makes-you-feel-like-yourself feminism. I think for Adichie, the key to letting all people be feminists is promoting different brands of feminism that still allow for a gender-equal future. Adichie’s feminism seems to be for all of us, the world, but only if we choose it for ourselves. No one brand of feminism should be prescribed to everyone. That would be the same as saying Friedan’s brand of feminism was the correct brand of feminism for Barrios de Chungara or vice versa. Instead, feminism(s) should be dynamic and open to critique, improvement, and interpretation. That is, seemingly, the only way we *can* all be feminists. That is not to say, then, that voices like Adichie’s cannot promote their own version of feminism to questioning feminists willing to learn what that word means to them.

CNA’s Suggestions for Being a Feminist

On October 12th, 2016, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, posted a lengthy Facebook post beginning with “A new piece from Chimamanda... ‘Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions’ by Chimamanda Adichie.” The story of this Facebook post goes that Chimamanda’s friend, Ijeawele, emailed Chimamanda to announce the birth of her baby daughter and to ask Chimamanda, a known feminist icon, how to raise her daughter as a

feminist. Adichie responds to Ijeawele in the form of this 9,000 word Facebook post which doubly serves as Adichie's second feminist manifesto following the essay based off of her 2013 TED Talk, "We Should All Be Feminists." In 2017, Adichie published "Dear Ijeawele" into a 63 page booklet, making minimal edits between the 2016 Facebook post and the bound manifesto. The Facebook post received 2.1 thousand comments, 9.6 thousand shares, and 10 thousand reactions - an impressive readership in and of itself. This manifesto is nestled amongst posts on Adichie's Facebook page about her achievements, presentations, and publications. It stands out on the author's social media and breaks the form of the usual social media post - long and poetic as opposed to short and straightforward. Why post it first on this medium, then? It does not fit with Adichie's normal social media presence and it certainly does not align with the form of 120 character posts. Why not respond to Ijeawele personally and publish this manifesto as a separate entity? Why this form at this time?

The manifesto is broken into individual vignettes elaborating upon Adichie's fifteen suggestions (notably similar to Eltahawy's organization in *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls*). The suggestions range in complexity from attainable and concrete to complicated and abstract:

1. Be a full person.
2. Do it together.
3. Teach her that the idea of 'gender roles' is absolute nonsense.
4. Beware the danger of what I call Feminism Lite.
5. Teach Chizalum [Ijeawele's daughter] to read.
6. Teach her to question language.
7. Never speak of marriage as an achievement.

8. Teach her to reject likeability.
9. Give Chizalum [Ijeawe's daughter] a sense of identity.
10. Be deliberate about how you engage with her and her appearance.
11. Teach her to question our culture's selective use of biology as 'reasons' for social norms.
12. Talk to her about sex, and start early.
13. Romance will happen, so be on board.
14. In teaching her about oppression, be careful not to turn the oppressed into saints.
15. Teach her about difference. ("Dear Ijeawe")

All of Adichie's suggestions are commands rather than suggestions. They are aimed at Ijeawe to help her raise her child to be like Adichie herself in a country - Nigeria - that is not entirely supportive of its women. According to the 2021/22 Women, Peace, and Security Index from Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, Nigeria is ranked 130 in an index of 170 for the treatment and security of women. For perspective, the United States is ranked as number 21. Adichie tells Ijeawe to teach Chizalum, her daughter, to read and to question, to reject likability and to be her own person, to know what she believes in. In a country and a world still holding women and girls to archaic standards, Adichie gives Ijeawe small steps that can make a big difference in the future of womanhood and in her daughter's life.

