



TRANSNATIONAL ARTISTIC RESPONSES: #METOO AND THE CREATIVE COALITION

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Abstract

Using a feminist mapping methodology to contextualize artmaking activities that challenge patriarchal and oppressive viewpoints of women, in this study I examine ways in which artists have responded to the #MeToo movement in locations outside the United States. Through intersectional and transnational lenses, I investigate creative responses toward ending gender-related violence. My goal is to provide a resource of cultural production that encourages wakefulness of both researchers and educators to the particular contexts and strategies artists use to stop gender-based violence. Derived from scholarly articles, digital newspapers, Facebook, Instagram and personal interviews, the artist responses that I selected for this study demonstrate situated creative reactions to the #MeToo movement, highlighting the prevalence and particularities of harassment, domestic violence, rape and femicide in many regions of the globe. Inspired by a climate of feminist activism, artists respond pedagogically, therapeutically, and for personal catharsis. Future implications of this research include the study of censorship in countries that #MeToo has not been able to thrive, exploring the significance and nuances of hashtag feminism transnationally.

Keywords: gender violence, hashtag feminism, activism, censorship, intersectionality

#MeToo

From star-studded celebrities to politicians and even academics, the spark of the #MeToo movement has swept the United States in a great blaze, divulging the surreptitious behavior of venerable characters that were once esteemed by many people in the U.S and beyond. A glut of sordid accounts, such as Christine Blasey Ford's sexual assault allegation against Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh, barrage mass media. Exposing man after man via social media, each predator, sleazy, powerful, and frequently unrepentant, is overtly castrated through their loss of reputation and professional career. The #MeToo phenomenon, however, is not a singularity within the United States, but a manifestation around the world. Rapidly disseminating across digital media, feminists around the world have claimed the #MeToo hashtag, identifying their unique struggles that pertain to their global location, and making a visible statement.

Initiated by Black women's rights activist, Tarana Burke, in 2007, the roots of the #MeToo movement began in Alabama and expanded across the globe with dynamism and potency (Tambe, 2018). Born in 1973 in the Bronx, New York, Burke suffered from a difficult childhood in her low-income home in a housing project, facing rape and sexual assault "both as a child and a teenager (Biography.com Editors, 2018, para.1). Through her mother's and community's support, Burke recovered from the violent experiences, and moved on to advocate for underprivileged youth. In her professional career in Selma, Alabama, Burke worked within the nonprofit sector of youth leadership. It was within her own nonprofit, "Just Be Inc.," an organization devoted to the well-being of young women of color, that the "me too" phrase was coined. When a girl revealed sexual abuse by her mother's boyfriend, Burke searched for the right words to show compassion towards her experience (Biography.com Editors, 2018, para. 4). The girl was among countless survivors who also sought support and validation in Burke, privately disclosing their stories (Biography.com Editors, 2018, para. 4).

“Me too,” is a phrase that not only connotes empathy but helps women and girls to realize that they are not alone.

Brought into public consciousness by Alyssa Milano’s use of #MeToo as a hashtag on Twitter in October 24, 2017, in response to the sexual assault allegations by Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein, the hashtag quickly gained momentum with 12 million users in the first 24 hours (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018, p. 236). Perhaps one of the most viral hashtag feminism movements in history, #MeToo has drawn participants worldwide. Strongly coinciding with a resurgence of the far right across the United States and Europe, the backlash against feminist gains have fueled the digital riot of the #MeToo movement. Hashtag feminism holds the capacity to increase empathy, awareness, and engagement with sexual harassment and violence by “raising feminist consciousness and producing solidarity” (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018, p. 237). Delivered from the wombs of Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, the artistic expressions and reactions through the #MeToo movement, not only answer to a call for disclosure of gender-related hostilities but, also, illustrate the plethora of acts of sexual aggression that women suffer within various cultural geographies. In this study, I first situate my research within both transnational and intersectional feminism to understand hashtag activism in ways that recognize multilayered identities and particularities of local cultural contexts.

Intersectional and Transnational Feminism

Despite the #MeToo movement’s origins within the United States, it is wise to expand discourse beyond its roots, exploring the manner in which the movement has inspired creative activism and resistance on a worldwide scale. The massive digital infiltration of the #MeToo movement through cyberspace compels my research toward visual engagements with artists around the globe, disrupting local and national binaries and disciplinary borders. The small sampling of artists included in this study cannot illustrate any groups’ beliefs. Emphasizing Inderpal Grewal’s (1992) notion of “scattered hegemonies,” or multiple subjectivities, which replace the European notion of universality, this study seeks to capture glimpses into artistic practices, highlighting the heterogeneous results and manifestations of the #MeToo social media activist movement. Moving beyond the dated model of the feminist global sisterhood, this study explores multiple lived

realities of artistic empowerment grounded in place, time, and history.

As Black feminists call artists, educators, and scholars to pay heed to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), it is essential to consider issues of class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability regarding #MeToo in order to understand multiple oppressions, as well as systems of oppression (Dixon, 2014). Most critically, the use of an intersectional framework can “aid in producing a universal language that criticizes the hegemonic culture while concurrently creating the foundation for unified activity against oppression” (O’Neal & Beckman, 2017, p. 644; Crenshaw, 1989). Falcon (2015) calls for a “contextualized intersectionality” that “remains mindful and cautious of advancing decontextualized essentialisms and universalisms as it relates to women’s struggles” (p. 7). In this manner, intersectionality can work alongside transnational feminisms to understand violence and inequities. In the methodology section that follows, I explain the strategies I used to compile data for this study, relying heavily on social media and news outlets for my “leads” to pinpoint transnational artistic activities related to the #MeToo movement.

