Namibia's #ShutItAllDown and Contemporary Feminist Tactics: Social Media, Transgressive Practices, and Feminist Collaboration in the 2020 Protests

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Abstract

This article considers how the 2020 #ShutItAllDown feminist protests elucidate contemporary Namibian feminist activist culture in contrast to earlier generations of Namibian feminist activism. The protests sprung up among youth (particularly women) mostly under 25 years old, a demographic with little political influence and traditional cultural power. Thus, the organisers used strategic, transgressive disruption along with social media as fundamental to their activism. Given Namibia's historically active and varied feminist and gender activist landscape, the absence of older women and feminist activists (with the exception of Sister Namibia) at these protests is noteworthy. This article asks: how does this absence speak to contemporary Namibian feminist activist culture? what role did social media play in facilitating the dynamic movement that #ShutItAllDown became? how is this movement situated in the context of contemporary transnational and global feminist and hashtag protests? I use mixed methodologies for understanding the movement; along with excavating online spaces, I draw from informal discussions and interviews conducted in 2022 with young and older Namibian women activists. I conclude that while the #ShutItAllDown movement is emblematic of a generational divide in protest practices between contemporary feminist activists and those of previous generations, the acts of solidarity and collaboration between this movement and Sister Namibia, facilitated by social media, are reflective of a culture of feminist solidarity practices between Namibia's early feminist organisations and the contemporary groups, despite the generational divide. Furthermore, the use of social media in conjunction with disruptive protest resonated with contemporary

transnational and global hashtag protest practices, effectively drawing attention to the movement nationally and across the continent.

Keywords: hashtag feminisms; disruptive protest practices; Namibian feminisms

Introduction

This article considers how the 2020 #ShutItAllDown Namibian feminist protests elucidate contemporary Namibian feminist activist culture in contrast to earlier generations of Namibian feminist activist practice. I consider the role social media and online activism played in the dynamic movement that #ShutItAllDown became, and how these sites connect the movement to transnational and global feminist protests more broadly. This almost completely youth-led (ages 15-25) protest of women, queer and non-binary people, and men, is currently considered the largest protest movement in post-independence Namibia, with approximately 1,500-2,000 people participating in Windhoek alone. Given Namibia's historically active and varied feminist and gender activist landscape, the general absence of older women and feminist activists at these protests is noteworthy (Sister Namibia, the nation's longest-standing feminist organisation, was an exception). Accordingly, this project asks: what does this absence reveal about contemporary Namibian feminist activist culture? what role did social media play in facilitating the dynamic movement that #ShutItAllDown became? how is this movement situated in the context of contemporary transnational and global feminist and hashtag protests? Like other contemporary African social media feminist movements, #ShutItAllDown is inherently transmedial and globally connected and thus requires mixed methodologies for understanding it. The movement has been extensively documented online on social media platforms and in interviews recorded on YouTube, podcasts, and online newspapers and magazines. #ShutItAllDown's digitality—as it came about through Twitter and as it is archived online—highlights the significance of online spaces as sites of research for contemporary activist movements. Equally significant are people's perceptions beyond the curated sites of social media, which give on-the-ground contexts of the protests and movement. Thus, along with excavating online spaces, I draw from informal discussions and interviews conducted in 2022 with

young and older Namibian women activists, and women from the community regarding the movement.

Using these methodologies, this article begins by providing an overview of the movement's beginnings and situates it within the broader context of global hashtag movements also occurring that year to highlight the significant role of social media activism for #ShutItAllDown. I historicise the movement within 21st-century African feminisms and the significance of Internet 2.0 for contemporary feminist activism. I discuss the use of social media in marking a generational divide in Namibian feminist practices with attention to the way in which the leaders of the movement theorise their use of social media. I demonstrate how Sister Namibia Magazine's 2020 move to exclusively online spaces facilitated cross-generational collaboration between the movement and the magazine. I consider the protesters' use of transgressive protest tactics and the turn away from respectability politics and situate these choices within broader transgressive protest tactics across the continent. I position #ShutItAllDown within local and southern African contemporary gender/feminist activist culture and cross-generational and political feminist solidarity practices in those instances. I show that while the #ShutItAllDown movement is emblematic of a generational divide in protest practices between contemporary protesters and the feminist activists of previous generations in Namibia, the acts of solidarity and collaboration between this movement and Sister Namibia, facilitated by social media, are reflective of feminist solidarity practices between Namibia's early feminist organisations and the contemporary groups, that bridge the generational differences in activist practices. Furthermore, the use of social media in conjunction with disruptive protest gave the movement visibility that it may not have received otherwise, and links it to contemporary transnational and global hashtag protest movements that rely on the Internet and social media to extend their influence socially and politically.

