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## Enduring Affective Rhetorics: Transnational Feminist Action in Digital Spaces

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**ENDURING AFFECTIVE RHETORICS:  
TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST ACTION IN DIGITAL SPACES**

A Dissertation Presented

By

JESSICA L. OUELLETTE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2016

English

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TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST ACTION IN DIGITAL SPACES**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my mother,  
whose fierce spirit and unfailing love got me here today.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this dissertation has been a lesson in gratitude. Its completion is due in large part to the many people who challenged, supported, and encouraged me along the way.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ENDURING AFFECTIVE RHETORICS: TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST ACTION IN DIGITAL SPACES**

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This dissertation raises questions about the possible efficacy of digital spaces as sites for transnational feminist action and engagement. Using a qualitative approach, I analyze a case study involving the digital circulation of texts that arose from activist Amina Tyler's decision to post a nude photo with controversial, provocative language sprawled across her chest. The circulation of this image by feminist groups such as FEMEN and Muslim Women Against Femen, as well as the mass media, led to global conversations about women's roles and rights, definitions of feminism, and statements about the body. In employing a transnational feminist rhetorical analysis of these texts, I investigate how certain claims and arguments, undergirded by emotional and embodied charges, get repurposed through the process of circulation, and how these moments of "repurposing" operate as forms of rhetorical action in their reinforcement of and/or resistance to discourses of globalization and geopolitics. For example, Tyler's original image, as it circulated, launched a collective movement when FEMEN encouraged their members to post a similar image in support of a "Topless Jihad Day"; FEMEN's circulation of these texts then prompted Muslim Women Against Femen (MWAFF) to recirculate FEMEN's images as an attack on women's rights, race, and religion; the mass media then circulated

Tyler, FEMEN, and MWAF's texts in order to repurpose Tyler and MWAF as globalized images of oppressed women, invoking images of Muslim nations as oppressors, and thus furthering terrorist fear-mongering.

My findings indicate that the web's ability to provide texts with enhanced amplification, velocity and endurance such that certain rhetorics become privileged over others points to the need for a new theory of rhetorical production. The implications of this study, that is, emphasize the ways in which digital circulation involves an affective element that necessarily determines the boundaries of rhetorical action—what is possible and what is foreclosed. I argue that scholars in both rhetorical studies and feminist studies need to look at affective circulation in the digital from a transnational feminist perspective so that we can, (1) better understand how feminist rhetorical action, or any kind of rhetorical action for that matter, works within a globalized system such as the web, and (2) learn how to leverage affective circulation toward a more productive rhetorical efficacy

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In early March 2013, an image of a topless woman, Amina Tyler, holding a cigarette in one hand, and a book in the other, moved rapidly through the digital sphere, sparking a series of debates, deliberations and discussions with far-reaching implications. Written across Tyler's chest was a message written in Arabic, translated as, "My body is mine, not somebody else's honor." Tyler, a nine-teen year old citizen of Tunisia and an outspoken member of the international feminist group FEMEN, posted this image on her Facebook in response to her nation's policies regarding women's rights. Hours after her initial post, she circulated another image of herself topless with "Fuck your morals" written in English across her body. Following these postings, and its subsequent rapid circulation by Tyler's Facebook and Twitter friends (and thus other friends of friends, etc.), Tunisian officials threatened her with physical punishment and even death for posting "nude photos." In the ensuing months, this story and other closely related events would become the subject of many news articles, blogs, and social media posts across the globe.

For rhetoricians, this event is particularly compelling. Not only does it highlight a moment in which feminist action prompts transnational conversations, it illustrates the scope and global reach afforded by digital circulation, and further illuminates the often unexpected consequences of such circulation. Tyler's case is not unique, however. Over the last decade, protests involving women's rights have been very much present in the

media. Since 9/11, we have seen a wave of feminist movements addressing various political issues—reproductive rights, acts of violence, the need for economic support, wage inequities, and rights regarding women’s bodies, among others. These various global upheavals have not surfaced without external influences. The “war on terror,” the perceived increased need for national security along with the push for open trade markets and the continuous move from national governance to supranational governance have caused many disjunctures between the state and peoples’ actual needs. Because of these pressures and their effects on lived experiences, social activist groups from all around the world have started online protests, demanding change.

In the following chapters, I conduct a case study of the responses to Tyler’s online protest, and based on the results of that study, I argue for a new theory of rhetorical production—a theory that acknowledges the ways in which digital circulation operates as a co-constitutive process that necessarily structures and shapes public life. This project comes out of my deep concern for and commitment to women’s issues and the gender politics surrounding the various inequities that pervade women’s experiences on a global scale. Although the digital is the site of my inquiry, at its core is a concern for transnational feminist discourse and activism; the digital entered the project organically, as one of the most viable places for such action to occur. The crux of this research project, then, is an effort to understand both the possibilities and limitations of transnational feminist engagement within digital spaces. As a result, I examine and expose how the circulations of discourses on women’s issues oftentimes serve as exigencies for national and transnational agendas. Examining digital circulation, I believe, can help us identify how the practices of writing and rhetoric within a

transnational context reproduce and resist current ideologies, and such identification might allow us to write for social change more effectively in these spaces.

### **The “Transnational” in the Field of Rhetoric and Composition**

In her essay entitled, “Global Turns and Cautions in Rhetoric and Composition Studies” (2006), Wendy Hesford calls on the field of rhetoric and composition to turn its focus to global matters—matters that necessitate “a reexamination of existing protocols and divisions, and the formation of new critical frameworks in light of a changing world” (796). While Hesford’s article was published nearly a decade ago, much of it remains relevant for our field today. Hesford’s deliberate reference to a “changing world” speaks to the ways in which the intersections between culture, power, politics, and economics are undergoing significant change due to the uneven processes of globalization. The increased production and advancement of information and media systems, and the ways in which these systems have vastly changed the processes of communication and information-sharing, have undoubtedly altered the ways we engage in writing and rhetorical practices.

Over the last several years, our field has begun addressing these changes in various ways. A consideration of the “transnational” in the field of rhetoric and composition has allowed for deeper examination of the ways in which writing, literacies, rhetorics, and texts are always already involved in the transnational flows of people, ideas, technology, and communication across national boundaries (Hesford; Schell; Dingo; Queen). Hesford and Rebecca Dingo have pointed to these movements through their transnational feminist analyses of public policy documents and human rights law, exploring specifically how narratives and arguments surrounding women and gender get

constructed in such texts. In *Networking Arguments* (2012), Dingo traces the various ways terms like “gender mainstreaming,” among others, are networked into new, oftentimes conflicting ideologies. Such examinations reveal how rhetorics shift in meaning “and thus have drastically different material effects” (Dingo 7). In *Spectacular Rhetorics* (2011), Hesford examines the rhetorical frameworks and narratives undergirding global human rights discourse, pointing to the ways in which textual and visual rhetorics about human rights produce and construct new, and arguably problematic, subjects.

While such studies have been productive in pointing to the problematics of globalization and its effects on writing and rhetoric, and thus material conditions, we have not yet taken the next step. We have not interrogated what it would mean to take action within these realms of imbalances and discontinuities. As a field, we have critiqued the language and rhetoric of policy, law, and the media, but we have not asked enough about how we—as writers, critics, rhetoricians, feminists, activists, etc.—can better understand, engage in, and change/transform these discourses. In other words, we need a transnational rhetorical lens that does not only operate from the basis of critique, but rather from the basis of rhetorical efficacy. What I have found to be so compelling, and perhaps what drives this dissertation, is the fact that there are social movements happening all around us, all the time, that are in fact affecting change within a transnational context (e.g., Slutwalk, PussyRiots, CODEPINK, Occupy, World Social Forum, Free The Nipple). While our field has begun to touch upon some of these movements, we have mostly focused on the ways in which the discourses of neoliberalism and capitalism move throughout writing and rhetorical practices instead of

questioning the ways in which our writing and rhetorical practices can perhaps combat these discourses. What are the limitations *and* possibilities for transnational feminist engagement? What is achievable and what is forestalled when feminist rhetorical production enters the realm of social action?

Rhetoric and composition scholars have consistently sought to understand the relationship between rhetoric, textuality, and action. How do rhetorics and texts engender change? How do they maintain certain social relations? How do they create, produce, and move those relations into new arenas? For feminist scholars in rhetoric and composition, in particular, questions of action and social transformation have been central to their work. Throughout much of the eighties, feminist scholars interrogated the various consequences of textual representations of women. In doing so they put forth productive critiques of equity imbalances, such as women's roles in the academy and the writing classroom. At the forefront of much of this research was the goal of attending to women's histories and identity politics to promote "inclusion" and equality for women (Flynn; Annas; Enos; Lunsford; Glenn), as well as acknowledging the varied histories of women's literacies and composing practices. More specifically, this research was attentive to the gendered nature of writing and teaching in the composition classroom (Miller; Bloom; Lauer; Schell; Sullivan; Lamb), stylistic differences between men and women's composing and rhetorical practices (Flynn; Hiatt), and advocacy for the use of personal experience in one's writing practices (Logan; Hennessy).

These feminist concerns led to inquiries about knowledge production and meaning-making practices, particularly in relation to notions of difference. In turning their focus to a study of the intersections between gender, race, class, sexuality, and place

(Miller; Malinowitz; Logan; Bower; Johnson; Lu; Lunsford; Ede), feminist scholars in composition produced a body of work that sought to debunk gendered power relations in academic discourse (Zawacki; LeCourt and Barnes), promote the acknowledgement of multiple subject-positions (Johnson; Romano), attend to multi-vocal texts (LeCourt and Barnes), and critically identify the various forms of marginality that are always already being (re)produced throughout and within textual and rhetorical practices (Lu; Gibson, Marinara and Meem). This kind of work contributed to what Ritchie and Boardman describe as a kind of “disruption” in the field of rhetoric and composition, as such work made the “the lack of attention to women’s material lives” more visible (Ritchie and Boardman 17).

Until recently, however, the need for “visibility” has, for the most part, been thought of in terms of the nation-state. Much of the feminist work on textuality and action has been informed by the context of the US; that is, composition has relied heavily on an “American” model, and rhetoric, on a historical one. While certain feminist scholars have looked to connections between “global feminisms” and textual practices (Lu; Royster; Kirsch; Glenn; Jarratt; Swearingen), much of that research focuses on the nation-state as a fixed and/or centered site for textual production (nations as separate entities for comparative analysis). For example, in “Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism,” Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford comment on the ways in which feminism in composition has overlooked other facets of identity, including cultural and geographical differences, and yet the methods proposed in their piece rely heavily on a paradigm in which the nation (read: US) operates as the center for analysis, and thus the site for all other comparisons. The recent shift in feminist research, however— the

“global turn,” as coined by Hesford—has inevitably required a move away from nation-based perspectives on writing and rhetoric to a more transnationally-based perspective. In other words, the nation as a “fixed” site of analysis is no longer sufficient, as the nation is always already being shaped by (and also shaping) processes of globalization. In an effort to forge strong connections between feminist theory and feminist praxis, many scholars have argued for a re-framing of the methodologies that dominate the field of composition, particularly because such conceptual apparatuses remain too bound up in US notions of citizenship, democracy, human rights, liberation, and individuality— notions that cannot (and should not) be taken as universalized concepts and desires across geopolitical contexts.

For the purpose of this dissertation, then, I employ the term “transnational” for two reasons: first, to engage with an analytic framework that captures the processes of movement arising from contemporary forms of globalization (on both micro and macro levels); and two, to signify a transformative site of encounter and engagement that necessarily brings with it both limitations and possibilities for exposing and rupturing the power relations embedded within those movements. While the term “transnational” can be thought of as a descriptive term for thinking about the literal movement of texts, people, ideas, etc. across borders (i.e. national borders), it is more useful, I think, to consider these movements in terms of power, as contemporary forms of globalization operate more from the basis of supra-national agencies, corporations, and institutions, rather than from interactions between nation-states. In other words, in viewing the “transnational” as a kind of analytical lens, or as Laura Briggs defines it, a “category of analysis,” we can acknowledge the importance of the nation-state while simultaneously

recognizing its limitations in understanding the power relations that result from the proliferation of globalized systems. “[T]ransnationalism,” Briggs suggest, “can do to the nation what gender did for sexed bodies: provide the conceptual acid that denaturalizes all their deployments, compelling us to acknowledge that the nation, like sex, is a thing contested, interrupted, and always shot through with contradiction” (Briggs et al. 627). In comparing the nation to sexed bodies (i.e. the traditional, static notions of “male” and “female” sexualities), we can acknowledge the ways in which the nation has historically been viewed as a static, fixed construct. Transnationalism—like gender—can assist in destabilizing these fixed notions in its very insistence on cutting through them. To put it a different way, in considering how “gender” has enabled us to see “entire symbolic systems and forms of social organization” related to bodies, transnationalism can allow us to see the nation as a porous, embodied space of organized knowledges, beliefs, and disciplines.

