Introduction:
Digital Activisms and Intersectionality in Context

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In the past two decades, there has been a great deal of visibility for marginalised populations from many parts of the world via social media platforms (whether through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Tumblr, YouTube, and other platforms). Digital visibility, as we know by now, does not always translate into changes in lived realities or liberation for most people. However, the visibility creates global awareness and highlights the specific conditions of particular groups of people and their struggles within local hierarchies as they intersect with, are complicit with, or are in tension with universalised understandings of hierarchies and power imbalances. Thus, while broader categories such as class, gender, race and sexuality definitely play out in various scenarios of governmentality and technologies of power, each national, local, regional and communal context of struggle and protests reveals the particularities of how these play out. The three co-editors came together to propose this special issue because our own research negotiates these spaces. We realised that flat terms such as 'global south' and 'global north' do not adequately address the simultaneous historicity and contemporary sociopolitical nuances of caste, indigeneity, class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and so much more. In fact, the three of us met through our research struggles and have collaborated on research projects that have revealed these problematics to us in various contexts.

Specifically, for this special issue, our call asked that contributors not only ponder and examine protest movements focused on gender, race and caste issues but also that they take into account the contradictions around, for instance, utilising these privately-owned communication technology infrastructures to build networks, reach global audiences, and demonstrate the influence of digital 'publics,' 'contrapublics,' 'alternetworks,' 'counterpublics,' and so on (see Squires, 2002; Sobande *et al*., 2023). At the same time, these platforms are equally accessible to trolls and groups that use them to spread hate speech, fake news, propaganda, misinformation, and divisive rhetoric in the name of freedom of speech. Misogyny and co-optation of feminist languages of choice happens side-by-side with brand-feminisms and feminist activist callouts.

Oppressive governments also use social media surveillance to silence dissent, enforce bans, and suppress opposition voices.

In this seemingly chaotic digital space, activists, influencers, and advocates attempt to simultaneously speak to their local, regional, national audiences while broadcasting outwards transnationally to garner solidarity and support. These outcries, callouts, and protests in digital publics create nuanced awareness around the particularities of social inequalities in the regions from which they originate. With platforms taking on bolder ideological stances through strategically marginalising moderation techniques or lack of, that step away from Gillespie (2018) had framed as a reluctant task of content moderation, one of the particularities of operating within digital spaces is to contend with phrases such as 'freedom of speech but not freedom of reach' (Twitter/X) or 'too many mistakes, too much content being censored' (Meta). With platform owners themselves redefining their roles as custodians of the internet, where boundaries of proper speech are reshaped in favour of racist, sexist, homophobic and xenophobic expressions, a core affect about activists is that the internet today is a more reinforced anti-activist internet. It is within these tensions that we seek to interrogate how intersectionality in digital spaces plays out despite, within and because of the multiple binds of oppressions triggered by state-user-platform encounters. Therefore, we invited submissions that examine the cultural and political contexts of digital activism and how they shape practices, strategies, and considerations of activism and online engagement.

Our call asked contributors to 'nuance intersectionality as theory or method' and deploy situated, contextual, intersectionalities to flesh out how activisms and solidarities can be forged based on shifting temporal, social, and geopolitical dynamics. We encouraged contributors to deep-dive into how digital activisms conceptualise intersectionality within and beyond activists' contexts and the nuances made visible in activists' use of intersectionality as critical praxis or analytical strategy.

The articles in this special issue cover a range of digital protest contexts. Adrija Dey and Gavaza Maluleke critically examine the case of the South African context based #RUReferenceList while also making comparative references to #LoSHA (coming from an Indian context) and a more global #MeToo by centring questions around sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). A key question they highlight is the question of why survivors turned to social media outlets in their call outs for justice. They argue, in their article, that both #LoSHA

and #RUReferenceList operated at a systemic rather than individual level, focusing not on specific perpetrators or survivors but on transforming institutional frameworks. They expose how institutional structures enable sexual and gender-based violence through systematic silencing, victim-blaming practices, and the suppression of survivor voices – processes that render existing due process mechanisms both inaccessible and insufficient. Rather than centring individual cases, these initiatives emphasised broader survivor needs and the pervasive structural violence embedded within higher education institutions. They envisioned comprehensive institutional transformation and promoted nuanced, intersectional frameworks for understanding rape culture that account for complex, intersecting power dynamics across multiple identity categories and institutional hierarchies.