It was a hot early October Tuesday in 2020 when the police found the body of 22-year-old Shannon Wasserfal in a shallow grave in the dunes of the coastal town of Walvis Bay; this discovery sparked protests across Namibia, most of which were organised under the hashtag ShutItAllDown. When Shannon Wasserfal went missing six months earlier, on April 9th, her family and friends kept her name and image in the public view, giving interviews and posting on

social media. This publicity was in turn picked up by gender activists online and shared under #bringshannonhome (Madia et al. 2022, 117). After the police discovered her body on October 5, this prolonged media campaign to keep Shannon in the public national consciousness translated into protests and marches mourning Shannon and decrying the police's inability to effectively address gender-based violence. Protests occurred across the nation, starting as early as October 6 in the coastal towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. Marchers expressed their frustration at the quotidian nature of this kind of violence toward women, chanting "Ons Is Moeg [We Are Tired]"; "Justice for Shannon"; and "Shut It Down" (Hambuda 2020). The largest protests were organised under #ShutItAllDown, beginning in Windhoek on Thursday, October 8, and spreading to other parts of the country, including Tsumeb, Swakopmund, Katima Mulilo, and Oranjemund. Protesters took on various concerns under the #ShutItAllDown umbrella. Because of the movement's careful and intentional use of social media, #ShutItAlldown's images and messages circulated on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and were taken up in online magazines and platforms in various parts of the world.

#ShutItAllDown occurred during societal upheavals that took place globally in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns. It emerged in an environment of ongoing contemporary local gender activism and Namibian solidarity with social media hashtag protests and movements happening transnationally and internationally, such as Black Lives Matter and South Africa's The Total Shutdown. Thus, social media activism featured as key for mobilising protesters, information dissemination, and garnering national and international visibility for the movement. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook enabled activists to organise protests across the country, coordinate townhall meetings regarding sexual gender-based violence, and interrogate the government's responses to their demands. Also, social media gave Sister Namibia a platform to disseminate information about the protests both nationally and internationally. Along with effective social media practices, the organisers privileged strategic, transgressive disruption as fundamental to their activism.

The protests sprung up among a demographic of youth who in the context of the law are without much political influence or traditional cultural power. Thus, transgressive protest practices aided in bringing national and global attention to

their cause and giving them a measure of political influence. While the majority of protesters were women, the protests were nonbinary in nature, including men and queer peoples, with many holding placards reading "womxn." The protesters cut across ethnic lines, and in their slogans, suggested an intersection between Namibia's "shadow pandemic" of gender-based violence and the nation's colonial past (Melber 2020, para 19; also see Ndakalako-Bannikov 2020). This connection was made explicit in February 2022 when #ShutItAllDown was featured in Amaka digital magazine. The photography in this feature merges images of the victims of femicide with historically fraught localities. The photoshoot occurred in Goreangab an informal settlement in Katutura, and a Windhoek location in Namibia known for its history of Apartheid forced removals of Africans that led to violence in 1959. Situating the shoot in this location makes an intersectional connection between the area's (and nation's) colonial history, continued poverty, and gender-based violence. The photoshoot makes explicit #ShutItAllDown's critique of the government's addressing of gender-based violence, and envisions a Namibian feminism rooted in historical context and articulated from the positionality of these 2020 protests.

Situating #ShutItAllDown and Social Media Activism Historically Within 21st Century African Feminisms

In her definition of "African Feminist Thought'" Amina Mama points out that African feminisms emerged in the context of "transnational liberal and emancipatory political discourses of the late 19th and 20th centuries of European empire" (2019, para 1). Following independence, women who had been part of anti-colonial liberation movements have had to pursue further struggles because the emergent African States often "hesitated or reverted to conservative patriarchal views when it came to extending freedom and equality to African women" (Mama 2019, para 1). In the context of Namibia, younger feminists participate in this struggle, and yet they also form a marked contrast to this generation, having been born after independence. Furthermore, the use of online spaces by Namibia's young feminist activists resonates with Minna Salami's delineation of 21st-century African feminisms as emerging in conjunction with Internet 2.0 and social media. Minna Salami describes the formal emergence of

African feminisms in the context of two "Rises", the first, occurring between the 1970s and1990, with Black African women directly referencing feminism and developing African feminist discourse (2023). This Rise landmarks moments such as the expansion of Women's Studies in universities across Africa and globally, and the

> UN decade for women 1975—1985, and the subsequent World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, which resulted in coalition-building, increased (if insufficient) funding for feminist activism and scholarship across the continent and diaspora (Salami 2023, para 41).