For feminist rhetoricians, a transnational mode of analysis can allow for the examination of how subjects (e.g. women) are constituted globally through the circulation of rhetorics, and how that constitution is very much tied to geopolitical discourses. Following Hesford and Dingo, I posit that a transnational feminist analytical lens is crucial for the field of rhetoric and composition if we are to address the new forms of globalization currently affecting gender relations—particularly the various global movements related to migration, capital production, and linguistic markings of neocolonial and neoliberal agendas. The relationship between women, gender and the “demise” of the nation-state is arguably more evident in the texts that circulate now more than ever. In studying public policy documents and human rights law, for example, we

have seen how the transfiguration of the nation-state actually depends on the asymmetrical political, social, economic and cultural processes of globalization. Put more strongly, studies like Hesford's and Dingo's allow us to see how "people, goods, money, and media images cross national boundaries in new ways that start to change our very idea of what we mean by national and local identities" (Grewal and Kaplan, *Intro to Women Studies* xxii). In her justification for questioning how and why rhetorics travel and circulate, Dingo reminds us that such processes enable us "to see how rhetorical meaning is not always stable. Rhetorics can shift and thus, have drastically different material effects" (Dingo 7).

In an effort to expand upon these recent critiques of how rhetorics shift and change as they traverse geopolitical contexts, my project seeks to extend the boundaries of transnational feminist rhetorical studies by pushing the conversation into new arenas—arenas that go beyond just critique. What can we do with this information? Are there spaces where transnational action and change do occur? This is where my second employment of the term "transnational"—an active, transformative site of encounter and engagement—becomes important. While I find feminist critique necessary, and while viewing the transnational as a category of analysis can help us get to a place of critique, this project also takes into account the "transnational" as an active, transformative site of connection and collision. Thus, in attending to both of these perspectives—perspectives involving critical analysis *and* possibilities for rhetorical efficacy—this dissertation explores how writing and rhetoric both reproduce *and* frustrate ideologies and power relations in certain spaces, so that we can better understand how to construct more productive agencies within those spaces.

One such space, I argue, is the digital. While several scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition have explored the relationships between feminist rhetorics and transnationalism, we have not asked similar questions about these relationships within digital spaces, despite the fact that web 2.0<sup>1</sup> has made digital sites increasingly and unavoidably transnational. Aside from the work of Mary Queen, the transnational work on the “digital” has mostly been limited to a study of digital literacies within transnational contexts (Hawisher, Self and Berry; Warriner; Lam and Rosario-Ramos). Thus, this project builds on the work of Queen, who, in looking at web 1.0, examines the ways in which representations of women get reshaped through modes of circulation, or as she describes, “actions whose transformation can be traced through the links embedded within multiple fields of circulation” (476). Like Queen, I suggest that if we want to look at digital spaces from a transnational feminist perspective, we need to look closely at digital circulation; however, circulation has a much different meaning within web 2.0. Whereas web 1.0 functioned simply as a site of “flat data,” an information portal where users received information without having the opportunity to participate in comments and feedback, web 2.0 is a site of user-generated content, the “writeable” phase of the web. Web 2.0 not only facilitates and encourages participation, collaboration and information sharing, it is driven and run by such content. This new phase of the web has demanded new ways of thinking about rhetorical strategies. One of the most important concepts for understanding rhetorical action on the web may be “rhetorical velocity,” a term coined by Jim Ridolfo and Danielle DeVoss to talk about rhetorical delivery within the context of user-generated content. Rhetorical velocity, they argue, is both a “strategic approach to

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “web 2.0” to emphasize the web’s level of interactivity (e.g. user-generated content, social media dialogue, virtual communities).

composing for rhetorical delivery” and a term that describes “the understanding and rapidity at which information is crafted, delivered, distributed, recomposed, redelivered, redistributed, etc., across physical and virtual networks and spaces” (Ridolfo and De Voss, 1). The speed of information, the nature of remixing and citation, and the ability to instantaneously respond, modify, and copy are just a few of the changes intrinsic to the reimagining of rhetorical action within web 2.0.

Having said all of this, we must acknowledge, too, that these changes are also implicated in globalized systems of power. In addition to the web’s ability to break down communication barriers between people from all over the world, the internet has been used to outsource jobs; export media, propaganda, news, and entertainment; produce, market, sell, and consume products; and mine data and information about its users. Moreover, the internet has not only led to an increase in economic growth for national and supranational enterprises, agencies, and corporations, it has allowed for that economic growth to be continuously calculated and analyzed in a way that makes consumption something malleable and thus regulated. These facts alone have contributed to greater imbalances and inequities between those who profit from and have access to these economic resources and those who do not. In addition, as Cecilia Ng and Swatsi Mitter note in their edited collection, *Gender and the Digital Economy*, the widening gap between the rich and the poor that has resulted from globalization and the increased use of digital technologies has inevitably affected and exploited—most directly—the lives of women (Ng and Mitter 12). In complicating this point, however, Ng and Mitter remind us, too, that these technologies have also created more jobs for women globally, as well

as more opportunities for communication and engagement with others that were never possible before the advent of the internet (Ng and Mitter 17).

In considering the web's implicit role in globalization and the movement of capital, I recognize that an analysis of transnational feminist engagement within digital spaces presumes a certain level of access to technology, which consequently presumes a certain kind of privilege in terms of class and material resources. For this reason, though, I find it even more necessary and important to question both the material potentialities and failures caused by the web's participation in a global economy. If, as Dingo contends, "globalization has had uneven material consequences throughout and within different regions of the world" (Dingo 11), then we must begin to question and examine one of the most concentrated, highly infused sites involved in globalization.

To do this, then, requires a rhetorical theory of circulation that acknowledges how textual movements differ in digital and non-digital spaces. The potential effects of circulation within a digital space are not just between a writer and a reader; rather those effects are caught up in larger networks of interaction or, to use Jenny Edbauer-Rice's term, "rhetorical ecologies" of meaning that are quite different not only in content but in velocity, speed, and scale from print or web 1.0. This time-space compression of communication is, in fact, one reason why we might view the web as a space where our everyday interactions and conversations happen transnationally and where those interactions and conversations often times have transnational effects.

In an attempt to understand these moments of circulation and their effects, this dissertation employs a transnational feminist rhetorical analysis of a series of events in which texts, linked through modes of digital circulation, operate as forms of action in

their reinforcements of and/or resistances to dominant discourses of geopolitics and globalization. In tracing and analyzing the moments of engagement and circulation surrounding Tyler's online protest, I aim to offer insight into the limitations of and possibilities for feminist rhetorical action on the web, as well as knowledge about the various roles global media and geopolitical discourses play in these moments of rhetorical action.

### **Circulation as Social Action**

As many composition scholars have argued, advanced technologies and information systems have completely altered traditional systems of production and communication. Various processes of globalization have demanded new forms of technology that have, in turn, allowed for goods, information, and ideas to move rapidly across national borders. Because the web, in its circulatory and participatory nature, has led to greater levels of interconnectivity, I see it as a space where social action can (and arguably does) occur. The web's global reach and immediate, fast-paced communicative features have enabled users to engage in various kinds of social action, from protest rallying and organizing, to political deliberations and debates, to the creation of virtual, often times dispersed, communities. Such acts, engagements, and communities are ignited and cultivated by the process of circulation.

For the last decade, several scholars have begun carving out a space for "circulation studies" (Gries; Trimbur; Mathieu & George; Ridolfo & DeVoss). Laurie Gries, for example, argues that circulation studies represents an "an interdisciplinary approach to studying discourse in motion" where "...scholars investigate not only how discourse is produced and distributed, but also how once delivered, it circulates,

transforms, and affects change through its material encounters” (333). Because digitality requires circulation as part of its logic, many have presumed circulation to be a form of action due to the fact that users decide “where” and “how” to circulate their texts (Warnick and Heineman; Porter; Ridolfo and Devoss). According to Barbara Warnick and David Heineman, circulation functions as a form of action in that it can “enable users to reproduce, transport, and share stored information in ways that are quicker and more reliable than older analog media forms” (Warnick and Heineman 70). This kind of perspective echoes the idea that circulation is a form of agentive distribution, in that it necessitates learning about and knowing one’s audience before engaging in rhetorical work. In the words of James Porter, whose work focuses on rhetorical delivery, “Digital distribution refers to rhetorical decisions about the mode of presenting discourse in online situations...Circulation is a related term that pertains to how that message might be recycled in digital space (should you want that to happen)” (Porter 214).

While many see circulation as inextricable from a consideration of purpose and audience, understanding circulation as a form of social action, for me, lies in the attempt to consider the circulatory movement as an independent, unauthored “action” itself. In other words, circulation can be thought of as its own form of agency in that the act of circulating a text does not always result in an “intended” outcome (Cooper; Edbauer-Rice). As Marilyn Cooper says of rhetorical agency and action, “Though the world changes in response to individual action, agents are very often not aware of their intentions, they do not directly cause changes, and the choices they make are not free from influence from their inheritance, past experiences, or their surround” (Cooper 421). Echoing Jenny Edbauer-Rice, I believe that rhetorics, in their own viral travels, function

as ecologies. In viewing rhetoric as an “ecological” model, I see rhetorical action operating as “a process of distributed emergence” (Edbauer, “Unframing” 13). This ongoing “contagion” effect is exemplified by the ways in which rhetorics encounter and overlap with other rhetorics as they travel. And while such overlapping moments contribute to the changing and shifting of rhetorical meaning, these shifted rhetorics nevertheless receive an “increased circulation through these kinds of affective transmissions” (Edbauer, “Unframing” 18).

This ecological metaphor works particularly well for a digital, transnational paradigm, as it allows us to consider the various ways rhetorics permeate each other and construct networks of interactions. The notion of ecology also speaks to both the indeterminacy and global reach of these encounters, as well as the ways in which these encounters materialize both on and off the web. The latter point—the notion of ecologies as a kind of materialization—is crucial for understanding the role that a feminist perspective plays in this project. Rhetorics embody ideologies, and in their circulation and resulting encounters with other rhetorics and thus other ideologies, they often elicit very real, material effects on bodies (e.g. women’s bodies). This is why digital circulation as a form of social action within a transnational context remains an important site of inquiry: in their travels, rhetorics both attract and magnify the influences of inheritances, past experiences, and surroundings. It is from these surroundings that rhetorics draw the power necessary to affect change within these networks, and yet, as I will discuss in the following section, these same surroundings allow rhetorics to (re)produce and become embedded in discourses of power that ultimately undermine or remove their potential for affecting change.

As I will discuss in the next section, because both the “transnational” and the “digital” are very much related to new forms of communication and new processes of globalization, the effort to consider circulation within this kind of context requires an acknowledgment of the various tensions inherent in those processes. In other words, while the study of circulation has vast potential for considering rhetorical action on the web due to the fact that the web operates as a textual universe with constant, rapid introduction and dissemination of texts, the digital is also deeply entrenched in the circulation of global capital and neoliberal logics.

### **Circulation as Economic Action**

While on the one hand circulation seems to offer a productive way to think about social action and social change on the web, it also creates various impediments to that kind of action: one impediment being the movement of global capital. In many ways, we as a field have failed to understand this tension posed by the transnational, and thus have failed to bring a nuanced understanding to theories of circulation within the digital sphere. As I mentioned briefly at the beginning of this chapter, digital technology is deeply entrenched in contemporary forms of globalization, particularly in its role as an agent of a capitalist economy and in its movement of neoliberal ideologies and practices. Because the web functions as a site of knowledge production and circulation, it therefore produces, reinforces, and capitalizes on neoliberal practices—practices that covertly produce and delineate power dynamics aimed at negotiating, maintaining, and controlling social and geopolitical relations. My employment of the term neoliberalism here derives from its use in mainstream discourse, where it has been defined within the context of economic liberalization, free markets and open trade, deregulation, and privatization.

Drawing on Foucauldian notions of power and governmentality, I see neoliberalism as a complex, operative ideology of power that seeks to produce knowledge through what Simon Springer, in his paraphrasing of Foucault, claims is “the ensemble of rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques concerning the mentality of rule that allow for the de-centering of government through the active role of auto-regulated or auto-correcting selves who facilitate ‘governance at a distance’” (Springer 137). To put it another way, neoliberalism “fundamentally” assumes notions of individual freedom and “deregulation,” but actually engenders a distant form of regulation and governance in an attempt to control the global circuits of knowledge production and economic generation. I would also add that neoliberalism, in its attempt to manipulate knowledge production within political, economic and social discourses, operates as a governing and regulating force through which certain bodies (e.g. women) are necessarily controlled.