Feminist Mapping Methodology

Considering artistic responses to gender-based violence on a transnational level, my research slips in and out of permeable geographic borders through hashtag activism. Breaking the taboos of gender violence within virtual spaces, the #MeToo movements has yielded artistic reactions that emphasize the unbreakable bonds of culture, society, family, and religion bound within patriarchal structures. It’s important to note when exploring violence of a sexual nature that sexual identities, “imbued with power relations,” are “connected to inequalities that result from earlier forms of globalization” (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001, p. 663). Although I explore the influence of the #MeToo movement around the world, my study particularly queries the notion of homogenizing influences of neocolonial ideas, stressing the asymmetries of realities that are digitally intertwined through social activism. While not all artists discussed in this study overtly refer to the #MeToo movement, their work, nonetheless, advocates through art against gender violence.

In this study, I examine artistic and creative activities that occurred between the years of 2013 to 2018, during the rise and peak of the #MeToo

movement. Most of the artists included in my study continue to produce powerful work addressing gender-violence and empowerment. Sourced from scholarly articles, digital periodicals, Facebook and Instagram, I selected eight artists (i.e., Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, Eliza Hatch, Ram Devineni, Chiara L. Bernardi, Flavia Carvalho, Evgenia Zakhar, Elsa Mubashir Sajjad, and Mehreen Hashmi) for this study based on their unique artistic approach (e.g., interviews, portraiture, augmented reality comics, protest organizing, feminist archives, body art, performance, and social media) to bring attention to gender-based violence, and the relevancy of their distinctive culture and geographic location in their work. Although I describe the grouping of the artists as a coalition, they are not members of an organization and do not perceive themselves as such. I have selected to group the artists included as such due to their mutual longing to improve the conditions of women and/or girls in their respective locations and particular circumstances.

Additionally, I interviewed two of the eight artists discussed.¹ The interviews, each comprised of 10 questions, asked about the nature of their artwork and its significance within their cultural context. Interviews occurred on Zoom. While I only had the opportunity to interview two artists, given limited accessibility, my goal was for depth in discussing their work rather than breadth that a survey might afford.

Using feminist mapping methods, I plotted artmaking activities that challenge patriarchal and oppressive viewpoints of women. The online software, iMapBuilder, provided a platform to observe patterns in reactions to rape and sexual assault, gender-based harassment, domestic violence, femicide, notions of women as a collective force, objectification of women and the male gaze. Simultaneously I tracked and plotted #MeToo related news stories, to examine relationships between these stories and the artistic narratives that surfaced.²

¹ I received Institutional Review Board approval to conduct interviews for this study, as well as the consent of the artists to quote from the interviews and reference them by their names.

² This study utilizes feminist mapping methodology to illuminate transnational relationships, visually bringing together artistic narratives in a manner that is both nonlinear and non-hierarchical. Through interactive cartography, artists' stories are brought into cultural conversations with one another to create a coalition of activists. The mapping of this data encourages scholars to consider whose voices are visible and whose are not. The map can be located at: <https://static.view.g.imapbuilder.net/?m=70323&s=bb9f686237d6d9cc24f972d0ca99de98>

Gender violence can be physical or verbal violation of a woman, situated in a culture of “heteropatriarchal power” (Kaur, 2017, p. 946). However, I acknowledge and recognize that gender is a “socially constructed and normalized category of identity,” and that gender violence can be perpetrated by and upon anyone (Kaur, 2017, p. 946). In addition, my positionality as a White cisgender middle-class woman in the Northeastern United States hinders my ability to fully comprehend the struggles many women face given their unique identities in relationship to their cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious contexts along with ableness and sexuality, which differ from my own. As the mother of a half-Pakistani daughter, it is my hope that my personal experiences in metaphorical border crossings can aid in my cultural understanding and sensitivity in the presentation of artists from different global localities. Through my research of sociopolitical conditions, artist statements, and personal interviews, I aim to present intersectional portraits of each artist’s work.

Transnational Responses

Around the world, the #MeToo movement has transformed and taken on new identities. While adapting the universal language of #MeToo, there is a reluctance to accept the movement without transforming, reshaping, and converting the hashtag into something that genuinely represents its user’s geographical region. In Russia, they call it #YaNeBoyusSkazat or “I’m not afraid to say.” In France, #balancetonporc (AFP, 2018, para. 2). In Pakistan, it’s called #MeinBhi, to empower victims of sexual assault by saying “mein bhi aapke sath hoo” or “I also stand by you” (Team Runway, 2018). Created to emphasize the uniqueness of each country’s struggle and avoid anti-U.S. censorship, #MeToo has slinked through the firewalls of even the most policed nations.

What follows is a narrative of visual storytelling, documenting, and interrogating how artists advocate for gender equity in the #MeToo era. I discuss specific art, organized by headers that convey the type of gender-based violence the work addresses.

Smile, Sexy

Spewing a hodgepodge of visual culture by way of street signs, billboards advertising, and flyers, life in any metropolitan area is composed of a constant

bombardment of pictorial stimuli. Generally ignored, this urban wallpaper often seeps into the circumstantial graphic noise, which most people have grown accustomed. Artists around the world have fused their ideas with the context of the street, exposing questionable, and often routine, public interactions. According to aesthetics philosopher, Sondra Bacharach (2018): “The job of street art is to convey resistance. . . . This kind of activism is made possible because of street art’s aconsensual methods of production—it is made on property whose owner has not provided consent” (p. 32). Street art activist, Tatyana Fazlalizadeh addresses gender harassment in her “Stop Telling Women to Smile,” art series in which her portraits of women are strategically placed on the streets where they have experienced harassment (Bacharach, 2018, p. 31). Focusing on the harassment of cat-calling, Fazlalizadeh examines the way in which women are objectified and, thus, silenced. Although women can theoretically respond to a cat-call by shouting back or making physical gestures, these actions would be imprudent and potentially hazardous. Fazlalizadeh’s street art provides women with the opportunity to respond without risk of repercussion.