A significant feature of this moment in African feminisms is the complicated and challenging process of "becoming", as women hesitated at the use of the "*feminist* label within the movement itself, which led key advocates of women's issues to denounce the notion entirely…or to coin alternative terms to feminism" (Salami 2023, para 45; italics belong to Salami). The second Rise, on the other hand, tended to embrace the term "feminist" as key to their political identity. This Rise emerged in the 21st century and was ushered in by the Internet and social media, which allowed activists to circumvent traditional gatekeepers and provided new tools such as blogs, apps, and online petitions to advocate for, and foster change (Salami 2023). Young feminists seized upon social media to challenge conservative and patriarchal practices of political participation across various geographical contexts (Dieng, Haastrup, and Kang 2023). It also enabled contemporary movements to highlight the foothold patriarchy has in earlier feminist and gender activist organisations (Dieng, Haastrup, and Kang 2023). Salami's periodisation of African feminisms was evident in #ShutItAllDown as the youth used social media as a means of gaining political power. Their transgressive protest practices, a turn away from respectability politics, is also a feature of transnational and global contemporary feminist movements, as young feminist activists use new forms of activism to challenge the status quo, and distinguish themselves from earlier generations of feminist and women's activism and their work with respective nation-states (see Hassim 2023; Dieng, Haastrup, and Kang 2023; McFadden 2018). #ShutItAllDown is thus part of a new generation of feminist activists that use social media as a significant new site of protest to focus national attention on gender-based violence and push for legal and constitutional changes to bring about gender equality (Okech 2023).

While #ShutItAllDown makes apparent the generational divide between contemporary and earlier feminist activism, it also reveals instances of collaborative intergenerational Namibian feminisms that continue to confront the aftermaths of Namibia's colonial past for women and LGBTQI+ Namibians in unexpected, disruptive, and yet productive ways.

Social Media and the Generational Divide Within Namibian Feminist Activist Practices

#ShutItAllDown's intentional deployment of social media for their activism, and the simultaneous move by Sister Namibia to exclusively online spaces is a shift in activist practices that signals a generational divide within Namibian feminist protest culture. #ShutItAllDown began in response to a call on Twitter for protesters to meet in a designated area in downtown Windhoek to demonstrate their frustration at the government's "inaction" regarding Namibia's high rates of sexual gender-based violence and femicide. In their planning of the protests, the organisers—Bertha Tobias, Ndiilokelwa Nthengwe, and Lebbeus Hashikutuva—targeted a demographic of online social media users already invested in protesting sexual and gender-based violence. Tobias explains that

> their individual social media accounts played the primary role of mobilising people and sustaining the movement, which also eventually took on its own presence within the online community…[T]hrough Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram it was easy to map out the demographic that had quickly taken to the issue of SGBV and the demand for immediate reform. [She further explained] that the group also had to be clever with the kind of posters, music and language associated with their initiative (Madia et al. 2022, 119).

Social media gave the protesters a platform not easy to ignore, and visibility before government officials who may have otherwise dismissed their concerns. The organisers considered the power of social media as "an institution" capable of provoking action from the politicians, who were also their elders. As Nthengwe explains:

> We realised we could use [social media] as another institution because most of our elected leaders don't have social media for the reason that they know we would hold them accountable publically [sic] and that is something they do not want to be confronted with […] We saw social media as a watchdog,

> one that can be used to close the hierarchy gap between those in parliament versus the people (Madia et al. 2022, 119).

Social media thus becomes a space of empowerment and agency in the face of a political body that disvalues youth and their voices. The first day of the protests culminated at the House of Parliament where the protesters delivered a list of 27 demands outlining actions the government could take to address sexual gender-based violence more adequately. The list of demands outlined radical reform within the legal, educational, and private sectors.

While the Office of the Prime Minister's response on October 10 and 13 lacked "detailed plans…deadlines [and] success metrics" (MICT Namibia 2020), the government pointed out that some of the demands on the list were already in the process of being addressed (Kuugongelwa-Amadhila 2020b). The movement's lack of knowledge regarding the government's (and other feminist organisations') past work to address Namibian gender concerns suggests a generational divide, since, as gender consultant and Sister Namibia representative Brigit Loots points out, the Namibian government has been making plans for substantial gender reform since 2001. Sister Namibia nevertheless stood in solidarity with the youth, recognising much of the inaction that nevertheless persists around the government's effort to address violence towards women. This was something Sister Namibia was able to do effectively because of their own then-recent shift from publishing in print to an exclusively online presence.