In considering neoliberalism’s relationship to knowledge production, we can assert that neoliberalism, as it manifests in spaces like the digital, seeks to strategically and tactically maintain and increase social inequalities. We can think about this manifestation in terms of the commonly-held belief that the web functions as a democratizing sphere, where we can freely share information and ideas without government or state interference. And yet in this supposed democratizing sphere, every move we make, every word we input into a search engine is mined for data and analytics directly tied to government and corporate interests. Our texts, then, become commodities, information to capitalize on and profit from, and yet to common web users, and the “public,” that capitalization is invisible and decentered—“governance at a distance,” to quote Springer again. As feminist scholar Paola Bacchetta et al. remind us in their essay

“Transnational Feminist Practices Against War,” a cogent critique of war conflicts and war rhetorics, the problematic discursive and material effects on race and gender, in particular, are results “not only of colonialism's discursive and knowledge-producing legacies, but also of the technologies and industrial practices that produce contemporary global media, and transnational financing of culture industries” (Bacchetta et al. 306). For this reason, an examination of how rhetorical practices can both engage in and disrupt this “project” of neoliberalism is imperative. If we believe that the web itself does function as a kind of neoliberal economy, understanding circulation as a part of this process is imperative: that is, what circulates—what we circulate (digitally or non-digitally)—affects the social and political relations of which we are a part.

Circulation on the web, then, cannot be theorized effectively without taking into consideration globalized powers from a transnational perspective. The web, now more than ever, represents a space where power operates as a fluid, unpredictable force. Because discourses of globalization undergird our digital engagements, and because they move and change in ways that are often times unstable and visibly concealed, we need to look at the web as a kind of circulatory, shifting structure. In such a space, power, as manifested through various forms of global capital, moves throughout the web as a kind of discursive and material force, morphing and changing with each and every encounter.

For the field of rhetoric and composition, the cyclical relationship between knowledge production, circulation, and consumption, particularly on the web, poses many questions about the preservation of a status quo related to issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, geographic locations, etc., and how such preservation oftentimes remains invisible. It can be argued that web users do not necessarily “see” how the material

effects of peoples' lives are inextricably linked to global media and digital technologies; they assume the opposite—that the web provides an outlet to read about these issues, to be informed, to take action. This phenomenon occurs as a result of global capitalism's very reliance on and continual reproduction of what feminist scholar Rosemary Hennessy has described as, "ways of knowing and feeling that conceal the exploitive human relations that the accumulation of profit requires" (Hennessy, *Profit* 6). This is why certain political scholars, like Jodi Dean, are less hopeful about the web's potential for political and rhetorical action. Dean has suggested that the web, in its globalized form, functions as a falsified notion of the public sphere. We come to the web to engage, to learn, to gather more information, and yet in our knowledge-seeking endeavors, she claims, we further postpone action because we never think we "know" enough. Thus action becomes a perpetual delay while that delay becomes a kind of capital generation (in our continued search for more knowledge and information). In other words, Dean is suggesting that in our very desire to communicate, question, learn and "know" things on the web, we become complicit in the power structures of global capitalism, an ideology with a vested interest in extending our inaction. This kind of participation, she claims, "sucks life out of political action. Action is postponed [...] This postponement is a permanent deferral" (Dean 163). For this reason, Dean does not see potential for the web to function as a site where social and political action can take place. Circulation, for Dean, is the perpetuation of communicative capital, and thus the compliance with and maintaining of global capital dominance: "Capitalism in its information mode functions as communication, as the circulation of messages and information. To fail to criticize this

circulation, to fail to politicize communication as an ideal, results in the acceptance of global corporate power” (Dean 150).

And yet if we are to approach the web from an economic standpoint, as Dean does, I posit that we need to consider the system of production in its entirety—that is, the economic notion of “use and exchange value.” Whether or not users are reinforcing global capitalism in their decisions to engage on the web and produce user-generated content, this engagement is occurring, and at rapid speed through processes of circulation. As compositionist Donna LeCourt has suggested,

If the knowledge economy is located in the manipulation of data into socially use-ful (or economically valuable) knowledge, then it is also a relation in which we can play a role. How we circulate that information, use it collectively with others, and leverage it to form collectivities may produce another exchange relation. If all people are producers of information (data) then all ‘are potential producers of knowledge commodities, that is, creators of value in a knowledge economy’ (Graham x). The commodity circulates freely (thus the surplus value others can accrue from it) and is open to a fluid set of uses, but only, I would argue, if we see what we do with information in our activity with others as part of the function of the internet rather than imagining our role as only producers and consumers of information. (LeCourt 15)

By questioning the system of production on the web, and the ways in which we play a role in that production, we can begin to understand the potentialities for the web to function as a space for social action. And furthermore, by interrogating the labor involved in that process, we can begin to understand further how social relations are formed, controlled, and maintained in that system of production. If Hennessy is right in claiming that “subjectivity is constructed out of the available knowledges in a culture as they circulate in discourses and institutional practices” (Hennessy, *Materialist* 37), then questioning the ways in which rhetorical circulation on the web engages in, revises, and/or resists dominant discourses is imperative, as such circulatory processes—the

processes in which we participate—affect actual bodies and lived experiences.

Examining these modes of circulation, and the ways in which they are inextricably linked to power dynamics, can provide rhetoricians with a more nuanced lens for understanding, and perhaps questioning, the tensions posed by the digital. It further allows us to consider the rhetorical limitations and possibilities that lie within this digital space.

### **Transnational Feminism and Digital Circulation**

Given the various tensions within the digital and the ways in which the web operates as a globalized, neoliberal space, we need a theoretical framework that can give us the language to talk about both the potentialities and challenges implicit in these contexts, and the ways in which social change and oppression coexist. If we want to understand the ways in which feminist rhetorical action might occur within a transnational context, we must interrogate the rhetorical practices within this space using a transnational feminist methodology that is attentive to the digital forms of social, political, and economic actions.

In their characterization of a transnational feminist rhetorical lens, Hesford and Schell claim that such a framework serves as an “interdisciplinary analytic, attentive to the constraints of neoliberalism and to the power differentials and inequalities that shape geopolitical alignments” (Hesford & Schell 465). Dingo echoes Hesford and Schell’s claim, affirming that globalization has made it “necessary to employ a transnational feminist lens to consider the vectors of power (often present within textual production through representational practices) that impact categories of identity, state sovereignty, and the markers of citizenship” (Dingo 11). The vectors of power within textual production on the web can be visibly traced and examined by looking at circulation. As

Grewal has suggested, the role of technology in the circulation and perpetuation of “dominant discourses” demands an examination of “transnational connectivities, [...] the discourses that travel through these networks, how some get translated and transcoded, how some are unevenly connected, others strongly connected, and still others incommensurable and untranslatable” (Grewal 23, brackets mine). Such connections are evident in the overlapping, and oftentimes conflicting, rhetorics that move throughout the circulatory space that is the web. These rhetorical instantiations illuminate discourses of globalization, such as neoliberalism in its most recent forms, that represent complex, operative ideologies of power. Such discourses seek to produce knowledge—or determined ways of “being” and “acting”—through rationalities, strategies, and logics. The web, as both a technological materialization of neoliberal ideologies and as a site that literally generates and reinforces such ideologies, arguably contributes to the continued exploitation of people’s lives while also concealing that exploitation by perpetuating flawed and false notions of individuality, autonomy, and liberation. In delineating these ideas, I aim to explore how we must envision circulation not only as an intricate process within the digital, but also a vastly affective transnational process within a global information economy.

More specifically, this dissertation brings together a transnational feminist analysis with composition’s theories of circulation. For the intrinsically globalized space of the web—a networked space of moving texts—I argue that circulation is a process through which various, and often times conflicting, intentions and goals come into contact with each other, creating new meanings and new kinds of knowledge. In order to concretely understand these collisions of meaning and recognize how these encounters

contribute to global connections and differences, Michael Warner's theory of reflexive circulation as a form of "world-making" provides a good starting point for breaking down the key movements that make up this process. For Warner, reflexive circulation is what constitutes a public. In other words, a public for Warner is an ongoing reflexive process and a relation among strangers—a "social space" constituted by circulating discourses and one's "mere attention" to those discourses (Warner 90). Warner's insistence that the creation of meaning is not made through a single text, but through the concatenation of texts throughout time and space, applies well to the digital despite his print emphasis. Textual or discursive encounters go beyond just the "relational axis of utterance and response" (Warner 91). Texts enact "infinite axes of citation and characterization" (as texts move, they bring with them contexts, references, citations, histories, etc.) (Warner 91, italics mine). Using Warner's notions of citationality and characterization helps us understand both how discourses circulate and how they create and exclude certain subject positions. In short, Warner views circulation as a form of rhetorical action, or in his words, a kind of "world-making," a definition that seems particularly applicable to the web, where writing is not inscription but circulation. Like writing, circulation necessarily involves the act of interpellation—hailing a specific audience member through discursive claims and pragmatics of speech—in ways that we hope will affect their thinking and behavior. By way of example, I return attention once more to Amina Tyler, who as a "rhetor" engages in the cyclical acts of projection and reflexivity in an attempt to create a world where women and women's bodies are not subject to patriarchal norms. Her goal, and the ultimate goal of reflexive circulation in general, is a kind of social transformation that specifically targets certain power structures, and thus certain subject positions. In

addition, the concepts of citationality and characterization work well for the web because texts, through their linkages, become the basis for further representations. We can also think of these concepts in terms of intertextuality: when one encounters a text, in her attempt to circulate that text, she may incorporate references or citations from the original text, or other texts (citationality), while also, intentionally or not, attempting to change, resist, and/or transform the meanings within that original text (characterization).<sup>2</sup>

Within the context of a digital space, reflexive circulation speaks to both the indeterminacy of rhetorical encounters and the ways in which these encounters materialize transnationally both on and off the web. Queen's work, in particular, demonstrates the ways in which reflexive circulation operates on the web through modes of citationality, as she points to the ideological uses of embedded hyperlinks in various texts. In an effort to extend this type of analysis, I suggest that reflexive circulation on the web—in its modes of interactive citations and social characterizations—goes beyond embedded hyperlinks and nominal references. Rather, the “kind” of circulation I am pointing to here encompasses embedded political, economic, and social meanings and goals: an exercise in “world-making.” Moreover, reflexive circulation on the web can be interpreted as a form of rhetorical action: someone circulates something, and that circulation affects something or someone else. We might think of this phenomenon in terms of Edbauer-Rice's model of rhetorical ecologies—viewing public rhetorics as “a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events” (Edbauer, “Unframing” 9). In addition, the reflexive circulation of rhetorics can also be thought of as having an agency of its own, as rhetorics travel in ways that we cannot always anticipate. For this reason,

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<sup>2</sup> My use of “intertextuality” comes from Norman Fairclough's definition of the term in *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), pgs. 232-238.

we must acknowledge that rhetorics circulating within digital environments are the constant subjects of co-option and repurposing, and are interarticulated (to use Grewal's term) for neoliberal and capitalist agendas.<sup>3</sup> As rhetorical scholar Catherine Chaput reminds us, theorizing circulation within spaces dominated by neoliberalism "demands a structural reorganization in the way we think about political-economic and cultural practices within capitalism from situation to transsituation and a new understanding of rhetoric as continuously moving through and connecting different instantiations within this complex structure" (Chaput 6). This concept of "transituation" not only speaks to a rhetoric's continued movement and encounter with other rhetorics, it also suggests that rhetorical meaning and the production and circulation of that meaning are never isolated processes, and thus never isolated in their effects.

This is where I find Trimbur's theory of circulation most helpful. As he reminds us, "We cannot understand what is entailed when people encounter written texts without taking into account how the labor power embodied in the commodity form articulates a mode of production and its prevailing social relations" (Trimbur, "Composition" 210). In his work on circulation and public writing (primarily non-digital texts), Trimbur highlights the importance of understanding circulation as a kind of materialization, particularly as it relates to ideology and the formation of power relations. In mapping out a theoretical paradigm for viewing and understanding the ideological implications underlying the production and circulation of texts, he claims that, "The process of

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<sup>3</sup> Grewal's term "interarticulation" refers to the ways in which various discourses and ideologies permeate rhetorics, thus changing their meanings across various contexts (*Transnational America*, 2005). Both Dingo and Hesford make use of this term in their larger works also: see Dingo, *Networking Arguments* (2012), pg.107, and see Hesford, *Spectacular Rhetorics* (2011), pg. 20.

production determines – and distributes – a hierarchy of knowledge and information that is tied to the cultural authorization of expertise, professionalism, and respectability” (Trimbur, “Composition” 210). Key to Trimbur’s argument is his reliance on the Marxist model of production—the idea that the process of production is always interdependent, a process of “mediation in mutual and coterminous relations that constitute the capitalist mode of production as a total system” (Trimbur, “Composition” 206). Thus, texts as commodities circulate and that circulation is always inextricably linked to social, political, and historical ideologies (neoliberalism, for example). Put more plainly, circulation can be conceptually understood as the process through which social relations are formed and reformed within a system of production. Understanding this process more concretely and making it more transparent, as is my goal in this project, can allow us to leverage that system for the purposes of increased rhetorical and social efficacy.