Begun in 2012, “Stop Telling Women to Smile” is a series of charcoal portraits of women who have suffered harassment. Fazlalizadeh interviews her subjects, asking them to describe when and under what conditions their harassment occurred (Bacharach, 2018). The artist then draws a portrait of the woman and invites her to respond directly to the harassment through a quote placed below her image. Testimonial injustices, these poster-style artworks are attached using wheat paste to the walls of buildings where each incident occurred. By placing each woman’s photo in the street where she endured harassment, the woman regains her voice. The woman reveals her identity as a human, rather than an object (Bacharach, 2018).³

“I started experiencing harassment when I was 12 in my school uniform. I avoided my town’s high street for years because I’d get shouted at by middle-aged men in vans. One time I was walking home from Tesco, and a group of men outside a pub started aggressively catcalling me. I pretended not to hear and carried on walking. One of the men jumped out in front of me and started doing monkey impressions. They were all in hysterics.”



Figure 1. Hatch, Eliza. (2018). *Leyla*. [Photography]. (3000x1989 px). @cheerupluv. Photography by Eliza Hatch@cheerupluv

³ Images of Fazlalizadeh’s work are available at stoptellingwomentosmile.com

You Must Have Provoked Them

Amidst an assembly of fanatics of the Marvel Universe, enthusiasts fully decked in the regalia of their beloved heroes, an innovative and stunning new augmented reality comic book was introduced in the December 2014, *Comicon* in Mumbai (Tiwari, 2015). The first of its kind in India, the comic, entitled *Priya's Shakti*, was created by filmmaker Ram Devineni working with graphic artist Dan Goldman, poet Vikas K. Menon, and producer Lina Srivastava. It is not only innovative in its use of technology but in its controversial and compelling themes (see Figure 2). The superhero of this comic, Priya, a rape survivor, is “empowered by Goddess Parvati (as a symbol of Shakti-power)” and fights gender-based sexual violence along with her sidekick, a tiger (Tiwari, 2015, para. 5).



Figure 2. *Priya's Shakti*. (2014). *Priya's Shakti* Cover. [Digital and Print Comic]. On the cover of *Priya's Shakti*, rape survivor, Priya sits alongside a tiger. Behind her, sits the Goddess Parvati who inspires Priya to break her silence. Courtesy of Ram Devineni.

Devineni, a New York-based documentary filmmaker and publisher, conceived “Shakti,” after a trip to India, in response to the Delhi gang-rape case of 2012. The brutal assault and gang rape of a young woman, which resulted in her death, shook up the world of gender politics in India in what came to be known as the Nirbhaya incident (Kaur, 2017). Unlike the rape cases of lower caste women, who were raped and tortured in the custody of authority figures, such as police or security services, the Nirbhaya story involved an educated woman who was defiled by lower caste men, thus making it more shocking and offensive to the general public (Kaur, 2017). “Nirbhaya” or “Fearless,” is the name adopted by the public to protect the identity of the woman who became a heroine and national martyr overnight. With the mobilizing of widespread protest, India’s metropolitan regions began a kind of “feminaissance,” which refers in this context to an “urban or creative uprising with women in the fore” (Kaur, 2017, p. 945).

Combatting masculinist culture and social attitudes, Devineni aims to disrupt the normalization of sexual violence against women in his comic, *Priya's Shakti* (Kaur, 2017, p. 946). Inspired by his work on his interviews with gang-rape survivors, Devineni was moved to create a graphic narrative. It was his interviews with top officials and their consistent victim blaming that perpetually disturbed him. After traveling throughout South Asia to various countries including Nepal and Thailand, Devineni learned how challenging it was for rape survivors to seek justice without fearing for their own lives (Chattopadhyay, 2019). Data strongly supports this rhetoric of victim blaming. For example, in a 1998 survey of judges who make decisions on rape crimes, three-quarters of the judges surveyed believe women should preserve the family unity despite experiencing sexual violence in their home. Yet, more than half of the judges in the study blamed women, who stayed with abusive husbands, for their abuse. More than two-thirds of the judges considered “provocative attire is an invitation to rape” and more than half of the judges considered the moral character of the victim in deciding who’s at fault in a rape incident (Rao as cited by Chattopadhyay, 2017, p. 4).

Priya's Shakti is available free online and downloadable on cell phones or alternative formats such as e-readers and pdf. Using religious ideology and Hindu mythology, Devineni challenges cultural norms in a manner that is not offensive or threatening to India’s Hindu belief system (See Figure 3). Featured in both

street art and gallery events, the *Priya's Shakti* augmented reality is accessible to all. Street murals, created by commissioned artists, are in Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, coming to life with a quick scan of the walls (see Figure 4). Any passer-by with access to the app can watch animations and movies pop directly from the wall (Rattapalax, n.d.).



Figure 3. *Priya's Shakti*. (2014). *Priya's Shakti*. [Digital and Print Comic]. p.7. After suffering a brutal rape, Priya's family chastises her, blaming Priya herself for the rape. The Goddess Parvati comes to Priya's aid through incarnation of her mind and body. Courtesy of Ram Devineni.