Sister Namibia and Social Media Activist Solidarity

Sister Namibia is a feminist organisation and magazine founded by Liz Frank and Elizabeth ǁKhaxas in 1989, a year before Namibia's independence, to give women a voice in the new process of nation-building (Frank and ǁKhaxas 2006). Since its inception, Sister Namibia has educated the local and international community regarding Namibian feminisms and gender activism using various means, including testimony, fiction, art, educational articles, and more. Using these means, Sister Namibia has featured the work and leaders of various feminist organisations across the country. The organisation draws its leadership from both older and younger feminist activists, and the site's educational technique bridges the divides between academic and intellectual feminist inquiry, everyday

experience resulting from gendered identities, and activism, highlighting their collaborative core and intersectional approach (Edwards-Jauch 2012). The magazine was distributed nationally and to international subscribers and libraries in collaboration with NGOs (Frank and IKhaxas 2006). However, in 2019, due to increasing budgetary constraints, Sister Namibia decided to move their magazine entirely online, publishing on a website and maintaining a strong and active social media presence. This move to exclusively online spaces was intended to target young people aged 18-35, who Sister Namibia believes are the future of feminist activism in Namibia. While the move accentuated the generational divide between young activists using social media and older feminist activists uncomfortable or unfamiliar with social media, the organisation hopes that the information they feature will be shared by their followers on other platforms like WhatsApp. This would ensure that their work reaches rural spaces as well as older feminists who may not use or frequent popular social media sites.

The move to online spaces positioned Sister Namibia magazine perfectly to strategically assist in #ShutItAllDown's online activism. While certainly intentionally planned, #ShutItAllDown very quickly took on a life of its own—something its leaders did not expect (Madia et al. 2022). It was likely for this reason that #ShutItAllDown created a steady social media presence under its name only after the protests ended, forming its Twitter and Instagram accounts in February 2021. In the meantime, the local and international public scrambled to find information regarding the protests, and Sister Namibia stepped into this gap, disseminating information on their newly formed social media spaces regarding the protesters' demands, and being able to couple this information with their decades-long understanding of the landscape of activism, policy work, and government (in)action regarding Namibia's epidemic of violence towards women. Sister Namibia became a key space where people turned to for information (Sister Namibia 2020b). On their Twitter feed and Instagram page, Sister Namibia deconstructed the problematic nature of the government's first and initial response to the protests on October 10on an ideological level. In their response, the government asserted the role of women and female children within patriarchal roles and normative gender binaries (Kuugongelwa-Amadhila 2020a). On Twitter, Sister Namibia outlined how the government's response to the protest highlighted the lack of an intersectional approach to sexual gender-based violence

in its call for calm and its appeal to conservative stereotypes of female identities as "mothers" and "sisters" (Sister Namibia 2020d). Decentring gender and patriarchy, Sister wrote:

> This language is dangerous. You are perpetuating the problem at the highest level. Human beings are dying and being traumatised. Even one's [sic] that aren't mothers or sisters or daughters. We don't have to fit into stereotypical roles to deserve freedom, autonomy and security. These are basic HUMAN rights. (Sister_Namibia 2020c)

Sister furthermore critiqued the government's characterisation of sexual gender-based violence and femicide as being a result of "evil" rather than a systemic problem. Sister replied:

> You are mandated to serve a secular country, but we have long lost hope of you fulfilling your constitutional duty to do so. Instead you insist on manipulating the Christian sensitivities of your constituencies for political gain…Most alarmingly, this shows a profound ignorance of the situation—our problem is systemic not demonic—How can you hope to defeat [gender-based violence] if you cannot even demonstrate that you understand what it is? (Sister_Namibia 2020c)

Sister's contention was borne out in that on October 13, after days of silence, the President finally responded with a statement regarding the protests, describing them as a sign of hope and faith in the government (Sister_Namibia 2020a). Sister introduced this quote to their Instagram audience with an image of a protester holding a cardboard sign that read: "And the president said and I quote" (Sister Namibia 2020a). This was followed by a photo of the clipped newspaper article. The President's comment signals his failure to recognise the urgency felt by the protesters: the protesting youth regarded this violence as a war on female bodies, which is a marker of everyday life in Namibia. Accordingly, they framed the protests within the context of a liberation struggle which has failed women, girls, and queer Namibians.