The title of the manifesto complicates things: "Dear Ijeawe, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions." Who is this written for? Ijeawe - one mother raising one daughter? Or a large readership? By definition, a manifesto is a public declaration. How much more public can one get than Facebook? A book reviewer from *The Guardian*, Tessa Hadley, writes in her book review of the bound "Dear Ijeawe" that "Adichie manages the same consummate balancing act

in her booklet as she does in her fictions: addressing a Nigerian friend and the specifics of Nigerian experience and at the same time addressing all of us, the world” (Hadley). She goes on to argue that readers from other, Western countries can see that the gap between the Nigerian woman’s experience and the British (alternatively American, Canadian, French, etc.) can become “that little bit more mutually intelligible” (Hadley). The context of this manifesto is certainly steeped in Nigerian culture and the Nigerian woman’s experience, but, overall, this manifesto can be read and applied by non-Nigerian readers in the same way “We Should All Be Feminists” can. One Canadian commenter on the Facebook post, Tara Petrie, tags a friend and writes what this manifesto exposed to her as a white woman:

hey I know this is long but it would mean a lot to me if you read it. As you read, I challenge you to compare her words with your own experience--what hits home, but also what are the differences? It exposed a lot of white-privilege that I had and didn't realize. All-in-all it sums up pretty much everything I've ever wanted to express about feminism. (Petrie)

Petrie’s comment aligns with Tessa Hadley’s book review; this manifesto is for everyone - the world. Both men and women. Both black and white. Both Nigerian and non. However, how far can social media posts and manifestos about raising feminists extend to the everyday woman in the world? *Everyone* in the world? Does social media allow for mutual understanding and a way for all of us to be feminists?

The Complexities of Online Feminist Orthodoxy

While Adichie herself is obviously a proponent for an online feminism considering she semi-published her second feminist manifesto using Facebook, she also recognizes the opportunity for misusing social media. She makes a clear distinction between one’s

feminism/empathy for others in public and in private. In June of 2021, Adichie speaks out about the obscenity of misusing social media in a blog post on her personal website. She calls out the younger generation in particular on their use of social media as a shield for being callous towards others:

And so we have a generation of young people on social media so terrified of having the wrong opinions that they have robbed themselves of the opportunity to think and to learn and to grow. I have spoken to young people who tell me they are terrified to tweet anything, that they read and re-read their tweets because they fear they will be attacked by their own. The assumption of good faith is dead. What matters is not goodness but the appearance of goodness. We are no longer human beings. We are now angels jostling to out-angel one another. God help us. It is obscene. (“It Is Obscene: A True Reflection in Three Parts)

Adichie published this essay on her personal website under the “Latest News” tab as a reflection on how people use social media as a tool for division instead of coalition. This essay was not silently posted to her website to be seen by a few loyal followers, but Adichie tweeted the link to this essay and received 14.1 thousand likes; 1,953 quote tweets; 6,245 retweets; and thousands of replies. I think it is important to note that Adichie did not post this link on her Facebook page or her Instagram, both of which are her more active social media accounts. She has 1.7 million followers on Instagram and 2 million followers on Facebook. She currently only has 159.1 thousand followers on Twitter considering her Twitter account was not created until 2018 because, at the time “fake accounts [were] impersonating her and attempting to extort people” (@ChimamandaReal). Why would Adichie post this link only on her website and her Twitter account in lieu of her more public platforms? Is Adichie herself creating a false sense of good

faith by picking and choosing where and how she speaks out? Or is she merely targeting this essay to an audience on the platform she is criticizing the most? She does, after all, go on to exclusively give examples of callous tweets in the essay and does not mention Facebook or Instagram posts at all in the essay. She is obviously targeting callousness on Twitter - a platform that allows only shorter posts and makes it possible for everyday people to have thousands of followers thus allowing a discourse community to publicly criticize someone or something. While platforms such as Twitter can be used for so much good, Adichie points out that it can also be used for abuse.

Adichie has no tolerance for blatant callousness and stone-throwing on the internet, and she addresses it in this reflective essay. Adichie directly acknowledges whose callousness the “It Is Obscene” reflection is in response to. In a March 2017 interview with Britain’s Channel 4 News, Adichie was asked about her stance on feminism and the LGBTQ+ community - particularly trans women. Adichie responded to the question by stating that “When people talk about, ‘Are trans women women?’ my feeling is trans women are trans women. I think the whole problem of gender in the world is about our experiences. It’s not about how we wear our hair or whether we have a vagina or a penis” (“Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on Feminism”). This statement received a slew of backlash from the LGBTQ+ community and allies, and Adichie’s authority as a gender-rights activist was called into question. Adichie only responded to her dissenters because she spoke seemingly out of turn. People, on Twitter mostly, had posted scathing comments about Adichie’s interview including, according to her “It Is Obscene” essay, two of Adichie’s young colleagues and pupils.