To that end, conceiving of and interrogating the process of circulation as it relates to the digital and the transnational requires an examination of the ways in which circulation affects, influences, shapes, and/or maintains the status quo of gender, race, class, sexuality, geographic locations, etc. in both visible and invisible ways. Thus, in viewing reflexive circulation through a transnational feminist lens, this dissertation questions the ways in which texts engage in or dispute discourses of globalization. For transnational feminists, this analysis can help us see and interrogate further the relationship between feminist action and spaces such as the digital that seem more amenable to transnational action and engagement. For rhetoricians, this project posits a new theory of rhetorical production and action that is unique to digital environments: in looking at digital circulation, we can then start to theorize new frameworks and strategies

for expanding our ideas about rhetorical composition and rhetorical effectiveness. It is my hope that such an analysis—one that attempts to mediate the tensions posed by the digital—will allow us to see the nuances of the form, so that we might better understand the limitations of and possibilities for feminist rhetorical action to occur on the web.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

I came to this project from the perspective of a feminist researcher and teacher interested in connections and disconnections between rhetoric, gender, and technologies of power. These interests arise out of my deep concern for and commitment to women's issues and the gender politics surrounding the various inequities that pervade women's experiences on a global scale. Rhetorics concerning women and gender issues have been most prevalent in larger discussions surrounding (and justifying) globalization. In recent years, I have observed the ways in which feminist and activist groups have responded to these discussions by organizing and engaging in transnational feminist movements on the web (e.g. PussyRiots; SlutWalk; #FemFuture; FEMEN; Muslim Women Against FEMEN). These movements and their subsequent effects led me to formulate many of the questions this dissertation poses, specifically the question of *how* feminist rhetorical action occurs on the web, so that we might learn from those moments of action and continue to leverage rhetorical efficacy in the digital sphere.

As Judith Butler notes in her discussions of rhetoric and communication, rhetoric is "concerned with the question of how communication works, how reality becomes presented in language...and how we come to accept and transform our sense of reality through the means by which it is presented" (qtd. in Beard). In this way, rhetoric is both an analytic method (one that allows us to approach texts a certain way in order to understand the social and political agendas underlying communication) and a heuristic for production (the way in which we "present" these beliefs about reality). The latter

speaks to my use of “*rhetorics*.” In addition to “applying” rhetoric as an analytic method to a text, I see rhetoric as also an object of study. Similar to how Sonja Foss defines visual rhetorics, rhetorics in this study refer to the combination of both *artifact* and *perspective*. The culmination of these two things—the text or image as the artifact, and the ideological perspective/belief present in that artifact/text—advances an argument about the world and reality. For this reason, tracing perspectival artifacts—inquiring into how and where rhetorics move—involves questioning the production and circulation of these “worlds.”

In *Analyzing Discourse*, Norman Fairclough describes discourses as “projective imaginaries, representing possible worlds, which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions” (Fairclough 124). In this way, then, discourse operates as a form of power in that it promotes knowledge (re)production and circulation. And these processes occur within and throughout the co-constitutive nature of language—specifically within texts. As someone interested in the dis/connections between rhetoric, knowledge formation, and gender, I look to discourse as a site of *rhetorical activity*. Therefore, I see the value in questioning the (re)production and circulation of rhetorics, particularly in relation to how those rhetorics construct and perpetuate certain discourses—i.e., ideologies and beliefs about gender. In the words of Michelle Lazar, who argues for a *feminist* critical discourse methodology, “the workings of gender ideology and asymmetrical power relations in discourse are assuming more subtle forms in the contemporary period,” thus we must call attention to those subtle forms by making them visible (Lazar 2-3).

One of those “forms in the contemporary period” is the World Wide Web. As I argued in the last chapter, the digital appears to be one of the most viable places for considering and examining feminist rhetorical action within a transnational context. To investigate this claim, I turn to the case study of Amina Tyler to see precisely how (and if) digital circulation can work as a kind of feminist rhetorical action. As an inquiry into circulation, this case study traces Tyler’s protest and its movement through the web for a period of two years. My methodology for examining this circulation is premised on my intent to (1) understand how texts circulate within the digital sphere and (2) acknowledge and analyze the effects of that digital circulation within a transnational context. Based on my theoretical framework, my guiding research questions are as follows:

1. How did the specific case study (e.g. the conversation) originate and what were the immediate responses to that conversation?
2. Who are the main players (textual producers) in the conversation?
3. Where do these texts move/travel?
4. How do these texts move/travel?
5. Are there any new claims/themes emerging from previous claims?
6. How does the conversation shift and change in meaning, if at all?

These questions emerged from my interest in tracing the kinds of digital circulations that involve responses, revisions, and/or a repurposing of meaning, and my desire to gain insight into how we might re-envision feminist rhetorical action on the web, as well as insight about the various roles global media and geopolitical discourses play in these moments of rhetorical action.

It's important to acknowledge, however, that I come to this project from a particular place and context that shape my own rhetorical purposes and goals. My aim is not to downplay these goals, and the ideologies undergirding them; indeed, it is my intent to call attention to them as inherently tied to the context from which this project emerged. As a feminist scholar interested in doing transnational work, I understand the limits of my knowledge and experience, as well as the limits of my audience. This work is necessarily part of larger conversations in the fields of Rhetoric and Composition and Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, and in many ways this work speaks to scholars like myself who may be interested in questions related to rhetorical action, transnational feminist engagement, and the digital sphere. Moreover, I acknowledge that this project unavoidably exists within the realm of discourses I critique in these chapters: i.e., Western feminism and academic liberalism. In calling attention to this, though, I aim to participate in what Alison Jaggar calls "critical dialogue"—a dialogue that engages in "promoting reassessments of our own commitments and refinements of our own views" (Jaggar 11). "Dialogue with those who share many of our values and commitments," Jaggar believes, "is also practically indispensable for making social change" (Jaggar 11). Thus, I see this project as an in-process "reassessment," and perhaps a "refinement," of what it means to consider the relationships between feminist rhetorics, transnationalism and digital technology.

### **Site Selection**

I chose to conduct a qualitative case study because I wanted to examine a conversation(s) that took place over a period of time—a continuous communicative chain of interactions, necessarily involving multiple stakeholders and most importantly,

transnational engagements. Although I do not believe that a transnational feminist rhetorical project requires a study that is “descriptively” about women’s issues, I am interested in transnational conversations about feminist politics and the effects of those politics on women’s lives. For all of these reasons, I chose to study a discussion that occurred in the spring of 2013 between Amina Tyler (an individual woman and member of FEMEN), FEMEN (a self-proclaimed feminist organization), Muslim Women Against FEMEN (a feminist social media group formed in response to FEMEN’s actions), other web users, and the mainstream media. As I briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, this discussion was prompted by the initial circulation of photographs of a topless Tyler with the messages, “Fuck your morals” and “My body is my own, not someone else’s honor” written across her chest. Following this circulation, other images of topless women from the protest group FEMEN moved throughout the web. The images showcased FEMEN members with messages such as “Free Anima” and “Women against Islam” written across their chests. Such images and texts, as they circulated throughout the digital sphere, prompted other kinds rhetorical action. In addition to responses from web users and mainstream media, one Facebook group in particular, Muslim Women Against FEMEN (MWAFF), organized a “counterprotest” designed to directly respond to FEMEN’s “topless jihad day,” which they called “Muslimah Pride Day.” MWAFF’s underlying goal was to send a message to FEMEN about their “imperialist” actions by attempting to (re)present Muslim women, Islam, and concepts of agency from their local and personal perspectives. Such events sparked much rhetorical debate and deliberation within the digital sphere, particularly over issues related to women’s rights, feminism, and difference.

Several elements in this case study lend themselves to the kind of research project I had hoped to conduct. First, the texts circulating within this specific study originated, traveled, and continue to move within a digital environment. Second, the multiple stakeholders in this study are located in various places around the world, specifically countries in the Middle East, Western and Eastern Europe, the US, parts of Africa, and Canada. FEMEN is an international feminist organization and Muslim Women Against FEMEN is a feminist social media organization. Both groups are comprised of members from various geographic locations, including Ukraine, France, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Brazil, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, the US, Italy, Poland, Russia, Israel, Belgium, Bulgaria, Serbia, Sweden, Libya, and Spain.

It terms of transnational engagement, it can be argued that most of the geographic locations that make up this study are based in the West (i.e. Europe and the US),<sup>4</sup> and thus most of the prominent voices in this study come from places of privilege, as there are many places in the world (places deemed “outside” the West) where technology is unavailable and access to the web is either restricted or very limited. Given these factors, though, I attest that this study still encompasses transnational perspectives—particularly perspectives that shape the geopolitical relationships between the West and the Middle East. I would also argue that while the geographic locations in this study are limited to specific regions of the world, this project still allows us to think more about rhetorical action from a transnational perspective, and more about how feminist rhetoricians and activists can leverage and alter spaces like the digital for other kinds of feminist engagement.

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<sup>4</sup> I employ the terms “West” and “non-West” not merely as geographical descriptors but also as critical references points (in terms of ideology and power relations).

As an academic feminist geographically located in the West, I came to this study *because* of the various debates and incongruities occasioned by this series of events. Much of the conversation dealt with questions around feminism and difference—what it means to be a feminist, what it means to advocate for feminist solidarity, and what it means to conceive of women and women’s bodies as central to certain political, social, and economic agendas. Before I decided to analyze this case, I was necessarily involved in its circulation in the role of reader, more specifically as someone seeking to understand the various problematics tied to transnational feminist coalition building premised on the belief in a “global feminism.” For me, this case highlighted differing, conflicting opinions about feminism(s). Thus, the differing of perspectives—the *differences* posed by this case study—became one of the main reasons I chose it as a site for examination, given that it allowed me to question both the possibilities and limitations for feminist engagement and action on the web.

### **Data Collection**

In containing this project within a reasonable framework, I begin my analysis with Tyler’s individual text, a text that represents a moment of social and rhetorical action that then prompted groups like FEMEN and MWAF to engage in continued conversation. In considering the interactions between Tyler, FEMEN, and MWAF as the main impetus for the various forms of circulation within this study, I look at the ways in which the rhetorics within their texts change and get altered through the various modes, methods, and pathways of circulation over an extended period of time.

Because circulation is a process that takes place over time, I divided my data collection and analysis into three phases, all premised on time: (1) the first two weeks

surrounding Tyler’s post; (2) one month following the initial two weeks; and (3) two years after Tyler’s post. As for an “end-point” in this project, I decided to stop collecting data after I had compiled a specific number of texts for each timeframe. Because I view circulation as an ongoing, fluid process, the idea of “choosing” a specific ending to the conversation in this study seems contradictory and counterintuitive. However, given the boundaries of this project, these self-imposed timeframes seemed like the most appropriate way to limit my data collection process.

In dividing my data collection into three phases, I used the Google advanced search option to restrict the timeframe, and I used the players involved in each stage as my search terms. Thus, for the first layer, involving the first two weeks surrounding Tyler’s protest, I used “Amina Tyler” as my search term. Many of the texts from that particular search involved FEMEN. Thus for the second layer, my search terms included both “Amina Tyler” and “FEMEN.” The texts produced in this layer brought another group into the mix: Muslim Women Against FEMEN. Therefore, my search terms for the third layer included “Amina Tyler,” “FEMEN,” and “Muslim Women Against FEMEN.”

Phase One:

*Timeframe:* March 20, 2013 – April 3, 2013, two weeks surrounding Tyler’s protest.

*Search Terms:* “Amina Tyler”

Phase Two:

*Timeframe:* April 4, 2013 – May 4, 2013, one month after the initial two weeks.

*Search Terms:* “Amina Tyler” and “FEMEN”

Phase Three:

*Timeframe:* March 20, 2015 – March 20, 2106, two years since Tyler’s post.

*Search Terms:* “Amina Tyler,” “FEMEN,” and “Muslim Against Women”

My rationale for choosing Google is based on the fact that many people use Google to search for, participate in, and/or read about public conversations. In addition, both its advanced search techniques and wide global reach in the realms of information and data provided inherent advantages. All of this said, I also realize that the recent changes in Google’s policies—the increased personalization of the “Google search”<sup>5</sup>—poses certain challenges for my project. Over the last few years, Google has moved toward a mode of service that uses our search processes as sites for data mining. This service, known as “Google Analytics,” monitors every individual’s website traffic, produces statistics on marketing choices, and measures conversations and popular topics of interest. In other words, what one searches for not only becomes part of a larger data archive, but also becomes used for personalizing market strategies and search results on that individual’s computer. What this means for me and my own research is that my computer—the web browsers I use for research—are all primed to my interests and past search terms. Given this fact and the challenges imposed by Google Analytics, I altered my search process to reflect a more expanded, varied effort. I collected my data in a more broad and comprehensive manner by conducting two searches for each data set—one with my personalized settings on, and another without (i.e. I deleted my “cookies”). This enabled me to see a varied filtration of information rather than just a personalized list of

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<sup>5</sup>See Ken Hills, Michael Petit, and Kylie Jarrett’s *Google and the Culture of Search* for more on the personalization of Google.

search results from my own web browser. For each phase, I collected and read through 100 texts per data set. Because I conducted two searches per set (one personalized, one neutralized), I skimmed through the results that both searches yielded (200 texts in total), cross-referencing them to make sure the searches were not that different (interestingly enough, both searches yielded almost the same exact results). In addition, while I primarily looked at texts written in English, I did look at a handful of texts translated from French and Arabic into English (about eight texts in total). Most of the texts, however, regardless of the geographic location from which they emerged, were published in English.