The sentiment of a continued war in which women and girls are the victims was echoed in the placards during the protest. For instance, two placards held by women read: "It is our blood that waters your freedom" and "Writing this in ink because the blood of women wasn't enough". Both comments allude to the national anthem, which praises the bravery and martyrs of the liberation

movement, "whose blood waters our freedom". While verbally leaving the readers to make their own sense of the President's tone-deaf response, the preface that Sister gives to the article (a protester with a water bottle tucked between their thighs and a cardboard sign held with both hands at the level of the camera) implies objection to his statement. Their framing of the President's remarks infers the need for continued protest and activism for reform, and comprehensive education regarding how gender-based violence operates in Namibia, in solidarity with the ongoing #ShutItAllDown protests.

Transgressive Protests and the Turn Away from Respectability Politics

The organisers of the protests made careful choices regarding what #ShutItAllDown means, and their mode of activism. The protests sprung up among a demographic of youth (Gen Zs) who normally do not have much political influence or traditional cultural power, thus driving the leaders' decisions for transgressive protest tactics. Tobias describes their choices as "genuine and deliberate and transgressive" (Madia et al. 2022, 119). Hashikutuva described their disruptive means of protest as "confronting docile and properly maintained systems of power…asserting that abnormal situations require action that is, in itself, disruptive, drastic and abnormal" (Hambuda 2020). For instance, the protesters did not apply for a police escort or permit to protest, and when the police nevertheless tried to escort them, the protesters refused to follow a fixed route. Anne Hambuda writes that

> The first day of the march was probably the most surprising for law enforcement agencies. Unable to anticipate the movements of the group to sufficiently prepare themselves, they were left scrambling and annoyed, especially when protesters stormed parliament (2020).

This accomplished the purpose of disrupting the city's day-to-day, one of the aims of #ShutItAllDown. Hambuda describes the day as "an extremely disruptive and inconvenient time for anyone who was not invested in it. From hundreds of people sitting in the middle of an intersection and shutting it down…and other disruptive tactics, the #ShutItAllDown protesters wanted to make a statement" (2020). The protesters carried posters and chanted the phrase "My Koekie My

Keuse [My Pussy My Choices]," a phrase used in efforts to "de-stigmatize [sic] bodily autonomy for women amidst the fight for pro-choice laws" (Madia et al. 2022, 115). They also danced and twerked to WAP by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion.

Following the protests, older feminists reprimanded the youth for their disrespectful protest tactics, finding the twerking to WAP offensive. They also attempted to give the youth direction as to "how you protest correctly." In a conversation, an older gender activist considered the protests unsuccessful because the youth did not talk to the authorities—who were significantly older—with respect and failed to recognise the importance of cultural traditions of respect to elders. However, this transgressive style of protesting was an intentional turning away from respectability politics in activism. This transgressive stance serves a purpose, as Liz McQuiston (2019) explains in her discussion of the effect of protest posters, which resonates with transgressive protest acts like twerking and disruptive marching:

> [A]gitational images represent a power struggle; a rebellion against an established order and a call to arms, or a passionate cry of concern for a cause. They signify, in short, an attempt to bring about change, whether driven by the cry of an individual or the heat of the crowd. It is the emotion, aggression or immediacy of this imagery that constitutes a visual power that links into the passions of the viewer. (6)

This has resonance with South African student protests in 2015 and 2016—#FeesMustFall and #EndRapeCulture.

Discussing these intersectional student feminist movements in South Africa, Amanda Gouws (2017) argues that young protesters used intersectional thinking as a means for facilitating radical change. These movements' radical impetus was undergirded by "militant irreverence" (Gouws 2017, 24). Thus while, like radical second-wave Western feminism, these South African movements were attentive to the objectification of women's bodies, reproductive rights and the policing of sexuality, their resistance was also

> …against matriarchal leadership and the construction of women as mothers through the nationalism of the ANC. [furthermore], [t]he inclusion of trans/

> queer and LGBTQI students opened a space for a radically different subject to challenge the normative binary logic of women/man (male/female), and…it poses the radical challenge to male-dominated societies that if we destabilise this binary, who is dominant? (Gouws 2017, 24)

In similar-style protesting, the Namibian #ShutItAllDown activists carefully planned a protest that was undergirded by a philosophy of radical interventions. Tobias has explained that #ShutItAllDown

> …means that everything needs to be brought to a standstill until we can re-evaluate what it is about Namibian systems of safety that is not working for Namibian women. Until we have answers to those questions, we do not believe it is right, healthy or in the best interest of anyone to continue doing business as usual. We don't want economic activity of any sort to continue as usual if young women do not feel safe (Civicus 2021, para 5).