In 2021, almost four years following the initial trans-phobia accusations, Adichie writes the “It Is Obscene” essay directly referencing the transphobic accusations. According to the

essay, Adichie had supported one young Nigerian writer who had signed up for one of Adichie's workshops. Adichie goes so far as to include copies of the young writer's emails to Adichie telling her about her upcoming novel, congratulating Adichie on the birth of her baby, etc. Adichie had, apparently, been nothing but supportive of the novelist even though she doubted the depth of this person's writing. Adichie then says, "After I gave the March 2017 interview in which I said that a trans woman is a trans woman, I was told that this person had insulted me on social media, calling me, among other things, a murderer ("It Is Obscene"). This anonymous person's novel was published after she tweeted about Adichie, but she still included Adichie in both the acknowledgements and the writer's book bio. Adichie asked to be removed from both because this person had attacked Adichie online.

The "It is Obscene" article also references an anonymous young writer who, according to Adichie, also went on social media to publicly criticize Adichie following that 2017 interview. Adichie makes it clear that she had a personal relationship with this particular writer, unlike the other young artist she addresses in the essay whom she had not spent time with in person. Adichie states "[This person] spent time in my Lagos home. We had long conversations. I was support-giver, counselor [sic], comforter," but, after the 2017 interview, Adichie says, "I was told she went on social media and insulted me. . . Of course she could very well have had concerns with the interview. That is fair enough. But I had a personal relationship with her. She could have emailed or called or texted me. Instead she went on social media to put on a public performance" ("It Is Obscene"). In response to this, I would like to refer back to Adichie's quote about Ifemelu's blog in *Americanah*; Adichie said that she incorporated Ifemelu's blog into the novel because she wanted things to "be said in a voice that was kind of different from [Ifemelu's] real voice, because the self that is in that blog is different from the self that lives every day" (Rifbjerg

102). The difference between the young woman who publicly spoke out online about Adichie and Ifemelu is simply anonymity - that is all. Ifemelu's blog is anonymous in the novel, but she does call out real characters in her life on issues including interpretation and racial blindness.

While I understand Adichie's anger, hurt, and frustration, I do think that she herself is forgetting that online voices often sound different than real-life voices. That is not to say that one is more genuine or more politically correct than the other, but the Information Age has progressed rapidly enough to cause human interactions to be different than they were fifty years ago. Virtual interaction is not going to replace face-to-face interaction, but it does and will continue to complement real-life interactions. I see, then, why Adichie is angry at the prospect of someone going first to an online forum as opposed to reaching out to her personally to talk about Adichie's comments about trans-women, but, in conjunction with the argument that online feminisms work, online accountability also works to create real change. If anything, Adichie's "It Is Obscene" essay can serve as a reminder that there are still real people at the other end of the internet who have real feelings and real stakes within the world, but it can also show how, over time, feminism(s) and personal philosophies can be molded by outside voices.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, much like Ifemelu, must reckon with representing both herself and her work, and her work is largely made up of her identity as a feminist icon. Adichie has, in part, helped create what she refers to as "Feminist Orthodoxy." Adichie suggests that the two anonymous women writers who publicly attacked her on Twitter "parrot the latest Feminist Orthodoxy" ("It Is Obscene"). The use of the word "orthodoxy" is interesting in this non-religious context. Orthodoxy, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means "belief in or agreement with doctrines, opinions, or practices currently held to be right or correct" ("Orthodoxy"). The keywords in this definition are "right" and "correct," which suggest that

there are opinions, doctrines, and practices that can be “incorrect.” Feminist Orthodoxy, at least suggested by Adichie, is *trendy*. It is not constant. It can change. She also suggests that it is not always genuine. She says that people can “parrot” the latest Feminist Orthodoxy especially online, but that could mean that someone’s online feminism can be different from their real feminism, and that is problematic. How could we deem what is real and what is not? We can’t. Therefore, we have to decide for ourselves what is real to us as individuals by simply *listening* and interpreting.