My goal in compiling a data set for each layer was to show both how texts circulate and change through different kinds of responses and references, and the ways in which certain texts actually prompt specific kinds of responses and references. To provide more detail about how I intended to organize my data according to my designated “layers” and research questions, I have included below a table that illustrates how I gathered each data set.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>
How did the conversation originate and what were the immediate responses to that conversation?	Texts from the first layer of circulation.
Who are the main players?	Background information about Amina Tyler, FEMEN, MAAF (websites and social media sites).

Where do these texts travel/move?	Mapping and tracing of the movements of texts from first layer to second layer, and from second layer to third layer.
How do these texts travel?	Second and third layer texts.
Are there any new claims/themes that are coming out of the previous claims?	Second and third layer texts.
How does the conversation change?	A subset of the texts from the second and third layers involving certain claims/warrants that came out of the first (and second) layer.

**Table 2.1: Data Collection Table**

### **Data Analysis**

My goal in analyzing these texts was to analyze how circulation works on the web in order to understand how it can work (if at all) to support feminist action. My logic for the analyses that took place in each phase of this study was premised on an effort to examine *what* messages circulated, *how* those messages circulated, and ultimately the *effects that resulted* from that circulation. Thus, as I describe in more depth in the sections below, the analysis in this study moves from descriptively questioning the “what” and the “how” of circulation to critically investigating, over a period of two years, the effects and social relations produced from that “what” and “how.”

### **Phase One**

In beginning my data analysis, I used aspects of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis to look at syntax, metaphoric structure, and forms of repetition in order to see how texts portray certain levels of visibility, or what Fairclough calls “authority” by and

through their linguistic arrangements (Fairclough, *Discourse* 64-88). I started with this kind of surface-level analysis because circulation is necessarily dependent on continuous recognition such that the texts with the most “authority” and visible significance are the texts most likely to recur and retain movement. In reading through the first 100 texts yielded from the search term, “Amina Tyler,” I looked at how headlines were constructed and arranged, as well as how many times certain words or phrases were repeated throughout each text. Take the following headlines, for example: “Tunisian woman under fire for bare-breasted protest” (*Index on Censorship*); “Tunisian Woman Sent to a Psychiatric Hospital for Posting Topless Photos on Facebook” (*The Atlantic*); “Tunisia: Feminist activist threatened, placed in psychiatric hospital” (*Examiner*); “Topless Tunisian Femen Protester ‘Amina’ Threatened With Death By Stoning” (*Huffington Post*). In these captions, we can see several repetitive constructions and repetitive words. The use of “Tunisia” at the beginning of all four headlines, for instance, indicates the subject of the nation as a main focal point. In addition, the repeated reference to Tyler’s naked body as “topless” and “bare-breasted” positions the naked body as a central topic of the narrative as well. In this way, I am able to make claims about the structure and repetition of the headlines, particularly in relation to how the larger themes of “nation” and “the naked body” become foregrounded as important features. This kind of analysis led to a compilation of the following most prominent themes/keywords from the texts (from both the headlines and article content):

1. naked body (79 texts)
2. nation (66 texts)
3. feminism (66 texts)

4. protest (65)
5. women's rights (58 texts)
6. religion (52 texts)
7. epidemic (42 texts)
8. oppression (41 texts)
9. freedom (41 texts)
10. progress (36 texts)
11. surveillance (27 texts)
12. digital activism (24 texts)
13. coalitions (22 texts)
14. transnational (16 texts)
15. race (16 texts)

Of the 79 texts that included references to these categories, all 79 mentioned the naked body in some form or another. Thus, I decided that the body was a crucial theme for this study and decided to make it the focal point of my analysis (after all, the study began with bodily protest, much of the conversation erupted over the implications of bodily protest, and many of the debates were about actual bodies). In conducting a second reading of the texts (still using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis), I decided to look for connections between the body and the other categories/keywords listed, as well as conflicting uses of those connections. In doing so I devised a set of "hashtags" regarding patterns/recurring topics specifically related to the "body." For example, in the following headline, "Amina Stands for Freedom" (Azar), the naked body (which is alluded to through the use of "Amina") becomes linked to protest (as "Amina" is positioned in that

statement as “standing” for freedom). Thus, embedded in this statement are correlations between the body, protest, and freedom (which I would label #bodyasprotest” and “#bodyasfreedom”). While many texts had the hashtag #bodyasnation, many of those same texts also had the hashtags #bodyasprotest, #bodyasobject, #bodyasepidemic, #bodyasfreedom, #bodyassexobject, #bodyascapital, #bodyaswoman, and/or #bodyasownership. Other hashtags included #bodyasprogress, #bodyasoppression #bodyasreclamation, #nakedbodyasfeminist, #bodyaswomensrights, #bodyassurveillance. The most prominent themes were: #bodyasnation, #bodyasprotest, #bodyasobject, #bodyasepidemic, #bodyasfreedom, #bodyasoppression, and #bodyasprogress.

Following my second reading of the texts from layer one, I wrote a reflective memo detailing the various questions that arose simply from looking at the list of hashtags, and the connections and disconnections between them:

- Why is a woman’s body always correlated with the fate of a nation-state?
- Why is it that over half of the articles make distinctions between the body as a symbol of protest and the body as an objectified entity?
- Why do many of the US-based and Europe-based news articles begin their headlines with “Tunisia” instead of “Amina Tyler,” or reference to protest?
- Why is a woman’s naked body always discussed in terms of “reclamation,” or taking back ownership, etc.?
- How does the body get discussed as a metaphor for nationality, or the nation-state?
- How is feminism being defined and “embodied” throughout all of these texts?

- How and why is the notion of naked protest being rearticulated as a “contagion” and an “epidemic” throughout one third of the texts?

As a way of delimiting the data set in this layer (and for the layers that follow), I chose to focus on the four hashtag themes that I felt were not only the most “prominent” themes, but also the most relevant to this case study and my larger inquiries about the viability of transnational feminist action in the digital sphere: #bodyasnation, #bodyasprotest, #bodyasobject, and #bodyasepidemic (in the actual analysis, #bodyasepidemic becomes relabeled as #bodyasmadness due to the various ideologies implicit in that theme). More specifically, my choice related directly to the controversies that arose from the various competing rhetorics attached to each theme. They were perhaps the most contested themes, the themes over which many participants in the discussion disagreed, and thus where differences were most evident (e.g. the “#bodyasprotest” theme was just as prominent as “#bodyasobject” theme – two very opposite kinds of correlations). Because my interests lie in understanding the possibilities and limitations of transnational feminist engagement online, I wanted to look at conversations where differences were a key issue, and these themes best assisted my investigations. In my examination of the 66 texts that included these themes, I questioned the intertextual and interarticulated moments within them, examining the rhetorics undergirding those themes, and thus the ideologies, beliefs, and claims implicit in their moments of circulation, as well as how those attachments contributed to shaping the possibilities and limitations for feminist rhetorical action.

Because one of my aims was to understand circulation in terms of social relations, in my third reading of the texts from layer one, I used a combination of methods from critical discourse analysis and rhetorical criticism to look for connections between the

body hashtags, rhetorics and ideology. For my analysis I relied on Fairclough's macro analytical approach of "manifest intertextuality" and Grewal's method of "interarticulation" to understand the social practices undergirding each text. Using the method of manifest intertextuality allowed me to examine and question how texts "overtly draw upon other texts" for purposes related to irony, recharacterization, and appropriation (as well as Warner's concepts of citationality and characterization) (Fairclough, *Discourse* 73). I used interarticulation as a method to examine the ways in which various discourses and ideologies permeate texts and change their meanings across various contexts (Grewal 28). From the perspective of a rhetorical critic, I looked for claims that were tied to premises—premises that were sometimes explicitly stated and at other times implicitly assumed. To get to these premises, and to identify the intertextual/interarticulated ideologies undergirding those premises, I asked questions such as, "why were those claims being made?" and "who/what do the claims/warrants affect?" In combining these methods, I was able to understand more clearly the social and political currents influencing the texts themselves, and how and where those texts circulated. As I read each piece, I took notes on textual content, visual content, and external content, looking for connections between the body and ideology. Textual content included specific intertextual and interarticulated moments related to social and political events, practices and beliefs. Visual content included any notes on images (most of the articles had one or more pictures of Tyler's naked body – sometimes the original, sometimes a revised and/or transformed version of the original). The last section, external content, included any important aspects of the digital text that affected my reading (links to other articles, sidebars, ads, etc.). For example, while viewing the aforementioned

*Atlantic* article, “Tunisian Woman Sent to a Psychiatric Hospital for Posting Topless Photos on Facebook,” I made notes in all three categories. First, I pointed to several correlations between the body and ideology by questioning the premise of certain rhetorical moves:

Amina, a 19-year-old who hoped to join the radical protest group Femen, is also threatened with death by stoning. [...] Shevchenko was also alerted to a video in which Amina's aunt declared that the aspiring Femen member ‘is now with her family. She had decided to kill herself and so posted nude pictures of herself online,’ which Shevchenko characterized as ‘a typical way of reacting to a woman's demand to be free—they say she's gone crazy or is being too emotional.’ (Tyler)

The first correlation is one that was present in the aforementioned headlines: the link between Tunisia and Tyler’s naked body. However, here the use of “Tunisia” and “topless” Tyler, along with the reference to her punishment for posing naked, imply an interarticulated link between the body and discourses related to national regulation. Moreover, the links between the body and Tyler’s psyche (*Atlantic* author Tyler even makes use of the repeated keywords “epidemic” and “contagion” in the article) suggests a link between the body and interarticulated ideologies related to female hysteria. Moreover, the way in which Tyler’s body gets interarticulated as something hysterical, “ill” and suicidal, as well as detained (she is demanding freedom, meaning she does not have it), suggests a link between the body and objectification. Interestingly enough, though, the body also becomes a symbol of action and “freedom” here. In the discussion about bodily protest—particular Shevchenko’s reference to Tyler’s naked protest as a “demand for freedom”—there is an ideological assumption that the naked body as a form of protest, as it is related to FEMEN, is analogous to the fight for “freedom.” Thus, in this

one excerpt, we see competing rhetorics of nationalism, freedom, hysteria and objectification interarticulated through the use of the body themes.

The interarticulated link between protest and freedom, in particular, speaks to my second category—that is, notes about visual content—as the article begins with a photo of FEMEN protesters (see figure 2.1 below).



**Figure 2.1: FEMEN Members Protesting**

In addition to the interarticulated link between naked protest and “freedom” for women, this image also suggests a kind of meta intertextuality (both in form and meaning), as the image itself draws on both the text in the article, as well as the texts that came before it, including Tyler’s own text (i.e. her image of protest). The text on the actual bodies in the image also represent moments of intertextuality, as the bodily writing resembles the various bodily inscriptions circulating earlier (i.e. Tyler’s mode of protest). As for my third category, external content, I noted that the article was tagged as “global” – a classification used to identify “international/global news.” I also noted an ad for a company helping businesses obtain “digital storefronts” and helping them become part of “global commerce,” as well as links to social media platforms (such as Twitter and

Facebook) that would allow one to immediately post the article on their social media account.

For each text I made similar notes, which ultimately allowed me to trace the ways in which the body hashtags produced various body rhetorics tied to certain ideologies, premises and arguments. In the next two phases of this study, these themes, and the competing rhetorics attached to them, would become the focus of analysis, as I traced their movement into new rhetorical arenas.

### **Phase Two**

In the second layer—a month after the initial two weeks surrounding Tyler’s protest—I again traced the four themes related to the body, questioning how they were being used to continue, reinforce, and/or alter earlier claims and arguments. I decided to focus solely on the continuation of these themes because I was interested in circulation, and the powerful, sustained movement certain texts can achieve. In utilizing, again, Fairclough’s method of “manifest intertextuality” and Inderpal Grewal’s method of “interarticulation,” I analyzed the ways in which power and ideology function in the circulation of these texts, and the ways in which the texts themselves enable us to see the construction and reinforcement of social relations. As Fairclough suggests, the amalgamation and circulation of language and ideology has the potential to “transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions to generate new ones” (Fairclough, *Analyzing* 102).

Out of the texts that emerged in this layer (the first 100 texts yielded from the search terms “Amina Tyler” and “FEMEN”), 72 of the texts included references to the body themes (i.e. protest, object, nation). Of the 72 texts, only four of them referenced

the “body-as-madness” hashtag, while 48 of them utilized my three other hashtags together in the same texts. Thus, the focus of the analysis in this layer was less about the hashtags as thematic entities, and more about the kinds of rhetorical claims and ideologies that were emerging from their confluences with one another. Thus, I conducted the same kind of macro-level analysis seen in the previous example from phase one (from my third analytical reading of the first layer texts).