Figure 4. *Priya's Shakti*. (2014). *Priya's Shakti Augmented Reality and Mural*. [Augmented Reality Comic and Mural]. Dharavi, Mumbai. In this photo, a group of young boys use the free, Blippar APP, to access animation and movies which emerge from the walls when they scan the *Priya's Shakti* mural. Courtesy of Ram Devineni

Priya, the superhero herself, has been lauded by many organizations, including United Nations Women as a 'Gender Equity Champion' (Tiwari, 2015). The comic was a recipient of a 2014 Tribeca Film Institute New Media Fund grant supported by the Ford Foundation (Tiwari, 2015). This high-tech comic grants access to India's history of sexual violence to the entire world. Devineni attempts to bring the #MeToo movement to Indian culture, encouraging sexual assault survivors to raise their voices against rape without shame.

Disappeared

Another example of activism against gender-based violence occurred on International Women's Day (March, 2018) in Argentina, when women filled the streets to protest as part of the activist group, "Ni Una Menos," or "Not One Less." Declaring war on the institution of machismo, "Ni Una Menos" confronts the

patriarchal disregard for the inhumane slaying of women throughout Argentina and Latin America. These murders, termed “feminicidios” in Spanish have long been ignored by the government, forcing women to take to the streets to seek social justice. In Argentina, a woman dies by murder every 30 hours (Povoledo, Minder & Joseph, 2018). Even in light of such staggering statistics, Vanina Escala, a leader of the “Ni Una Menos” movement is optimistic (Povoledo, Minder & Joseph, 2018). Despite the relentless violent acts towards women, protestors look towards the future with hope.

Situated close to the U.S.-Mexico border, in the Ciudad Juarez, cartel violence and murder rates intensify daily. Made famous for prostitutes and brothels, frequented by U.S. military men, Juarez was known as a place where many fathers would take their teenage sons for their first sexual experiences (Wright, 2001). In the 1970s, “transnational firms seeking ‘docile’ and ‘cheap’ labor sought such extensive supplies of female workers that women poured into the border city and transformed it from a predominantly agricultural city to one with a bustling nightlife” (Wright, 2001, p. 550). The icon of the female *maquila* worker or low paid factory worker became the icon of the city and the new bars and clubs catered specifically to this young woman. As a result, the “image of the maquila worker as ‘whore’ was inaugurated” (Wright, 2001, p. 550). Seen as prostitutes and sex workers, void of any value, the intensity of savage masculinity that befalls Ciudad Juarez has blended into the humdrum of daily routine in the city.

With a meteoric rise to infamy in the early ‘90s with the discovery of almost 200 female corpses in the desert within a five-year timespan, Juarez stunned the world as an epicenter of the massacre of women (Wright, 2001). Feminist activist, Esther Chavez Cano, one of Mexico’s most renown feminists, joined the fight against rape, torture and murder of women, forming a coalition called La Coordinadora de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales en Pro de la Mujer, a group of nongovernmental women’s organization, which was later called, simply “the coalition” (Wright, 2011). It was Cano’s hope that through this political force, strategies could be realized and executed to prevent “further deaths and kidnappings” (Wright, 2011, p. 711).

From the ashes of the souls lost in Ciudad Juarez, arise visual narratives

of digital dust. In Chiara L. Bernardi’s (2018), “Digital Dust and Visual Narratives of Feminicidios,” Bernardi discusses the “Feminicidios Reclassification Project,” a database that she created to statistically address the missing and murdered women in Ciudad Juarez. Grounding her research in the digital archaeology research of digital media scholar, Jussi Parkka, Bernardi transforms the scattered digital dust of the lost women on the World Wide Web into a feminist archive. With aims to shed light on and expose previously ignored narratives, the author heeds the international call for feminist qualitative data through the use of visual storytelling. Reflecting on the ideas of feminist philosopher, Nancy Tuana and her epistemology of ignorance, Bernardi contemplates a “willful ignorance” that is a “systemic process or self-deception, a willful embrace of ignorance that infects those who are in positions of privilege, an active ignoring of the oppression of others” (Tuana as cited by Bernardi, 2018, p. 7). Using imagery in the forms of “petitions, pictures of marches and protests, articles, video, and audio documentaries, and even podcasts,” Bernardi sculpted and molded the digital dust archive to meet the needs of the community to get their message out (Bernardi, 2018, p. 8). As the project develops, the dust most frequently takes the forms of short hashtags or keywords. Through the datafication and archive of the feminicidios of Ciudad Juarez, researchers can preserve the records of the brutalities that occurred and continue to occur (see Figure 5).