#ShutItAllDown's strategically disruptive protest style is in line with earlier protests by youth, such as Namibia's 2019 Slut Shame Walk movement (inspired by the North American SlutWalk of 2015), which "From the outset…sought to pair feminist messaging with a politics of spectacle, a noticeable break with feminist antirape organising in Namibia focused on rape law reform and enforcement" (Currier et al. 2021, 273).

However, collaborative solidarity work between older and contemporary youth-led organisations is not unusual in contemporary protest contexts. Ashley Currier, Erin Winchester, and Emily Chien (2021) describe #MeTooNamibia as a coalition emerging in 2019 between various NGOs, including Sister Namibia, Slut Shame Organisation, and the Office of the First Lady—a mix of early and contemporary feminist organisations. This coalition was formed "to offer support to SGBV survivors, provide a platform for survivors to share their stories, and advocate for sex positivity" (271). As much Namibian feminist activism tends to occur apart from State involvement, the involvement of First Lady Monica Geingos makes #MeTooNamibia unusual—both in-country and in the context of international #MeToo movements. In fact, "#MeToo activists worried little about antifeminist backlash or threats of reputational, sexual, or physical harm" because of the First Lady's involvement, which "enveloped #MeToo organising, particularly the naming and shaming tactic, in respectability" (276). Similarly in the context of #ShutItAllDown, older feminists assisted in #ShutItAllDown's

negotiations with the government, lending the youth their seniority in the mediations. Following the protests, #ShutItAllDown encountered difficulty being taken seriously in a conservative political landscape led by elderly men and women. The protesters were young and did not have all of the facts at hand regarding earlier steps taken by other feminist organisations and the government to address sexual gender-based violence and femicide. While their deliberate acts of disrespect got the protests national and international attention, it also brought them hostility from government officials and many in the public. However, Sister Namibia and Immaculate Mogotsi (Sister Namibia's then-chairwoman) were able to act as mediators between the movement's leaders and the government officials.

While the #ShutItAllDown's transgressive protest and deliberate turn against respectability politics, coupled with social media hashtag activism, divide earlier generations of feminist activist work from contemporary younger feminists, this is not a strict divide in the wider African feminist context. An example is Stella Nyanzi's radically rude Facebook poetry and controversial naked protests. In 2018, Stella Nyanzi published vulgar poetry on Facebook targeted at Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni (Allison 2019). This "masterpiece of calculated obscenity" levelled at the failures of the president's term in office led to her arrest under Uganda's cybercrime laws, and in one of her court appearances, Nyanzi disrobed, jiggled her breasts, and flung obscenities at the justice system (Allison 2019, para 8; Makoni 2021). Busi Makoni describes both this poetry and defiant disrobing as radical rudeness, an antisocial "resistance strategy" that uses words or the body, or both, to unsettle "civility and/or politeness, thereby subverting dominant modes of sociability through disruption and confrontation" (2021, 551, 552). Makoni contextualises Nyanzi's poetry in Ugandan colonial history when, in the 1940s, Bugandan activists used radical rudeness— "derogatory insults, disorderliness, intemperance and obnoxiousness to unsettle colonialists' pretensions to politeness and hospitality while denying Bugandans their freedom" (553). Nyanzi's naked protests also have historical precedent, predating colonialism and deployed as effective, subversive last-resort tactics to signal women's discontent and secure political or economic redress (Tamale 2017; Makoni 2021). While not drawing from cultural precedent in their protests as Nyanzi did, a similarity lies in that the #ShutItAllDown youth used disruptive protest with similar intent.

Discussing the symbolic meaning behind the transgressive public displays of the female naked body in response to repressive authoritarian regimes, Florence Ebila and Aili Mari Trip examine the "body symbolism" within the naked protests by the women of Apaa Uganda on April 17, 2015 (2017, 30). They draw from the meaning of female nakedness as a form of protest in Acholi culture in which as a last resort, women wield the symbolism behind motherhood as the bringer of life to communicate frustration and the need for redress. In this context, "the widowed protestors symbolically represented the source of life and their protest was a curse that threatened social death to the authorities" (38). Thus, these protests were as much social as they were political, "drawing on culturally resonant understandings of motherhood" (26). While not drawing from cultural practice as the Ugandan women did, #ShutItAllDown's twerking to WAP nevertheless carried symbolic resonance in the Namibian context. As the #ShutItAllDown youth twerked, they signalled their refusal to being inscribed as chaste, obedient, respectable young women, voiceless in the context of conservative nationalist and religious ideologies, and various of Namibia's cultural traditions. However, drawing WAP into their protest practice resonates globally with conversations regarding the appropriateness of the video when released earlier in 2020 (Serpell 2021). A significant reason for the controversy surrounding WAP was Cardi B and Meghan Thee Stallions portrayal of women desiring "sex for its own sake", highlighting female pleasure and sexual agency, and turning the common notion of "prostitute" on its head (Serpell 2021, para 37). In her reading of WAP, Namwali Serpell points out that:

> [T]he whore—or colloquially, hoe—*does* want. Yes, a whore exchanges sex for money or fine luxury items. But what makes the whore a hoe, what makes them distinct from a prostitute, is that they want sex for its own sake, too, being not just ready and willing but actively ravenous for it" (2021, italics in original text).

In bringing sexuality and sexual desire out of the private and into the public sphere, and using WAP and twerking as a symbol of sexual agency, they politicised eroticism as a challenge to the status quo and impetus for change (Tamale 2017; Lorde 1984). They also played on cultural and globally understood body symbolism to communicate their discontent.

#Shutitalldown's Transnational and Global Activist Resonances

#ShutItAllDown's call to radical disruption of business (and government) -as usual shares affinities with transregional southern African feminist politics. It is also in conversation with global activism against police brutality toward Black people and people of colour, and violence toward women. 2020 was a year of international and local protests, including #BLM and #EndSARS, with COVID-19 restrictions exacerbating police brutality and sexual gender-based violence. #ShutItDown protesters stood in solidarity with both of these movements (Ngutjinazo and Oliveira 2020), and in turn, garnered transnational attention in South Africa (Shapwanale 2020). Indeed, the hashtag ShutItAllDown evokes a transnational connection to #TheTotalShutDown, a feminist protest that occurred across southern Africa in 2018, in which Namibians participated. At #ShutItAllDown a protester in Windhoek made an explicit link between Namibian and South African women's activism—both in past and contemporary contexts—when they held up a sign that read: "When you strike a woman you strike a rock". #TheTotalShutdown Intersectional Women's Movement Against Gender-Based Violence occurred on August 1 2018 and was a women's and gender non-conforming-only march to protest gender-based violence and femicide (Gouws 2018). This transnational and transregional movement was coordinated from South Africa. Women marched in various regions across the country, as well as in Namibia, Lesotho, and Botswana; there were 19 marches in total on that day (Head 2018). The movement aimed to get the South African government's attention which had, up to this point, been mostly silent regarding the violent treatment of women through social and economic disruption (Moosa 2018b), hence "the platform of a total shutdown with women and gender nonconforming people being asked to stay away from work" (Moosa 2018c, para 1). To that end, the march in Pretoria culminated at the steps of the Union Buildings in Tshwane, memorialising the women's march of 1956 against the Apartheid regime. There, women held up signs that repeated the slogan used in 1956— "When You Strike a Woman You Strike a Rock". In anticipation of the president's speech on Women's Day, the organisation handed President Ramaphosa a memorandum listing 24 demands, the first of which required acknowledgement "…from the office of the President that gender-based violence

against womxn…is pervasive and widespread and that it cannot be tolerated at any level of society" (Moosa 2018a, para 4). Similarly in Windhoek, Namibians marched under the theme "My Body is not a Crime Scene"; they gathered outside of the Katutura Police Station to make recommendations on how to better assist women in situations of gender-based violence, and read out the names of many women who had lost their lives to such violence (Alweendo et. al. 2018; Mukaiwa 2018). This protest makes transnational and transhistorical connections with slogans, chants and hashtags that are reminders that women were significant actors in the liberation struggle, and the high rates of gender-based violence signal southern Africa's incomplete liberation work.

Conclusion

#ShutItAllDown was effective because of social media's ability to amplify and unify youth expressions of frustration with the State's historically slow response to gender-based violence, all coalescing around the death of Shannon Wasserfal. The protests sprung up among youth (particularly women) mostly under 25 years old, a demographic with little political influence and traditional cultural power. Thus, the organisers used strategic, transgressive disruption and a turn away from respectability politics, along with social media as fundamental to their activism. The use of social media in conjunction with disruptive protest resonates with contemporary transnational and global hashtag protest practices; it drew international attention to the movement, and contributed in making #ShutItAllDown the effective movement it became. In highlighting the role of Sister Namibia in these protests, this article points to an actor not apparent during the protests on the ground, but that nevertheless draws a generational throughline with implications for #ShutItAllDown. Sister Namibia's collaborative efforts are emblematic of a culture of feminist solidarity practices between Namibia's early feminist organisations and the contemporary groups, bridging the generational divide evident in the protesters use of social media and their turn away from respectability politics—something some older gender activists disapproved of. While the generational divide persists, and youth benefit the most from the strategic use of social media, moments of solidarity across generational and political divisions—such as Sister Namibia's actions, and the collaborative

practices evident in #MeTooNamibia—demand that we are attentive to acts of solidarity in order to understand the movements themselves. These acts across divisions shape the landscape of Namibian feminist and gender activism more broadly.

