Special Issue

Tweeting, Posting, Blogging: Feminist features in the battle against sexist violence and for peace and equality

Presentation of the Monographic Issue. Tweeting, Posting, Blogging: Feminist features in the battle against sexist violence and for peace and equality

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Digital tools have ushered in a new age for social movements championing Human Rights and equality (Castells, 2012; Rovira, 2017). In the Feminist field, *hacktivism* — a term meaning activism through social networks — tirelessly battles against gender violence and sexual harassment, the victims of which are overwhelmingly women and children. Digital tools link and shape Civil Society, spreading messages that demand attention and remedies (Dean and Aune, 2015; Friedman, 2015; Chamberlain, 2017). We live in a globalised world whose links reveal many commonalities and differences that arise from sundry kinds of structural inequality and violence (Massey, 1994; Sassen, 2007, 2015). In this world, social networks and the way they facilitate communication makes it that much harder to contextualise the concerns, experience, and empathy of those whose lot in life is conditioned by their intersectional relationships (Haraway, 1988; Creswley, 1989; Collins, 2000).

There has been constant international social mobilisation ever since the signing of major international treaties, for instance, The Treaty of Rome, and The Peking Conference. Yet it was not until the dawning of globalisation that such mobilisation took wing. Here, local matters are easier to publicise in a Civil Society in which citizens are made aware of violent incidents wherever they happen in the world. As a result, people can ally with others to stir indignation and to pressure public authorities to put things to rights.

This mobilisation approach has been used often over the last few decades, particularly to defend key Human Rights given the need to organise against structural violence. Such mobilisation can be seen in campaigns ranging from #MeToo to #YoSoy123, #BringBackOurGirls, #OccupyWallStreet, #BlackLivesMatter, to name but a few. Internet and Communication Technologies (ICT) in general and social networks in particular channel the demands of Civil Society and fuel popular revolt.

Intersectionality is a key theoretical and political tool for both building scientific knowledge and for articulating political activism. It does, however, pose an intellectual challenge. That is because it begs the question whether situated experiences (which stem from local socio-cultural settings) can be generalised to the global scale. Are important nuances of the local setting lost when one scales up to international mobilisation? Are some aspects simplified or misinterpreted? Even when mass support is garnered and everyone supports the protest, what results are achieved? What change processes come into play? What consequences may flow from highly-complex political situations — for example, ones in which a society is engaged in armed conflict or other types of extreme violence (Bunch, 2001; Friedman, 2005; Magallón, 2010, 2012; Bloom, 2011; Leatherman, 2014; Anderlini, 2018)? One needs to ask whether cyber-campaigns are led by international agencies or by local leaders. In either case, what impact do the campaigns have on the local political agenda, on resolving the conflict, and on local citizens' everyday lives? One also needs to consider whether these campaigns represent one or other of the pressure groups in a conflict and if they take the complexity of the issue and the population's general feelings on the subject into account (Hooks, 1986; Mohanty 1984; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Maxfield, 2016).

These questions underpin our research proposal, whose origin lies in a research project titled *Las redes sociales como instrumento de lucha contra las violencias de género* [Social Networks as a Tool for Battling Gender Violence] (2017 RICIP0000), funded by L'Institut Català Internacional per la Pau [The International Catalan Institute for Peace] (ICIP). Some of the papers here are linked to this research, as is the case of the papers by Carmen Magallón, Beatriz Revelles-Benavente, Maite García and that of the editors of the special issue of the *Debats* journal. A seminar — Peace and Human Rights: #enREDadas in the battle against gender violence", with was co-funded by the Women's Institute [*Instituto de la Mujer*]. This Special Issue is the result of the work proposed in the project, which established a research network for people working in this field. In pursuing the work programme, we made a call for papers between February and April 2019 for this Special Issue with a view to disseminating the international work carried out by other researchers in this discipline. The response to the call was very encouraging, letting us include a wide range of papers and viewpoints on cyber-activism from the standpoint of gender and the fostering of a space that is free from gender violence. To this network, the editors added other researchers in the field as external viewers. A 'blind' review of submissions was made but this does not mean that the reviewers should remain in the shadows. We should like to thank the following for their time and outstanding work in conducting these reviews: Patricia Peña (Universidad de Chile); Jessie Bustillo (London Metropolitan University); Lola S. Almendros (Centro Superior

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This Special Issue contains seven papers and two additional documents. The first paper, "Violent Extremism, A Challenge for Pacifist Feminism" by Carmen Magallón looks at violent societies and considers the way these victimise women. She suggests that an international policy agenda is needed to cast women in the role of peace-makers. In Magallón's words: "Leaders of Pacifist Feminism are shifting from criticism to drawing up new strategies. In doing so, they are guided by women's views, providing solutions to violence rather than merely analysing its causes".