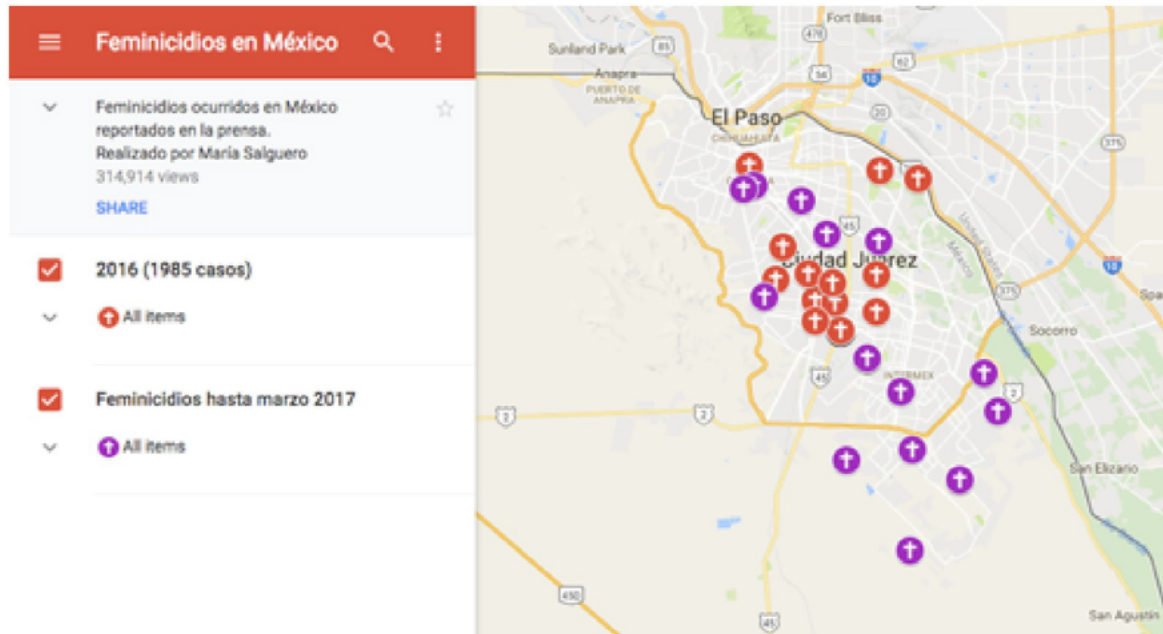


Figure 5. *Feminicidios en Mexico*, is a digital map by Maria Salguero, created through crowdsourcing, courtesy of Chiara Bernardi (2018). Using mapping techniques, activists and academics have documented the feminecidios in the region of Ciudad Juarez, along the Mexican/U.S. border. Through the collection of digital dust, Bernardi (2018), working with volunteers, developed a database and archive for the documentation and analysis of lost visual and textual narratives.

Cover-Up

With an extensive history of concealment, domestic violence (i.e., violence that occurs within the home) is frequently an accepted, normative behavior in many parts of the world. This hush-hush form of abuse transpires between lovers and kinfolk often within the very residence that should provide refuge from the toils and drudgeries of daily life.

Tattooing beautiful, transformative and empowering artwork on women's bodies, Flavia Carvalho, a Brazilian artist, born in Curitiba, redefines the trauma inflicted on each client's skin from domestic abuse (Santana, 2015). Her project, which began in 2013, is entitled, *Pele da Flor* (skin of the flower) and is derived from the Portuguese expression "A flor de pele" (deeper than skin), "which speaks

of how strongly we feel when facing an extremely difficult or challenging situation" (Santana, 2015, para.7). Carvalho describes in her interview in Huffpost, "*Pele da Flor* also alludes to the fact that all of us women are like flowers and deserve to have our skin protected and embellished" (Santana, 2015, para.7). Inspired by the traumatic story of one of her former clients, who experienced a stabbing at a nightclub, Carvalho decided to offer free tattoos to women who had scars as the result of domestic violence or mastectomies (Santana, 2015). The tattoos themselves are frequently delicate floral designs that embody strength and resilience.⁴

Partnering with *The Municipal Secretariat of Policies of Women*, Carvalho intends to establish a partnership with the Women's Police Station, as well as participate in National Women's Day events to increase public awareness of domestic abuse and her tattoo services to transform scars (Santana, 2015). Although Carvalho describes her impact as a mere "grain of sand" in the larger picture of domestic violence awareness, she is inspiring artists around the world, including Evgenia Zakhar of Russia (Santana, 2015, p. 4).

Since February 7, 2017, domestic violence in Russia, which affects nearly 26,000 children and 36,000 women, according to the Russian Ministry of International Affairs, has been considered an "administrative" misdemeanor, rather than a criminal offense, for first-time offenses or cases that do not result in serious injury (Masset, 2017). In Russia, "40 percent of all violent crimes take place within families" (Associated Press, 2017, para. 9). After encountering the work of Flavia Carvalho, Zakhar, a veteran tattoo artist, at the age of 33-years-old, decided to extend her services by offering them for free on the Russian social network, V Kontakte (Masset, 2017). Zakhar not only sees herself as an artist but a therapist. In a country where 97% of domestic abuse cases don't see a courtroom, Zakhar listens to women tell their stories of injustice (Masset, 2017). Typically choosing butterflies or flowers to conceal their scars, survivors of domestic abuse

⁴ Images of Carvalho's work are available at <https://www.facebook.com/flavia.apeledaflor>

are relieved to tell their stories one last time before obscuring them in a decorative badge of courage and survival.⁵

Not So Good Girls

Rather than concentrating on individual issues, many artists have chosen to combat gender violence and harassment in a manner that envisions women as a collective force for a cultural paradigm shift. For example, Elsa Mubashir Sajjad, of Karachi, Pakistan, made headlines at the age of 18 years old, with her play entitled #MeToo (E. Sajjad, personal communication, August 24, 2020). A sensitive and controversial topic in Pakistan, Sajjad's student-run production company, BlankPage Productions, revolves around the story of an upper-middle-class family. In my interview with Sajjad over Zoom, Sajjad described her decision to create the play as "sudden" and unplanned. As #MeToo posts starting to appear in Pakistani society, Sajjad knew she had to react (personal communication, August 24, 2020).

Inspired by her observations of Pakistani societal dynamics, #MeToo features several mini narratives that illustrate the perception of sexual norms. In one scene, the mother, Shamim, encourages her son, Akbar, to take his studies seriously in order to study abroad at foreign universities. Simultaneously, Shamim denies her studious and high-performing daughter's requests, claiming, "Girls don't go abroad for further studies!" (Anwer, 2018, para. 6). In another scene, daughter, Shanze is dancing with young friends at her elder sister's, Marium's *dawat* (engagement party), when a *mamu*, or distant uncle, joins the girls in the dance, causing the girls to feel uncomfortable and sexualized. Sajjad emphasized this scene as the most important in the play, because it highlights situations that occur, which are never discussed. Even when the *mamu* joins in the sexual dance with the underage girls, no one does anything. However, the girls receive a reprimand for "being 'vulgar' and inciting men" (Anwer, 2018, para. 7). Sajjad's goal was to force the audience to sit with the discomfort of watching the scenes unfold on stage while making connections with their own lived experiences (personal communication, August 24, 2020).