Following the interview in which Adichie argued that trans women are not women, Adichie posted an explanation and an apology to her personal Facebook page, which, as previously stated, is the social media platform on which she has the most followers - 2 million. She ends this Facebook post with the following statement:

I think of feminism as Feminisms. Race and class shape our experience of gender. Sexuality shapes our experience of gender. And so when I say that I think trans women are trans women, it is not to diminish or exclude trans women but to say that we cannot insist – no matter how good our intentions – that they are the same as women born female. Nor do I think that we need to insist that both are the same. To acknowledge different experiences is to start to move towards more fluid – and therefore more honest and true to the real world – conceptions of gender. (Adichie “CLARIFYING”)

This Facebook post garnered 11 thousand reactions, 4.2 thousand comments, and 3.7 thousand shares. The responses are mixed with some people thanking her for clarifying what she meant when she said “trans women are trans women” and others still suggesting that Adichie is transphobic - either knowingly or unknowingly.

Hearing or reading Adichie's comments out of context can make her seem like a TERF, a Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist. Adichie, in the original interview, stated that "Are trans women women?" my feeling is trans women are trans women. I think the whole problem of gender in the world is about our experiences" ("Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on Feminism"). It seems that Adichie is not, in this comment, excluding trans women from being *feminists*. She is excluding them from being *women*. This is not a new claim for Adichie. She says something similar in "We Should All Be Feminists," which, as previously stated, has been lauded as a feminist phenomenon for the modern age. In "We Should All Be Feminists," Adichie states plainly that "Men and women are different. We have different hormones and different sexual organs and different biological abilities - women can have babies, men cannot. Men have more testosterone and are, in general, physically stronger than women" (16-17). Adichie seems to fall into the trap of conflating sex and gender, biology and experience.

While biology can affect personal experience, it does not always *have* to. One's personal experience is one's personal experience, and no one should claim that experience as their own. However, I do think that by listening to personal experiences be that the experience of a cis-gendered woman, a trans woman, a man, a non-binary person, we can practice empathizing with others. Adichie's experience as a cis-gendered African woman is, obviously, similar to the experiences of thousands upon thousands of other cis-gendered African women, but that does not mean that only cis-gendered women of color can understand oppression and injustice. On the contrary, trans women and trans women of color can absolutely understand oppression, be it bodily or emotionally. I think that Adichie is moving towards altering her own definition of gender by claiming that "To acknowledge different experiences is to start to move towards more fluid – and therefore more honest and true to the real world – conceptions of gender"

(“CLARIFYING”). I think that she does acknowledge that her experience is different than that of a trans woman and she respects that. I also would argue that, in making these comments, Adichie is not excluding trans women, or any person of any gender identity, from being a feminist. That would directly go against what she argued in “We Should All Be Feminists.” Feminism is not just for cis-gendered women, but for all people. “All of us, women and men, must do better,” and I would like to add, trans, non-binary, agender, gender-queer, and gender-fluid people can also do better in fighting gender problems (“We Should...” 48).

The internet makes it even more accessible for people, regardless of gender identity, to work together to fix gender problems in the real world. Regardless of real-life experience, the online persona has a different voice than the flesh-and-blood person behind the screen. In online spaces, physical bodies are something to empathize with. They cannot physically occupy an online space, but they can metaphorically represent someone’s physical being. To put it this way, we do not confuse cardboard signs with permanent marker slogans for the physical bodies of the people those signs represent, so why do we do the same thing with the internet? The internet is, arguably, just a very large cardboard sign or an infinitely long hand-written letter. Therefore, why do we problematize it? We should respect it as a tool used to fight oppression just like any other tool. This tool can, unlike those of the past, be spread in real time, can reach across the world, and can self-translate and self-regulate to make it more accessible. Adichie, it seems, recognizes that both her physical writing and her online presence are both tools that she can use to make the difference she wants to see in the world. But Adichie is not holding that cardboard sign alone. She is not the only hand raised with a message, but there are millions of other signs up alongside hers. The power, then, is when all of those signs do similar good in the world. Luckily, the one

harmful sign can get lost in the sea of progress, and that is what the hope is for online coalitions. It is not the bad that we focus on, but the good. The progress. The problem-fixing. The people