Brianna Wiens and colleagues, on the other hand, examine the viral uptake of media events around 'Bear vs Man' memes noting that these memes speak to the current status of #MeToo and reveal depths of misogyny. Connecting this with other trends through a 'digital dwelling' as methodology this article highlights how digital activism within the digital itself as social space is an important reality of our everyday life.

Laura Haddad in her article focuses on postcolonial fashion drawing on case studies around hijab fashions. She discusses three creators who use social media in a deeply personal mode. Since hijab-wearing makes their appearance inherently political, reclaiming this politicisation aligns with feminist traditions of making the personal political yet the designers themselves do not claim to be feminists. They practice contemporary digital activism by sharing their personal struggles in relation to gender expectations, family relationships, and beauty standards, thus also providing visibility for marginalised perspectives. Intersectional feminist practices shape how they navigate conflicting beauty standards (religious and secular) while developing individual coping strategies.

Taking forward the problematic of how to research the subjective experiences of religious women navigating technocolonial regimes of visuality and beauty standards on Instagram, Rachel Abreu's article contributes to our understanding of layered methodological approaches, or intersectionality-as-method, to understand digital lives of women without flattening these to either platform-centric analyses or to a singular subject position. The strength of this article is its exploration of networked identities-in-difference (Muñoz, 1999) and the role of the researcher as

not only a participant observer within digitally mediated spaces and conversations, but also as one constituted by a critical-interventionist position.

Closely linked to this is the methodological approach that Nathasha Fernando introduces as postcolonial autoethnography in her article charting the course of racialised Italians' media making in response to and following the networked #BLM movement. Drawing from her work in the award-nominated podcast Sulla Razza, the findings in this article throw light on the strategies racialised Italian activists developed to insist that mainstream coverage on #BLM did not skirt over local issues, finding interconnections between experiences of Black people in the US and their own in the Italian context. Kumru Berfin Emre focuses her analyses on the politics of media witnessing of the persecution and massacre of the Alevi community based in Turkey. Shattering the outdated dichotomy of online versus offline activisms, this article forwards a theoretical framework for understanding the centrality of media-making towards the collective memory and communal identity of Alevi people. These modes of media, mainly tele-visual, witnessing thus not only resist violent attempts to erase the challenges that this particular minoritarian identity poses to the fantasy of the Turkish national identity. Moreover, utilising a feminist critical lens, this article further explores how 'the persecution of Alevis stand at the nexus of complex interplay between religion, gender and sexuality.' This article highlights the affordances of the tele-visual and screen-based media forms to facilitate emotional viewing and provides a feminist conceptual framework that stretches our understanding of digital protests as extending beyond hashtag mediated events.

O. M. Olaniyan explores how feminist-queer intimacies were constructed and fractured in #EndSARS discourse. Framing their work as a complementary reading to research that explores the behind-the-scenes and inner workings of feminist and queer networks in this movement (Faniyi, 2025), they focus their analysis on the Black diasporic queer witnessing embodiment in the discourse of #QueerNigerianLivesMatter, a sister hashtag that emerged out of #EndSARS silence on queer experiences of police violence. Reading this counter movement as a strategic engagement with Blackness produced in and through digital spaces, they explore the alternative frameworks of solidarity and visibility brought on by the discourses within digital magazines such as *The Rustin Times*, *Minority Africa*, and *The Kito Diaries*, Olaniyan argues that 'QueerNigerianLivesMatter maps a transformation of African LGBT solidarities through diasporic longing.' Through the affordances of the diasporic networks these media create and

curate, they argue that queer diasporic identities and histories of the present and past are reinvented through feelings of friction and longing triggered by and beyond the movement. While this movement was peculiar to the tensions and politics of alterity in Nigeria and Africa as a whole, Olaniyan argues that the tense terrain of the movement was nonetheless diasporic, produced in and through digitised narratives of national politics encountering an equally digital and attentive global audience.

And finally, the last piece in this special issue is a 'roundtable' of essays around issues of queer lifeworlds, transnational solidarity and activism, and organising within the intersections of the digital and the political. As noted by co-editors Basu and Gajjala in the preface to the essays, they reveal tensions between digitally mediated 'transnational' and local struggles (which might themselves emerge and be re-shaped within forms of digital mediation), queer critical imaginaries and organisational work, asking what it means to hold space for queer presence and activism within different public spaces that utilise or respond to contemporary issues pertaining to digital mediation in a variety of ways drawing from situated yet interconnected struggles.

GENERAL ARTICLES

Mary Harrod's video essay, 'Heightened Genre and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood: Embodying History in Detroit (Kathryn Bigelow, 2017)', examines deliberate heightened genericity and self-consciousness in this film. The problematic of a white director making a film about Black suffering and the self-conscious presence of the director form the basis for an intriguing study.