In Act 2, Shanze, Mariam's younger sister, is followed by men through

a mall and chased when she tries to escape. "She was not raped," says Sajjad, "no one inappropriately touched her," stressing her conscious choice to feature a less overt case of gender violence. (personal communication, August 24, 2020). However, what happens to Shanze is different. The men corner her and shout "all the things they physically plan on doing once they catch her" (E. Sajjad, personal communication, August 24, 2020). "In countries like Pakistan where it is already hard to talk about sexual harassment," says Sajjad, "it is even harder to talk about the nuances of sexual harassment" (personal communication, August 24, 2020). Such incidents as Shanze's are often minimized by society because they do not fall under the category of rape (see Figures 6 and 7). Addressing issues of women's so-called obligations to avoid situations where they could encounter harassment, such as walking alone, #MeToo identifies a surfeit of internalized misogyny.



Figure 6. Sajjad, E. (2018, January 10-11). #MeToo. [performance]. BlankPage Productions. American Cultural Centre (PACC). Karachi, Pakistan. Courtesy of Elsa Sajjad. In this scene, Shanze comes home after being sexually harassed. Mehek Aunty is overwhelmed and upset and Shanze's father slut shames her and blames her mother for raising her to be shameless before exiting the scene. When Shanze's sister, Marium tries to defend her, she is slapped by her mother, Mrs. Baig. From Left to Right: Mehek Aunty, Shanze Baig, Marium Baig and Mrs. Baig.

⁵ Images of Zakhar's work can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uY0d7utjUSU>

22.

MR.BAIG MR.BAIG
Is ko control karna seekho. Learn to control her.

Mr. Baig and Akbar EXIT.

MARIUM MARIUM
Mama yai itna crazy hai, Mama this is crazy, Shanze
Shanze harass howi hai or was harassed and you're
aap ulta us ko punish kar punishing her for it! What
rahi hai! Aap kaisi maa kind of mother are you?
hai?

Mrs. Baig slaps Marium.

MRS BAIG MRS BAIG
Zabaan control karna Learn to control your
seekho! Mai kaisi maa houn? tongue! What kind of mother
Kya mai nai us ko mall am I? Did I send her to the
akaylai bhaija? Huh? Yakin mall alone? Huh? I'm sure
hai kai yai sab tera idea that all of this was your
tha! Mai galaat toh nahi idea! Can you tell me that
houn naa! Sab sai zyada I'm wrong? You should be
thujai sharaam aani chai the most ashamed, sending
hai, apni bhayn ko your sister out alone,
unprotected bahir bhaijna. unprotected. I have taken
Mai nai apni care of you
poori zindagi aap dono ka both my entire life, have
itna kyaal rakha, thum nai you learned nothing?
kuch sikha nahi? Aap apni Shanze, get up, go to your
bhain kai saath kaisai kar room, give me all your
sakhti ho huh?! Shanze computer shumputer gadgets
utho, kamrai mai jao sara now!
computer shumputer abhi

Shanze gets up and EXIT, Mehek
Aunty and Mrs. Baig follow her.

Figure 7. Sajjad, E. (2018). #MeToo. [script]. Courtesy of Elsa Sajjad. In this scene, Marium defends her sister against her mother's reaction to Shanze's harassment. Using a combination of Urdu and English language, the play is deeply situated within the culture of the city of Karachi.

The remainder of the play focuses on Shanze's mental deterioration because harassment does not happen to "good girls." The play continues to explore family honor and cultural taboos regarding sharing one's private business with a therapist. Sajjad emphasizes that the intergenerational female characters in the performance are not all likable, often reinforcing societal perspectives, but sharing in personal experiences of trauma (personal communication, August 24, 2020).

Sajjad is optimistic that her play was part of a larger body of expression that will improve conditions for women. However, she says, "While I want to believe that the power of the #MeToo movement in 2018 was enough, the sad reality is that it was not and that the conversation needs to keep on going" (personal communication, August 24, 2020). With deep generational scars of British colonization and partition of India, Pakistan's gender violence reside entrenched in painful history, the same history that provided White-passing, Sajjad, the ability to perform her play publicly. Citing her White-passing, educational, and socioeconomic privilege, Sajjad points out her good fortune to be able to produce the #MeToo performance with minimal risk.

The young playwright describes the country as one where "it's a completely legal and acceptable solution for a rapist to marry the woman he raped to avoid jail time" (E. Sajjad, personal communication, August 24, 2020). Emphasizing the religious nature of the nation, Sajjad describes patriarchal institutions oppressing women is a problem worldwide but notes that in a country so deeply ingrained in religious ideology, it's even harder (personal communication, August 24, 2020). "I will never be just me, myself, and I. I will always be someone's wife or someone's daughter" (E. Sajjad, personal communication, August 24, 2020).

Censored

Soul Bitches, a Pakistani Facebook forum, which boasts nearly 22,000 members, was created by Rabiya Seemal Latif, as a place where women can feel "secure, safe and respected." *Soul Bitches* was created as a response to the heavy censorship of an earlier female Pakistani Facebook group, entitled *Soul Sisters*. Members of *Soul Bitches* include prevalent artists that are responding to #MeToo on their own terms. It is on Facebook that I first encountered Karachi-based

curator, visual artist, and art educator, Mehreen Hashmi.