Notes

1. Loots, Brigit. Personal interview. Windhoek, August 5 2022; Titus, Hildegard. Personal interview, Tape Recording. Windhoek, August 12 2022.
2. For instance, the University of Namibia (UNAM) students campaigned at the UNAM administration building for clearer rules about reporting sexual harassment on campus.
3. The nonbinary nature of this protest was made explicit in 2022 during an interview and photoshoot with #ShutItAllDown protesters and Amaka Magazine. The signs the Namibian protesters held up in the photographs point to a contemporary Namibian feminist protest culture that is queer-led and interethnic. One prominent sign held up during the photoshoot lists the hashtags samesexmarriage, abolishsodomylaw, queerandhere, and in Oshiwambo (thus forging another cross-ethnic link) omashengeovanu [#homosexualsarepeople] (Madia, et. al. 2022).
4. Amaka is a women-run pan-African media-tech platform and magazine dedicated to facilitating social change for African women globally.
5. For instance, in one photo, six activists—women and nonbinary persons—stand holding framed photo portraits—waist high and turned to the camera. The photographs are of six young female victims of sexual and gender-based violence: Shannon Wasserfal; Ndamononghenda Nafuka; Avihe Cheryl Ujaha; Rejoice Shovaleka; Martha Nafuka, and Magdalena Stoffels. Each of the femicide victims and the accompanying activists is an individual, and yet together they emphasise activist Ndilokelwa Nthengwe's point that "Shannon is not the face of…sexual gender-based violence, because those faces are everywhere" (Madia et al. 2022, 117).
6. Loots, Brigit. 2022. Personal interview. August 5 2022.
7. Many placards used "womxn" instead of "woman" to indicate that the protest was nonbinary and inclusive of Namibia's queer community.
8. Titus, Hildegard. Personal interview, Tape Recording. Windhoek, 12 August 2022.

9. Anonymous Source. Personal conversation. Windhoek, 23 July 2022.
10. It is worth noting that #MeTooNambia emerged out of digital feminist collaborative solidarity in that after the Slut Shame Walks, women reached out to and tagged the Slut Shame Walk online platforms, relying on the movement's strong and visible social media presence "to name and shame their rapists," thus shedding light on serial rapists and rape culture in Namibia (Currier et al. 2021, 274). Currier et al. describe this collaborative and disruptive "sex-positive feminist organizing" between various organisations (that shaped how #MeTooNamibia emerged) as founded in "productive disruptions," activist work that unsettles "anti-SGBV feminist activist spaces, strategies, and tactics in ways that cultivate new feminist activist constituencies and cooperation with different social actors" (271).
11. Nyanzi's poetry was preceded by her nude protest, staged in 2016 at Makerere University following a serious work dispute and mistreatment by her boss (Makoni 2021; Tamale 2017). Naked protests must be mentioned here, even though they differ from the defiance of the #ShutItAllDown, because part of the threat of Nyanzi's protests is her status as a mother. Nyanzi capitalises on cultural beliefs regarding mothers of twins (as she is) to further deepen the threat of her naked body in her protests (Tamale 2017). Her naked body also "threatens" on a nationalist level as it signals the nation-as-mother's unravelling (Tamale 2017, 70). Naked protests are the kind of politics that undermine "the foundations of the hegemony of repressive regimes" (Tamale 2017, 58). It should also be mentioned that Nyanzi's naked protests caused controversy because naked protests are considered acts of the last resort and weapons of the weak (Ebila and Tripp 2017). Some asked whether an educated woman like Nyanzi may have had other avenues to pursue redress (Ebila and Tripp 2017).
12. Men, and those unable to join the march but wanting to act in solidarity were asked to leave work for half an hour between 1.00pm and 1.30pm, and not spend money that day to assist in economic disruption (Moosa 2018c). Men were also asked to stand in solidarity by filling in for women and gender-nonconforming people at work, to assist wives, mothers, and partners in their home duties, and support the movement by "stopping the abusing and intimidating of women, gender-nonconforming and children" (Moosa 2018c, para 10).

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