In addition to the analysis of the body themes and the rhetorics attached to those themes, I also questioned how “travel” and “movement” of the themes were defined within this second layer. Did the various rhetorics within each theme circulate through hyperlinks? Through citations? Through imitations of language, phrases, and/or words? Did they circulate on mainstream media sites? Non-mainstream media sites? Did they circulate quickly? Slowly? In many ways, how a text travels relies on the kinds of platforms, genres, and styles that it moves in and out of (e.g. did an open letter then become a tweet or a Facebook post?), thus I questioned how those mediums and platforms opened up or limited where a text could travel and how it could change.

I also made note of the rhetors and kinds of venues involved in the circulation within this layer: were individual people circulating texts? Groups of people? Did organizations play a role in that circulation? Businesses? Corporations? Were there multiple sponsors involved in a certain moment of circulation? These questions were particularly important to understanding the role of the media. As Fairclough reminds us, “News is making stories out of series of logically and chronologically related events. One way of seeing news is as a form of social regulation, even a form of violence: news reduces complex series of events whose relationship may not be terribly clear to stories,

imposing narrative order upon them” (Fairclough, *Media Discourse* 84). Because news stories operate as impositions—prescriptive narratives—in that they tell people “what significance has happened in the world,” it was important to question how that knowledge was produced and disseminated in order to understand the nature of the social relations driving this study. The *Atlantic* article mentioned earlier, for instance, was circulated in this layer through citational tweets (literally, a hyperlink contained in a tweet), enabling the article to reach thousands of people in a matter of seconds.

### **Phase Three**

In the third layer—two years after Tyler’s post—I continued the kind of analysis conducted in phase two: examining the texts that involve the conflation of the body themes. Again, I examined these same four themes because my goal was to look at circulation over a long period of time. Thus I focused on examining what differences, and/or transformations took place within the travel of the body themes and the rhetorics attached to them. This kind of analysis allowed me to note not only the linguistic and stylistic changes in the various arguments, but also the larger ideological changes that occurred as well, and how such changes necessarily affected the political and social relations within this study.

The texts in this layer in particular (the first 100 texts yielded from the search terms, “Amina Tyler,” “FEMEN,” “Muslim Women Against FEMEN”) were similar to those in phase two in that over half of the texts—62 out 100—involved the amalgamation of the three prominent body themes (protest, object, and nation). As in the previous layer, the focus of this phase was less about the themes as separate applications, and more about the kinds of arguments and assumptions that emerged from the encounters and collisions

between those themes, and thus between the various competing rhetorics associated with them. Thus my coding in this layer was similar to the coding in phase two (and thus my third analytical reading in phase one). Like phase two, though, I incorporated questions about travel, as well as questions about the actual individuals/groups/venues engaged in the circulation of these texts, in order to further question the social, political, and economic effects of circulation, particularly in terms of the various ideologies that arose from their movements. Below is a table indicating how I analyzed the data in this study:

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
How did the conversation originate and what were the immediate responses to that conversation?	Texts from the first layer (involving Amina Tyler and FEMEN)	Defining stakes of the conversation - what are the stakes? What are the themes?  Rhetorical/critical discourse analysis of themes
Who are the main players?	Background information on Amina Tyler, FEMEN, MAAF (websites and social media sites).	How does the background information/contexts of the rhetors' in this study influence the ways in which the conversation might be understood and responded to?  Rhetorical/critical discourse analysis of historical, political, and economic contexts.
Where do these texts travel/move?	First, second, third layers of texts.	Who are the sponsors in each layer of movement? How is the movement being defined in terms of sponsorship, venue, location? Breadth? Time?  Rhetorical/critical discourse analysis of movement.

How do these texts travel?	Second and third layers of texts.	How are these texts moving? Citations? Hyperlinks? References? Embedded quotations? Genres?  Rhetorical/critical discourse analysis of the kind of intertextuality and interarticulation that occur through the process of circulation.
Are there any new claims/themes that are coming out of the previous claims?	Second and third layers of texts.	Do the themes from the first layer continue into the second and third layers? Are new themes/claims being argued?  Rhetorical/critical discourse analysis of the themes in the texts.
How does the conversation shift and change in meaning, if at all?	A subset of the texts from the second layer (and later the third later) involving certain themes that came out of the first and second layer.	What changes take place in these texts? Are certain themes being re-used? Are certain ones being altered for other purposes?  Rhetorical/critical discourse analysis of themes and claims in the texts (focusing on language, intertextuality, interarticulation, sponsorship, and time).

**Table 2.2: Data Analysis Table**

**Further Considerations**

In combining rhetorical and digital studies with transnational feminist theories and methodologies, this study takes an interdisciplinary approach to questioning the system of production on the web. This allows us to examine our role in that production, so we can better understand the potentialities for the web to function as a space for transnational feminist action. As with any study, though, there were limitations in this one. If given the time and resources to address those limitations, I wonder if this study might have been more multi-layered and nuanced. For example, I wonder how this study

might have changed if I were afforded the opportunity and time to talk with the particular rhetors in this study, namely, Tyler, members of FEMEN, members of Muslim Women Against FEMEN, and certain news reporters. Might my approach to circulation have differed if the circulators' voices were part of this analysis? In addition, and as I mentioned earlier, access to technology was always at the back of my mind when analyzing the data within this study. Technology involves aspects of privilege that are inextricably linked to the kinds of discourses that I discuss and ultimately critique in this study. Thus, if I were to conduct this study again, how might I address the issue of access differently? Are there ways to address access that I may not have considered? Lastly, it seems worth acknowledging the overwhelming, pervasive presence of the media as a kind of limitation in this study. At the outset of this project, I was well aware of the role global media plays in the circulation and visibility of texts. Thus I wonder if I had moved outside of the digital, as an addition to this study, would I have seen other kinds of action, other modes of circulation? In other words, were there other places outside the web where I might have observed relevant feminist rhetorical action?

While I do not know the answers to all of these questions, I do know that this study yielded interesting findings about the possibilities for feminist rhetorical action. In looking at digital circulation, and particularly the digital circulation of the texts within this case study, I was able to examine the social/political/economic agendas undergirding circulation. Do particular moments of circulation within this study result in the (re)production of certain social and geopolitical relations? How are power relations being affected, altered? And what power relations (if any) are being affected? How (if at all) does the circulation of texts within this study lead to certain transnational consequences

and effects? Attending to these larger questions, I believe, can help transnational feminists and digital rhetoricians develop a better understanding of the potentialities for and limitations of feminist rhetorical action online.

### CHAPTER III

#### AMPLIFIED RHETORICS

In an effort to raise questions about the possible efficacy of digital spaces as sites for transnational feminist engagement and social change, this chapter focuses on the ways in which circulation marks certain texts as agents for rhetorical action. As I theorized in chapter one, circulation is a process through which various, and oftentimes conflicting, rhetorical intentions and goals come into contact with each other, creating new meanings and new kinds of knowledge. The data in this study reveals that while circulation does represent this kind of contactual, interactive process, various elements unique to the digital play a necessary role in actuating that process. Visibility, speed, and time, for example, all contribute to how and why circulation occurs. This chapter, then, breaks down how this process works (or is forestalled) by examining the web's ability to provide texts with heightened amplification such that certain rhetorics become privileged over others. In other words, amplification—a feature that I identified in my reading of the first layer of circulation, and what I have chosen to call the first step in this larger process of circulation—increases the visibility of certain rhetorics, which then leads to an increased velocity in the movement of *some* of those amplified messages (chapter 4, second layer of circulation), ultimately resulting in the endurance of fewer and fewer of the original rhetorics (chapter 5, third layer of circulation).

In circling back to my research questions (particularly my questions about claims and actors), the data in this specific layer of circulation—the first two weeks surrounding Tyler's post—reveals more about ideas and beliefs rather than individual actors. Thus,

this chapter focuses less on the “players” and more on the ideologies “at play” in the conversation. By looking at the texts that emerged within this first layer, I examine and account for how Tyler’s text gets picked up and magnified in certain ways through revisions, reinforcements, and/or transformations of different ideologies. Such ideological magnifications, I argue, contribute to the creation of new meanings, and thus new arguments. In sum, this chapter reveals how the study of amplification—particularly the amplification of Tyler’s text and the ways in which her text becomes a canvas for various, and oftentimes conflicting, narratives—can help us explore how writing and rhetorics within a transnational context have the potential to both reproduce and resist current ideologies. This further allows us to think more critically about one of the stated goals of this project, that is, identifying possibilities for transnational feminist action on the web.

More specifically, the data analysis in the following pages illustrates how, in a transnational space like the web, amplification can help shed light on the routes of the various global connections and disconnections that emerge in the digital sphere. The concept of amplification, however, is not new to the study of rhetoric. Scholars such as Jim Ridolfo and Danielle Nicole DeVoss have used amplification to talk about the composing and delivery processes of textual production. Ridolfo and DeVoss’s use of amplification stems from Daniel Kimmage and Kathleen Ridolfo’s July 2007 Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty special report on Iraqi insurgent media titled, *The War of Images and Ideas: How Sunni Insurgents in Iraq and Their Supporters Worldwide are Using the Media*, (2007). In this report, Kimmage and Ridolfo use the phrase “amplification effect” to suggest that the web’s infrastructure enables users “to amplify the message of the

Sunni insurgency by using insurgent press releases and statements as the basis for their coverage of events in Iraq (p. 61)” (Kimmage and Ridolfo via Ridolfo and DeVoss). This kind of production, Kimmage and Ridolfo suggest, allows for other users, including mainstream news outlets, to address and circulate those statements, giving the event broader exposure. For rhetoric and composition studies, Ridolfo and DeVoss build on the idea of the “amplification effect,” asserting that amplification is necessarily part of the “delivery” process. One amplifies a text through a kind of “recomposition”—recomposing a statement from an article into a Tweet, or revising that statement for a YouTube video. For Ridolfo and DeVoss, this recomposing practice *always* involves an intended audience and/or an intended encounter. In advocating for a consideration of the “amplification effect,” particularly in terms of how we theorize the composition of texts, Ridolfo and DeVoss contend that, “Composing practices are increasingly taking delivery into consideration in particular ways. Although this can occur in oral rhetoric, we see emerging in the variety of compositional mediums available an increase in this sort of thinking about delivery: How will the press advisory I write be recomposed by the reporters I have a working relationship with? How will my media packet be utilized in the production of broadcast news?” (Ridolfo and DeVoss).

In an effort to expand and perhaps complicate the use of amplification as a mode of composition and delivery, I use the term to describe a moment within the process of circulation that ultimately makes the concepts of audience and delivery less pertinent. While the questions offered at the end of Ridolfo and DeVoss’s statement are important, and are indeed prototypical questions a writer might ask during her composing process, I would argue that the web, in its circulatory nature, complicates the potential answers to

those inquiries. When considering how texts circulate, rather than how they are composed, amplification points less to deliberate acts of writing and more to how messages change through their viral spread. Amplification, I suggest, is the activity by which a certain aspect of a text gets highlighted over the rest of the text. A specific ideology embedded in a text, for example, becomes magnified in such a way that it becomes detached from its original purpose, context, and history, thus changing the text's meaning and overall message. In other words, the volume is figuratively 'amplified' as some messages get louder and others move to the background. Central to amplification is the relationship between a subject, a text, and that subject's (re)reading of that text—the moment of contact and interpretation wherein the text gets recirculated as another (perhaps different) kind of message. When one amplifies a text, she narrows in on a particular slice of it (be it an image, a phrase, a particular word), and the ideologies behind/within that "slice" become foregrounded as the main argument of the recreated, and then recirculated text. Rhetorically-speaking, the process of amplification works to increase the rhetorical effects of a particular aspect of a text through various kinds of strategies—stylistic and discursive devices involving forms of repetition, revision, appropriation, and/or transformation of texts. Those devices are necessarily tied to particular ideologies—ideologies that, whether intentional or not, construct exigencies for particular responses that ultimately lead to new arguments and thus new kinds of knowledge. Thus a text, regardless of its human and non-human encounters, retains what Laurie Gries has termed, an "ongoing rhetoricity," in that what gets amplified always already presupposes a particular kind of rhetorical argument (Gries xiv).