A victim of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse for more than 20 years, Hashmi, who is now in her mid-30s, reveals her experiences through her paintings, including developmental trauma as a child. In a Zoom interview, Hashmi says, “My inspiration is my emotional state, because I had to go through PTSD, trauma recovery” and “healing” (personal communication, August 26, 2020). With stylization towards expressionism and illustration, her many acrylic self-portraits are bold and striking, featuring faces contorted in agony with colors trickling down the canvas. Her work reveals a particular affinity towards shades of Persian blue.

Unique to Hashmi’s approach is her avoidance of “narrating the facts of her story,” focusing instead on the aftermath of childhood abuse, sexual assault, and rape and exploring the emotional states, social struggles, and barriers faced by survivors (M. Hashmi, personal communication, August 26, 2020). Hashmi does not view her work as therapeutic, but rather as a “catharsis,” as she relives her pain throughout her artistic process. It is her ability to speak up through her work in exhibitions that gives her satisfaction. Passionate about the pedagogy of her artistic process, Hashmi frequently hosts online workshops, inviting students to engage in their own personal self-growth and expression.

Although Hashmi regularly curates in Pakistan, she mainly exhibits her work throughout Europe due to some of her art’s graphic nature and its direct confrontation of sexual abuse. Describing social and political pressures, Hashmi cannot exhibit her work due to security concerns and the necessity to protect herself from her abusers. “There is no legal support for us,” she says (M. Hashmi, personal communication, August 26, 2020). With a series, entitled, *His Shame on Her*, Hashmi addresses victim-blaming and the intense emotions of trauma in her work (M. Hashmi, personal communication, August 26, 2020). (See Figure 8.) When asked to describe her work in relation to the #MeToo movement, Hashi says that #MeToo has supported her art, provided it with a genre, and brought more collective understanding (M. Hashmi, personal communication, August 26, 2020).



Figure 8. Hashmi, Mehreen. (2018). *His Shame on Her Series II*. [Acrylic on Canvas] (61X41 cm). Courtesy of Mehreen Hashmi. In this painting, Hashmi reflects on the topic of sexual abuse in her childhood and adult life. She portrays the physical and emotional traumas as aftermath and social suppressions of rape victims as a narration of her own struggles with PTSD and developmental trauma.

Conclusion: #MeToo Contextualized

Any exhibition of work related to #MeToo requires a cautious approach and consideration of the great diversity of the country. Due to the movement’s U.S. origins, #MeToo tends to work in favor of those who already come from a place of privilege. Despite the potency of the #MeToo movement, many countries have made fervent efforts to suppress and expurgate its existence. Labeled a

volatile Western interference, the hashtag of #MeToo has been blocked by the Chinese government, forcing activists to use creative homonyms such as “Rice Bunny,” graphics which when said in Mandarin sound like #MeToo (Fan, 2018). (See Figure 9.) With groups such as China’s famous “Feminist Five,” criminally detained for “planning a public sexual harassment awareness campaign,” social activism is not only unwelcome but dangerous (Rudolf, 2018, para. 1).

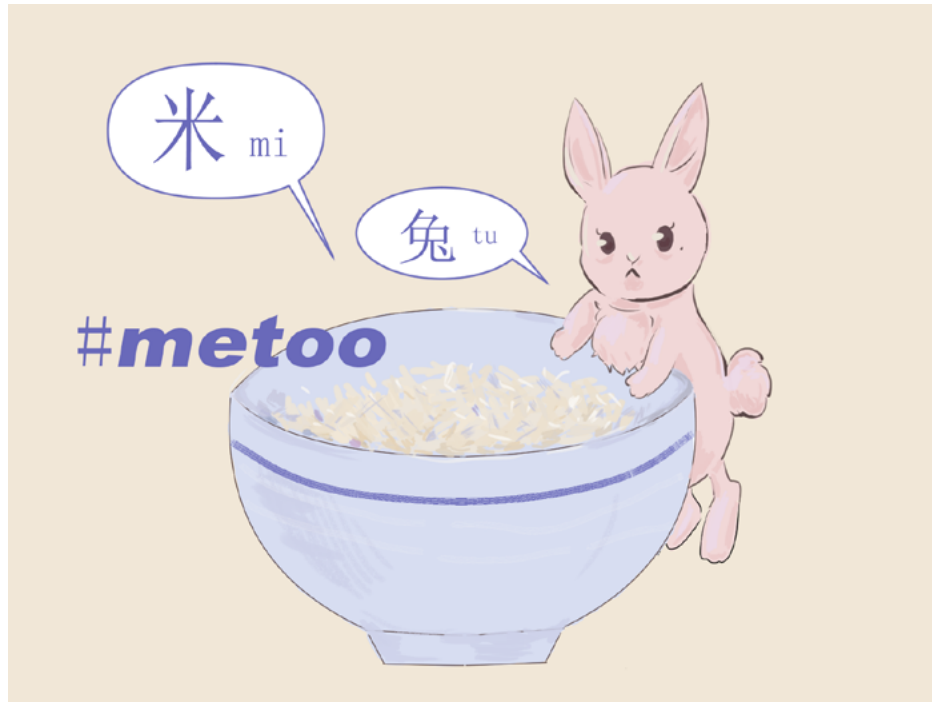


Figure 9. Liu, S. (2020). #MeToo. [Digital Painting] (1600x1200). Courtesy of Siwei Liu. This image was created by Siwei Liu, a Chinese artist and Master’s student in art education at Penn State University. The image depicts a rice bunny. It is representative of the rice bunny emojis that were used to evade censorship on social media in China during the #MeToo movement.