CHAPTER 4

THE WORLD WIDE WEB OF FEMINISTS

The “me too.” movement was founded in 2006 by survivor and activist Tarana Burke to end sexual violence and provide support to survivors specifically women of color, but it was not until 11 years later, in 2017, when the #metoo hashtag went viral that the movement went global (Burke). Actress Alyssa Milano tweeted in October of 2017 a screenshot of a passage that reads “Me too. Suggested by a friend: ‘If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too.’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem” (@Alyssa_Milano). She captioned the screenshot with “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” As of March 30th, 2023, Milano’s tweet has 19.8K retweets, 17.4K quotes, and 45.8K likes. Those numbers cannot begin to indicate the scope that the #metoo hashtag took on in the following weeks and months. The #metoo movement is unique in that it is, truly, the first movement of its kind that combines a localized, specific grassroots movement with a global, accessible online movement. The “me too” movement that was founded in 2006 did not intend on becoming a global movement, but, along with Alyssa Milano’s tweet, the two “have come to be considered as two benchmarks in one movement due to the connected nature of events they describe” (Ferrière). With this in mind, I would like to return to Runyan and Peterson’s claim (see pg. 14) that “it is important to refrain from imagining that social media are sufficient for building inclusive and sustainable social movements” (278). I agree with this argument that social media are not sufficient alone for

building inclusive and sustainable social movements, which is why online movements do need the people-focused, personalized help of grassroots movements. A movement is not made by one phenomenon alone. A movement is made when there are multiple factors that contribute to socio-political change.

This thesis began with a reference to the 1975 IWY conference and a reference to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's ongoing work in postcolonial feminism. I would like to conclude this thesis by returning to the 1975 IWY conference and my question of "how far have we come since 1975?" I would argue that we have moved horizontally but not necessarily laterally. We have come far, yes, but we have not come as far as we can go. Movements such as #metoo and #MosqueMeToo and #IBeatMyAssaulter prove that progress can cross borders, but that does not mean that all borders are crossed all at once. The work is not over. The work will never be over.

When I began this project, I originally wanted to argue against Chandra Mohanty's original claim that there is not a universal homogenous group of "women" at all; there is no real evidence to classify all women as a "Woman" because cultural differences and imbalances of power create a myriad of experiences that cannot be homogenized under one umbrella, let alone one universal concept. I thought that she was wrong. I thought that "Woman" meant something to me and to all other people who identify as women. I thought that my definition of "Woman" should be the same as everyone else's, but, through study, I have come to the conclusion that I, myself, was wrong. What "Woman" means to me is simply not the same as what "Woman" means to someone else, but that does not mean that it is any less powerful. It does not diminish my experience of gender and my experience with gender injustice. It does not mean that gender, as a social construct, is not real for me or for anyone else. It simply means that the definition is not prescriptive.

The only way to understand what “Woman” means to me is to learn what “Woman” means to others as well. “Woman” is not a concrete noun, but an abstract one, and that is okay. It can change. It does not have to be stationary. Betty Friedan, when she began her work as an activist, understood what “Woman” meant to her and to the women she spoke to, but, until the IWY conference, she had not taken time to listen to women who did not live like her or look like her. We cannot fault her at the onset for not taking time to listen when she had done so much talking for so very long. We can, though, fault her for not learning to listen in the future. We can also fault ourselves, now, in the present age of information and the internet, for not taking the time to listen and to support others. It is easy to say that online coalitions of women are not possible because they are not effective and they disregard differences, but I would like to argue that online coalitions of women are positive primarily because they can recognize differences. They can be a space for listening as opposed to just talking. A conversation is a conversation no matter where it takes place. Discourse is discourse if it has a tangible outcome.

Therefore, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s and Mona Eltahawy’s work and their different versions of feminism can be both specific and culturally grounded while also still being able to speak to a global audience. We, as activists, as women, and as evolved peoples don’t have to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. We don’t have to choose between Betty Friedan’s feminism or Domitila Barrios de Chungara’s feminism. We should have the right to choose both. Feminism(s) do not have to be linear. Feminism(s) can be connected in a web. One thread can easily be broken, but a web can be much much stronger.

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