To better understand amplification in this way, Michael Warner's concept of reflexive circulation, particularly his notion of "world-making," serves as a useful touchstone. For Warner, the "rhetor" engages in the cyclical acts of projection and reflexivity in an attempt to create a world in which she wants to live. This cyclical process of circulation involves discursive encounters that go beyond just the "relational axis of utterance and response": rather, texts, and our reactions to those texts, enact "infinite axes of citation and characterization" (as texts move, they bring with them references, citations, histories, etc.) (Warner 91). This process is significant because as texts circulate—and as writers respond to texts through the act of circulation—certain "axes" of citation and characterization become more prominently highlighted. In other words, a particular axis of a text (a particular discourse, belief, or ideology) becomes more pronounced and more visible than the other parts of the text, inadvertently or purposefully erasing the original assemblage of axes—the context, history, and meaning of the original text. That prominent, amplified axis alone then becomes the main content and message of the text, invoking and/or proscribing specific responses, and/or specific subject positions related to that one discourse. In this sense, we can think of amplification as a form of rhetorical action, or in Warner's words, a kind of "world-making," in that what gets circulated, and thus amplified, is oftentimes a specific and selective message that carries a certain ideology(ies).

While many scholars in rhetoric and composition examine the effects of this kind of rhetorical movement, specifically the agentive aspects of textuality (Gries, Porter, Cooper), my analysis diverges from this conversation by focusing on the "why" instead of the "what"—why do these movements take place? And how do these movements

happen? Why do some texts gain more intensified levels of amplification than others? And what is at stake in that process? These are the questions that drive this chapter. As I will show in my analysis, amplification reveals how the activity of responding to and re-circulating a certain aspect of text also performs a kind of global (re)structuring, as that activity always already involves a nexus of ideology, history, and place. Therefore, in order to inquire into the possibilities and limitations for transnational feminist action to occur on the web, and in order to think about circulation within a global context, we need to understand how certain rhetorics get actuated and marshaled. This deeper understanding will allow us to leverage that kind of actuation for more productive transnational engagements.

In this particular layer of circulation—the first two weeks surrounding Tyler’s post—I trace the ways in which Tyler’s text gets amplified through its entanglement with various discourses. In many instances, the discourses amplified are ones that have been circulating for some time—discourses that many are familiar with and already invested in. And yet what becomes clear in these discursive muddles is the fact that Tyler’s text, and particularly the context and exigence of her original message, becomes completely lost in the discursive *disassemblage* of her initial post. The amplification of Tyler’s text has less to do with her original message and context and more to do with the various kinds of discursive encounters her text undergoes through its circulation. In other words, through the process of circulation, and more specifically, through amplification, Tyler’s text gets rearticulated as an iconic symbol of particular ideas and beliefs that differ from her original purpose. Central to this chapter, then, is an analysis of how meaning gets *embedded* and *pulled* from the continuous circulation of her act. The construction and

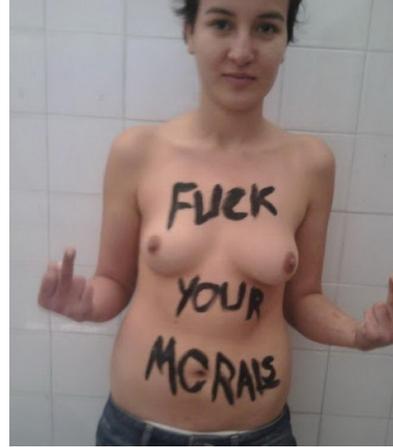
amplification of these meanings lead to new kinds of arguments, and therefore perform various kinds of rhetorical action that ultimately leave us with a variety of conflicting narratives. What we can gain from looking at these moments of amplification is a better understanding of how global differences are simultaneously highlighted and eclipsed, so that we might more keenly grasp the interplay between our own motives and those of locals when partaking in such transnational engagements.

### **Situating Amina Tyler**

Because amplification functions as a selective, presumptive process, it necessarily performs a kind of decontextualization of the relevant text. Consequently, it is important to situate Tyler's original text within the context from which it emerged in order to understand and remain aware of how that context gets dismantled through the very act of amplification. Based on the published texts on the web, both immediately following the posting of her images, as well as months later, here is what we can say we "know" about her rhetorical situation: Tyler, a citizen of Tunisia and an outspoken member of FEMEN, a Ukrainian-born international feminist group, posted images on her Facebook page with the messages "Fuck your morals" (in English) and "My body is mine, not somebody else's honor" (in Arabic) written across her bare chest (see figures 3.1 and 3.2). Within twenty-four hours of the initial posting, the images disappeared from her Facebook wall, and her social media accounts were deleted. Reports from FEMEN and mainstream media sources, such as the *Huffington Post UK* and *Jezebel*, stated that Tyler had received death threats from Tunisian government officials for posting defiant "nude self-portraits" and was as a result forced to flee Tunisia and go into hiding (Elgot; Breslaw).



**Figure 3.1: Amina Tyler, Arabic**



**Figure 3.2: Amina Tyler, English**

According to several published interviews, Tyler posted the images as a response to her nation's policies regarding women's rights ("Amina Tyler for Tunisia"). At the time of her posting, the government of Tunisia was in the process of drafting a new constitution, one that would allegedly alter, and perhaps take away, some of the rights already in place for Tunisian women. After the most recent draft of the Tunisian constitution was ratified in 1993, women's rights in Tunisia were considered quite "progressive" in comparison to other Muslim countries. In many cases, Tunisian women were given similar privileges to those of men: women had voting rights, authoritative positions in government roles, self-chosen careers, and more flexibility in their own interpretations of Islamic traditions and practices. In early 2012, the University of Manouba in Tunisia shut down over several disagreements involving "Islamist feminism" and the hijab. Many women identifying as Muslim feminists sought to redefine what it meant to engage in the religious practices of Islam while also staying involved in feminist praxes and feminist pursuits. According to Jeremy Farrell, writer for *Jadaliyya*, an ezine produced by the Arab Studies Institute (ASI), these conversations between Muslim

women in Tunisia contributed to “shaping a new discourse about what feminism actually means in its Tunisian context.” He goes on to quote a subject involved in those conversations, reaffirming just how serious Tunisian women were in disputing and scrutinizing notions of “feminism”: “‘Traditional feminism has been associated with the foreign, with the Western thought, with a certain attitude about women, and it is not welcomed’ (224). A dichotomy had developed wherein the bulwark of secular feminism in Tunisia began to lose ground to a type of feminism - often espoused by men and women alike - emphasizing religious freedoms and rights” (Farrell).

In early 2013, Tunisian citizens were made aware that their constitution was to undergo significant change. At the time, various political parties had become more involved in the state’s national policies (particularly the Enhad Party, a moderate Islamist political party, as well as politically active Salafi-influenced groups). Such parties began circulating new models regarding women, religious symbols, and a woman’s place/role in societal practices. This led to increased debate, particularly surrounding the newly-proposed article regarding the relationship between men and women, which, according to Farrell’s translation, positioned women as “man’s associate” and a “complementarity” to men. The proposed, revised constitutional article reads:

The state shall guarantee the protection of women’s rights and support for their gains, in considering her a true partner with man in building the nation; the role of these two is complimentary within the family. The state shall guarantee the parity (*takāfu*) of opportunity between the woman and the man while accepting different responsibilities. The state shall guarantee prosecution of every form of violence against women. The content of these statutes does not differ significantly. They all ascribe a type of “complementarity” between men and women within the space of

the family, with both forms of the personal status code making women explicitly subservient to the man, who is “head of the household.” (Farrell)<sup>6</sup>

In describing the responses to this proposed amendment from Tunisian citizens, Farrell writes,

Reaction from secular feminists and the Western press was swift and damning, as it has since been in more liberal circles of the Arab world. Salma Hajri, of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women as quoted in a Tunisia Live piece, said, ‘I am distraught and worried. Women are not given rights as individuals, only in reference to men.’ The public debate spurred massive demonstrations throughout the country. (Farrell)

Tyler’s protest can certainly be understood within the latter context. And I would argue that her response, in particular, moved this public debate beyond the borders of Tunisia. As a reader of Tyler’s text myself (I encountered her image of protest through stories from the *Huffington Post* and *Jezebel*), I initially viewed Tyler’s moment of rhetorical action not as an isolated moment of protest, but as a part of an ongoing global conversation. Her act arose from a specific, timely political moment, a moment in which discourses on women’s rights and specifically women’s roles within Islamist communities had been circulating for some time. Since 9/11, the United States, in particular, has made violence and oppression against women in the Global South a

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<sup>6</sup> From the 1993 Constitution: “It is incumbent upon each one of the spouses to treat the other with kindness and improve his or her wellbeing (‘ashira), and avoid inflicting harm upon him or her. The two spouses shall undertake married responsibilities according to what custom (al-‘urf) and common practice (al-‘āda) require, and help improve the family’s affairs (shu’ūn). They shall raise children and provide for them (taṣrīf shu’ūnihim), including: education, travel, and financial transactions. It is incumbent upon the husband, in his capacity as the head (ra’īs) of the family, to provide for his wife and children to the extent that his conditions and theirs allow within the scope of the content of payments. It is incumbent upon the wife to contribute to the family’s expenditures if she has means (māl)” (translated by Farrell).

concern for NGOs, the United Nations, human rights organizations, and other globally-focused institutions. Certain feminist organizations have contributed to these discourses as well, although in very different ways. Some have attempted to “reclaim” women’s rights issues as “their own” through active movements and protests both on and offline (PussyRiots, SlutWalk). Two years before Tyler’s nude protest appeared on our computer screens, Egyptian Ailaa Magda Elmahdy posted nude self-portraits on her personal blog along with the accompanying phrase: “Screams against a society of violence, racism, sexism, sexual harassment and hypocrisy” (“Support Egyptian Atheist Blogger”). Several other posts similar to Elmahdy’s circulated the web in the years following, but none of these had quite the same kind of global response as Tyler’s.<sup>7</sup>

Why did this text receive such a massive global response? We can perhaps postulate that, given the messages written across her chest—“My body belongs to me and is not the source of anyone’s honor” in Arabic and “Fuck your morals” in English—Tyler may have been attempting to speak out against certain patriarchal norms and policies within the nation of Tunisia, and, more importantly, to participate in a discourse of feminist critique already present in Tunisia. Even more interesting, though, is her decision to write those provocative, controversial messages in *both* Arabic and English; a

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<sup>7</sup> Egyptian-American activist Mona el-Tahawey; Libyan cyberactivist Danya Bashir; Bahraini journalist Lamees Dhaif; Egyptian activist Dalia Ziada; Saudi Arabian activist Manal al-Sharif; Yemen activist Tawokkol Karman; Yemen activist Maria Al-Masani

choice that speaks to a rhetorical attunement regarding audience and readership, which seems crucial here, since it certainly invokes a transnational audience.

That said, while Tyler's reasoning for posting such an image is certainly of importance, the point here is to look at its subsequent circulation and the meaning and justification implied *through* the text's movement. For one thing, the posting and circulation of this text—Tyler's individual confrontation, shall we say—led to death threats from government officials. But it also provoked something else in the digital sphere: as it circulated throughout various social media and digital news outlets, it sparked other acts of rhetorical engagement. Her embodied text, once life-threatening, became a transnational rallying point, a symbol for other forms of rhetorical action. For some—particularly FEMEN and FEMEN supporters—Tyler's naked protest symbolized an effort to combat patriarchal regimes, particularly those regimes associated with Islam and the Middle East. For other feminists and activists, Tyler's naked protest served as a transnational “standing up” act in the name of feminist solidarity and support for women's rights. For others, however, Tyler's bodily rhetoric signified claims about—or even more so, representations of—certain ideologies: namely, ideologies concerning a specific kind of feminist, a specific kind of gendered subject, a specific kind of place, and a specific kind of culture. Over the course of two weeks, then, Tyler's text, and particularly her physical body, I argue, became a catalyst for constructing global narratives about the female body with regard to several themes, four of which I will discuss in this chapter: the female body-as-protest, the female body-as-object, the female body-as-madness, and the female body-as-nation-state.

As mentioned in chapter two, I came to these themes after coding over 100 texts that emerged from within this two-week period. I did so by highlighting and tagging key phrases and topics. Of those 100 texts, almost all of them focused on the body in some way or another. The relationships between body and object, body and madness, body and protest, and body and nation, however, held the most significance in terms of visibility and breadth. In other words, these themes over others retained a heightened level of amplification in the digital sphere, and thus contributed to the production of various transnational narratives and conversations.

### **Body as Object**

In the mainstream media's portrayal of Tyler's story and the #freemina campaign, certain news outlets focus solely on the "entertainment" factor of Tyler's and FEMEN's nudity. As journalist, Matt Gurney of the *National Post* claims, nudity always garners attention: "When presented with nude protesters, enjoy the show, and say so," he wrote (Gurney). In this moment of circulation, the goals underlying FEMEN's rhetoric—which included resisting sexist, patriarchal discourses—become characterized as the butt of a joke about women's nudity. What seems most prominent in this statement is the belief that women's naked breasts alone, regardless of the images' purposes or contexts, will inevitably lead to more readers, and thus generate more capital. This demeaning sentiment becomes amplified further as other social media users and bloggers post similar statements. For example, an anonymous writer from the US-based blog, *Kafir Crusaders*, a site dedicated to "standing up to Islamization," writes, "This is a jihad I could live with. Titslamism, is the future." ("Topless Jihad Day").