The long and complicated histories and belief systems, deeply embedded in various cultures, influence responses to the #MeToo movement. In Russia, feminism, to even the most progressive thinkers, is a word met with disdain

(Ferris-Rotman, 2018). It is seen as a “Western attack on femininity” in a belief system where motherhood is a “first priority” (Ferris-Rotman, 2018, para. 6). With the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church, Putin has brought a more conservative social order to the country, which has hindered the progression of the rights of many minoritized groups, including women.

Several Islamic nations view #MeToo as a failure of non-Islamic societies and proof that liberal ideas of femininity don’t work. In Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, commented on the one-year anniversary of the movement by suggesting a strict Islamic dress code as the key to solving the problems, affirming once again, that the responsibility to prevent rape and assault falls on its victims (Esfandiari, 2018).

Though #MeToo has awoken many people worldwide to the realities of the patriarchal acceptance and normalization of violence against women, there is also backlash. Using feminist mapping, researchers can help to build creative coalitions while carefully navigating the grave perils, which many artists and organizations take, when speaking out and risking censorship, imprisonment, and even death (see Figure 10). Despite #MeToo’s urgency to elevate voice, not every voice can be made audible. In this study, I have presented artists who bravely propel the #MeToo movement forward despite personal risk, joining in a powerful collective transnational uprising.

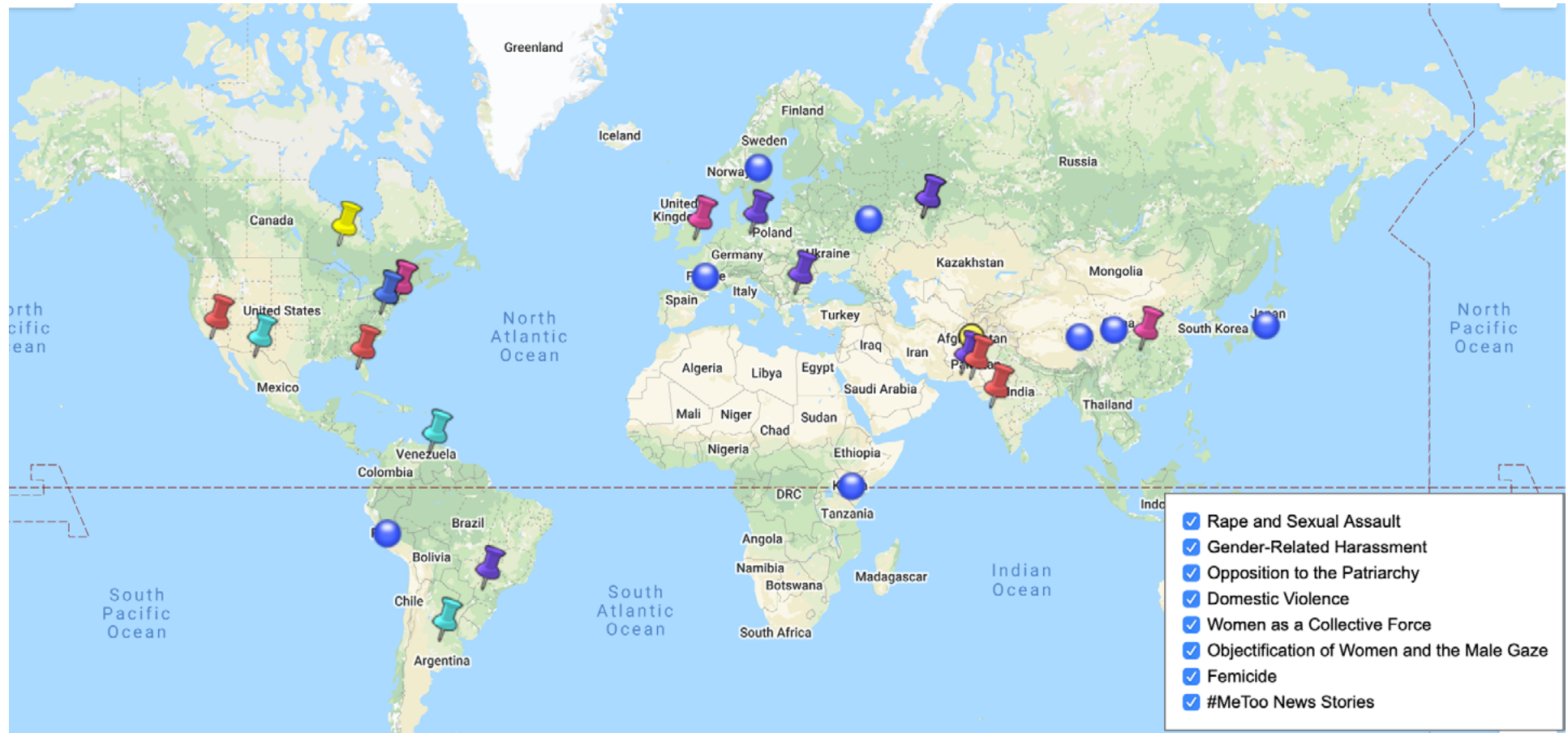


Figure 10. #MeToo Artistic Responses.(2018). [Digital Mapping]. This map, constructed by iMapBuilder, was used to plot the eight artistic responses to the #MeToo movement using common themes such as rape and sexual assault, gender-related harassment, opposition to the patriarchy, domestic violence, women as a collective force, objectification of women, and femicide, as well as track #MeToo related news stories. As research continues, I invite others to contribute to the map as part of coalition building.

As scholars consider the future implications of the #MeToo movement within the arts and pedagogy, it is essential to explore and illuminate the role of art as a storyteller and many artists' specific intentions toward public education. Despite potential challenges with censorship, the transnational movement against gender violence and harassment should yield robust discussions in school curriculums. With consideration towards cultural and religious sensitivity, there is potential for creative work to share critical messages about gender-based violence.

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