The second paper, by Ana M. González Ramos, Beatriz Revelles-Benavente, and Verónica Gisbert-Gracia, presents Nigeria's internecine conflict and the objectivisation of women's and girls' bodies in the war zones. The authors describe the complex role played by women from their intersectional positions in Nigerian society with all its religious and socio-cultural nuances.

The third paper is by Beatriz Revelles-Benavente. In it, she delves into the roles played by girls in the conflict and the way in which the #BringBackOurGirls campaign instrumentalised political mobilisation from an affirmative Feminist standpoint. The author notes the elasticity of the concept of childhood — a category whose acceptance and definition is shaped by each society and by the passage of time itself (in the case of the Chibok kidnapping, the victims were girls when they were kidnapped but several years later, are all now young women).

The fourth paper is by María Teresa García-Catalá, who used the Twitter API to analyse the *hashtag* data spanning the period from the 19th of May 2014 to the 16th of May 2019. She uses this data to shed light on the reasons for the campaign's international success. Her results point to a truly local campaign with an international impact. That is because most of the tweets were by Nigerians. In addition, many of the events underlying activity on social networks were also of Nigerian origin.

The fifth paper is by Blessing Datiri, which opens the discussion on how the cyber-campaigns contribute to the Feminist cause in eradicating violence against women. Datiri analyses the #BringBackOurGirls, #JusticeforNoura and #JusticeForOchanya campaigns to this end. The paper answers one of the needs raised earlier, to wit: contextualisation of movements in their local settings and noting their results. She analyses the male chauvinism and domestic violence inflicted on African women, which have spurred the African Feminist movement to demand their countries draw up policies to deal with gender discrimination.

The sixth paper, by Macarena Hanash Martínez, takes a different angle, namely the patriarchal violence suffered by Feminist women on the Internet. She uses the case of the *Gamergate* movement in which Anita Sarkeesian and Zoë Quinn were attacked online in August 2019. The author also looks at grassroots movements in which activist users strive to manage cyber-violence "when social media platforms refuse to apply their terms of use and service to protect vulnerable groups from male chauvinist, racist, trans-phobic, and homophobic violence and harassment."

The papers in this Special Issue are complemented by two further documents. The first document is an interview by Begonya Enguix Grau of the activist and former Minister Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili. The interview was held on the 20th of September 2019, revealing the viewpoint of one of the people running the #BringBackOurGirls campaign. Obiageli Ezekwesili tells how the international campaign was managed, and evaluates both its success and its impact on Nigeria's national politics. In the interview, she stresses the campaign's ability to shape public opinion and to foster gender equality for African girls and women. Ezekwelisili ends the interview by alluding to the starting theme of the peace culture and Feminism. The second document is a poem by Maria Antonia García de León, titled: "Nosotras nunca estuvimos allí" [We Were Never There".

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Nosotras nunca estuvimos allí

María Antonia García de León

Leo la historia cruel del Siglo Veinte, su barbarie.
Veo hoy, las imágenes de Egipto, Libia y Siria.
Siempre la misma guerra,
siempre los mismos hombres
broncos, agresivos, vociferantes.
De un bando o de otro, siempre el olvido de la vida,
siempre el adiós a la paz.
Nosotras nunca estuvimos allí,
en aquella locura,
en aquella crueldad,
en aquella sinrazón, en aquel desperdicio,
en aquel odio,
en aquella tremenda destrucción,
en aquella ruindad,
en aquel arrasamiento de vida,
en aquella baldía bancarrota del amor.
Nosotras nunca estuvimos allí.
Nosotras, hiedras fuertes,
inmensas enredaderas, salvamos escollos,
trepamos por paredes imposibles,
agarramos clavos ardientes.
Salvamos la Vida.
¡Oh sagrado posibilismo de las mujeres!
Nosotras no apostamos por el todo o nada,
ni al blanco o negro, ni al jaque mate del poder.
Jugamos a la vida,
creemos en la vida,
y la vida no es dogma.
Nosotras, las valientes,
hacemos la vida posible en un mundo de hombres.