In his article 'A Home away from Home: Diasporic Cultural Identity in Susan Abulhawa's *Morning in Jenin*', Majed Hamed Aladylah provides a timely analysis of the tragedy unfolding in Gaza, though discussing 'the forced displacement, fragmentation, alienation, and shattered identity of the forcibly dislocated characters'. He also discusses the implications of the Diaspora and the dual consciousness of the displaced central character.

Jue Jiang's article, 'Critical Analysis of the Rifts and Ostracism in an Online Feminist Community in China', 'shed[s] light on the complex and nuanced impacts of the state and global politics on civil society and rights activism in an authoritarian regime'. She does this through a study of rifts in the online Chinese feminist community and the deployment of the label, 'toxicant cats' to alienate feminists who do not conform.

'Gendered Proverbs in the Eyes of Jordanians: Are They Still Alive?' is a linguistic analysis of Jordanian gendered proverbs. Through their analysis, authors Hana Khalil and Doaa Riziq show an awareness of gender discourse in language discrimination and the call for better gender equality in Jordan.

In 'Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Zimbabwe: Analysing Structural Challenges and Pathways to Gender Equality between 2013 and 2023', Tapiwa Patson Sisimayi, James Tauya Muperi and Sandra Vuyiswa examine the policies and mechanisms that reduce women's involvement in political participation, whilst offering recommendations for improvement. The study uses both qualitative exploratory and descriptive methods.

During the 1990s India 'underwent significant changes with the implementation of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation policies'. But how much change happened in people's everyday life? In 'Shifting Narratives: Globalisation, Women's Rights, and Domestic Violence in Select Hindi Films Between 1996-2001' Navin Sharma and Priyanka Tripathi explore this through an analysis of several films of the period that are about domestic violence.

BOOK REVIEWS

In her review of *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism (Special Issue, Indigenous Feminisms across the World, Part 1* (editors: Basuli Deb and Ginetta E. B. Candelario), Sarah Barrow discusses the importance of Indigenous female leaders and the challenges and complexities of writing about Indigenous feminism.

Itır Aladağ Görentaş reviews *Gender-based Violence and the Law: Global Perspectives and Eastern European Practices* (editors: Agne Limante, Arturas Tereskinas and Ruta Vaiciuniene). While the book challenges and progress in Eastern European countries regarding gender-based violence and gender inequality, Görentaş considers the lack of appropriate legislation to protect rights.

Gendered and Sexual Norms in Global South Early Childhood Education: Understanding Normative Discourses in Post-Colonial Contexts (editors: Deevia Bhana, Yuwei Xu, and Vina Adriany) considers educational practices across a variety of countries. Urszula Markowska-Manista describes the anthology as 'reveal[ing] the complexity of local practices, challenges, and possibilities for their disruption, providing an interdisciplinary analysis that integrates pedagogical, sociological, cultural, and anthropological perspectives'.

Transforming Bodies: Gendered Stories of Embodied Change (Author: Victoria Kannen) offers an in-depth and nuanced exploration of bodily changes, both extreme and more minor. Hilla Nehushtan discusses the pedagogical value of the book and its innovative use of visuals, making it accessible to scholars and lay people alike.

In our last review for this issue, *Feminists Confront State Violence* (editors: Anne Gray Fischer, Sara Matthiesen, and Marisol LeBrón), Rebecca Smyth describes the book as 'urgent and necessary', providing 'rich theorisations of violence and of care'. Despite the topics covered, Smyth finds hope in the book, much needed in our current times.

Finally…

A last word from Chief/Founding Editor Sally R Munt, and Managing Editor Rose Richards, who are stepping down from their roles at Feminist Encounters at the end of 2025, and so this issue will actually be the last one that will be produced by us. It has been a privilege to work on this journal jointly with activist scholars and feminists from all over the world, and to see the journal developing into a strong research publication that has now over 100,000 readers in dozens of countries globally. We wish to thank all of our authors and contributors, guest editors, production team, and the esteemed Editorial Board for all of their hard work and support over the past 10 years, making the journal such a collective effort. Like all great projects it has been a joy (and of course occasionally a pain!), to see each issue come together, and to experience the shared commitment to equality and diversity that has made the journal such an ethical portal for feminist research. In many ways, feminist research is becoming more important than ever, so we wish the journal well in its future and want to thank you once again, dear readers, for supporting us and for disseminating feminist knowledge, we hope you will continue to do so and may the conversations endure.

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