In these moments of amplification, we can see how the original message and rhetorical purpose of Tyler's text becomes completely erased. The amplification of both Tyler's and FEMEN's texts as objectifications of the female body illustrate the ways in which one component of a text—the naked body itself, pulled from its relationship to protest, to politics, to the messages literally written on those bodies—can be reconstructed as its own narrative, producing new, and often-times conflicting meanings. Amplified in these moments is the problematic correlation between feminism and what the body of a feminist should look like. And once again, amplified in these texts is also a Western ideology of the liberated naked body held in opposition to the arguably highly conservative practices of Islam.

In yet another example of the amplification of the objectified body, we see how quickly Tyler's text collapses—and in many ways, dissolves—into the texts of FEMEN. In other words, the contexts and histories of both Tyler's and FEMEN's bodily protests become irrelevant; it is instead their bare breasted images that earn them any relevance. In the article, "FEMEN Storm in DD-Cup: Stand-by for Topless Jihad!," which appeared on the Jordan-based news site, *Al Bawaba: Your Gateway to the Middle East*, an anonymous writer claims, "Women of miscellaneous heritage but from the collective 'sextremists' FEMEN - strewn between hubs in the Ukraine, Sweden and Paris - are enjoining their supporters to strip off in the battle with the 'Islamists'. FEMEN mean business, as they deploy their best assets to the front-line to tackle the oppressive patriarchal honor society" ("FEMEN Storm in DD-Cup"). In both the headline and opening paragraph, it is important to note that there is no mention of Tyler or Tyler's text. While her text becomes a focus later in the article, the piece cues its readers to two

things: FEMEN's bare breasts and a war against Islamists. Even if the purpose of this article is to encourage solidarity among women regarding Tyler's cause, the author's use of ill-humor in recasting FEMEN's protest as a "storm" of protesters in "DD cups," as well as the author's appeal for readers to passively "stand by" to watch the topless protesters in action, discounts that entire goal. What gets amplified, once again, then, is a narrative about "sextremists" and their "best assets."

The slippage in this rhetorical move—the failure to achieve a call for solidarity due to the article's focus on the body as a kind of sexualized object—points to the ways in which the process of amplification is fraught with contradictory and conflicting outcomes. As in the latter example, the amplification of the female body as a kind of sexualized tool for persuasion, an erotic "canvas" for resisting patriarchal discourses, positions the *Al Bawaba* text within the exact kind of discourse Tyler's text sought to resist. In other words, although superficially they claim to support Tyler and FEMEN's critique of sexism and "male power," their representation of the sexualized female body undermines that effort, as they themselves purport an ideology wrapped up in the "male gaze."

While this paradoxical sentiment is amplified further in multiple venues, other writers/responders also focus on the body as a kind of object, but amplify its rhetorical functions quite differently. The mainstream media's focus on objectifying women's naked bodies, for example, prompted various reactions to and disagreements with FEMEN and Tyler's mode of protest. In an ironic move, Tyler and FEMEN are ultimately criticized for not being feminist enough because their mode of protest—the body—can *only* be understood as an object. As a result, "feminists" who might have

aligned with FEMEN come to distance themselves from the protest. As writer for *The Daily Beast* Janine Giovanni states, “Any protester knows that the only way activism works is to get the people on your side. Femen is not exactly endearing themselves to anyone, except perhaps to hormonal teenage boys” (Giovanni). Later in the article, she notes: “Amina’s heart might be in the right place, but I wish she would cover it up with a T-shirt and protest quietly, but effectively, rather than getting her kit off” (Giovanni). The reference here to “getting people on your side” depicts a clear understanding of how users reacted to these texts, and how the amplification of a particular ideology ultimately leads to specific kinds of allying.

Within all of these instances of amplification, the bodily objectification and the commentary surrounding that objectification, engender certain assumptions about Tyler’s text and the context from which it emerged. Each moment of amplification assumes a Westernized view of the body, as the notion of “objectification” is very much premised on Western liberal perspectives related to bodily liberation, sexual freedom, and gendered roles. While it is important to point out the slippages within this theme, it must be said that perhaps those slippages result from one’s own contexts and experiences, as well as projected arguments about Tyler’s body, stemming from normative liberal assumptions about human nature, freedom, and the liberated body. While “objectification” of the body is certainly important here, and while Tyler’s protest gestures towards both a critique and use of bodily objectification for her own rhetorical purposes, sexual freedom and liberation, according to Tyler, were not at the forefront of her protest. Rather, according to a published conversation between Tyler and an *Ettounsiya TV* reporter, as reported by *The National* news site, the idea of honor as it is tied to a woman’s body in Muslim

contexts was seemingly the focus of her rhetorical act: “I want the message to be read this way,” Amina told Tunisia Live reporters, “(A woman’s) body is hers — not her father’s, her husband’s or her brother’s.” (“Nude Facebook Photo Protest”). Here, we can think back to the original public debate in Tunisia regarding the constitutional amendment that would position women as a man’s “compliment” or “associate.” Perhaps Tyler’s text is less about an “innate desire” for liberation and sexual freedom and more about a kind of provocation that seeks to fracture—both physically and figuratively—a woman’s adjacency to a man. Unfortunately, though, due to the amplified messages around bodily objectification and the decontextualization of Tyler’s text, that reading becomes clouded, and ultimately indiscernible.

### **Body as Madness**

As the body-as-object theme becomes amplified, so too does the notion that Tyler’s image is a representation of female hysteria. Words like “epidemic” and “contagion,” for example, become prominent descriptions of Tyler’s rhetorical act. In several instances, she is even referred to as having a mental illness. One news outlet, for instance, *Al Arabiya News*, put forth the following headline: “‘Quarantine her!’: Top Tunisian Islamist Says Topless Girl Needs Stoning.” In this same article, Tunisian Salafi preacher, Alami Adel, is quoted as saying, “She [Tyler] is like someone suffering from a serious and contagious illness and she must be secluded and treated” (“*Quarantine Her!*”). Following these references, it was widely circulated that Tyler had been hospitalized in a mental institution (which, according to published interviews with Tyler, never actually happened). Two Western-based news sources showcase this. An *Elite Daily* headline, for example, reads: “19-Year-Old Tunisian Girl Is Sent To The Psych

Ward For Posing In This Topless Photo.” And a post from *MFS – The Other News*, a news blog reporting on religious politics across the globe, cites Tyler’s story along with the following title: “Tunisian Femen member incarcerated in a Psychiatric Hospital for Posting Topless Photos on Facebook.” Similarly, the UK news site, *Daily Mail*, circulated an article with the following headline: “Salafist preacher wants her quarantined because she is contagious.”

Within these moments of amplification, we can see how Tyler’s act becomes associated with a Western discourse regarding women’s psychology—a discourse that, for centuries, has been used to categorize women’s actions as irrational and simply “too emotional” (Showalter). Evidenced in these headlines, quotes, and phrases is the belief that women’s bodies are directly linked with madness. In this case, responders and circulators of Tyler’s text focus on and magnify Tyler’s naked body as a sign of irrational behavior, and thus a symptom of hysteria. This happens mainly through the repetition of key phrases. Much of the actual content of the articles referenced above simply repeats statements made by Salafi preacher Adel; and yet, despite this detail, what seems to get picked up and recirculated by other bloggers and social media users is not the full context of the preacher’s statement to *Al Arabiya*, but rather Tyler’s image in relation to certain words such as “quarantine,” “epidemic,” “psych ward,” “psychiatric hospital,” and “contagion.” As a result, social media users on Twitter and Facebook posted statements echoing those words, circulating claims about Tyler having a mental illness and having to be hospitalized (see #freeamina).

What is interesting about this kind of amplification is the way in which Adel’s comparison of Tyler to a person suffering from a “contagious illness” becomes

immediately positioned within a Western discourse, one that views the female body as a source of mania. If we reposition Adel's use of contagion in relation to the context from which it emerged—a religious and political context where the female body is viewed as a site of honor and purity, as well as an adjacent counterpart to a man (as depicted in the Tunisian constitution)—perhaps the reference to “contagion” and the spreading of an “illness” signifies the belief that a Muslim woman's naked body would be contagious in the sense that it would either “tempt” and/or lure others to think “impure” thoughts about the body, or that it would literally “infect” her counterpart (e.g. her husband, brother, father). Considering Adel's response in this light points out the various ways in which amplification is fraught with both contradictory assumptions and misunderstandings of particular contexts. It also suggests that amplification necessarily relies on pre-existing discourses that seek to construct relations of power in certain ways. Instead of complicating Adel's use of contagion, and inquiring into the reasons why a woman's body in this particular context might be tied to “illness” instead of liberation (as seen in the last section), *MFS, Elite Daily & The Daily News*, among others, amplify an ideology that ties the female body to madness, and thus the “mad” female body to global disruption. This amplification is then sustained through continued circulation.

We see the further amplification of the relationship between female madness and global conflict occurring through acts of citationality (the repetition of key phrases) and rhetorical characterization (the construction of particular claims), to go back to Warner's terms. Take the following two blog post titles, for example: “Tunisia: Feminist Amina Thrown in Psych Ward” (from the US-based blog, *Freedom Faith*, a site advocating for the belief that Islam “is a religion of hate, of terror and of war”), and “Women's Bodies:

Cause of Epidemics and Disasters?” (from the US-based blog, *Women Under Siege*).

Both titles are particularly troubling, but the latter is even more disconcerting. The suggestion of a cause-and-effect relationship between women’s bodies and epidemics/disasters implies that women’s bodies are inherent vessels for contagion and infection. This problematic relationship also suggests something greater about the female body: its potentiality to prompt global dissonance. While the aforementioned headline, posed as a question, may be functioning as a rhetorical critique of that inquiry itself, there is a kind of amplification implicit in that question—one that, if read outside of the context of the article, like many headlines are, has the potential to perpetuate and reinforce a firmly held ideology that discounts women bodies as anything but rational and stable. Thus the nation, too, is rendered unstable.

In yet another instance of amplification, we see a more nuanced approach to the body-as-madness theme. In her post about Tyler’s use of naked protest, a writer with the username “Stable Hand,” states, “Let’s hope this ‘epidemic’ continues to catch on. No one controls a woman’s body except for that woman. Islamists hate losing control of females” (“The JAWA Report”). In this case, the term “epidemic” is repeated, but for a different reason—to invoke critique of the notion that women controlling their bodies would be seen as a kind of contagion. Here, amplification is working to subvert a common, widely circulated belief. By citing the word “epidemic” in a mocking context, this writer is able to turn the discourse surrounding body-as-madness on its head. Unfortunately, though, this theme does not gain as much traction and movement as that of the initial amplification, that which equates women’s bodies to a kind of global hysteria.

The idea of global hysteria as it relates to Tyler's text, however, deserves a bit more attention here. As we look more closely at the amplifications of the body-as-madness theme, it is extremely important to realize the racial and cultural implications inherent in this ideological construction. The correlation between a woman's body and madness, here, is not the correlation between "all women" and psychological illness; rather it is Tyler—a Muslim woman's body—that gets positioned as "mad." FEMEN protesters do not receive this same kind of projection and representation, and neither do international feminist groups like SlutWalk and Pussy Riots. In fact, if we think about the difference between the last section and this one—the difference between the amplification of female bodies (*any* and *all* female bodies) as sexualized objects and the amplification of Tyler's body as a representation of madness—we can see how the practice of amplification allows one to construct ideological arguments that contribute to larger perceptions and understandings of power. In other words, in the last section, we can argue that one of the main claims that emerged from the body-as-object theme was the belief that "all women" need and are entitled to sexual freedom and liberation. From this section, we can deduce the belief that Tyler's body, and thus Muslim women's bodies, are linked to madness, and thus linked causally to the infectious growth of geopolitical discord. Ultimately, then, it is Muslim women that become depicted as irrational and unstable.

### **Body as Protest**

FEMEN's instances of circulation, in particular, foreground and amplify the theme of the body-as-protest as the main message of Tyler's text, and this happens in two ways. First, FEMEN uses Tyler's text as a catalyst for organizing a "topless jihad day." In



In these messages, the call for a topless protest is amplified, and for two reasons: to oppose the “oppressive religious nature” of Islam and to help liberate a Muslim woman from a purportedly oppressive Arab nation (FEMEN Facebook). This kind of repositioning of Tyler’s text—FEMEN’s move to rhetorically repackage Tyler’s text as a collective mouthpiece for all women, which moves a textual representation of a singular voice to a plural one—is indicative of a Western feminist discourse premised on the goal of forming a global sisterhood. This kind of Western feminist ideology glosses over the local and specific goals of Tyler’s text, and instead makes Tyler’s message about gender inequities on a global scale, rather than her specific, localized exigence. This rhetorical move is similar to the use of the body-as-object theme—particularly the ways in which the mainstream media (re)presented and (re)purposed Tyler’s text as call for sexual liberation and freedom.

Under the auspices of forming a global sisterhood, FEMEN leader Ina Shevchenko tells reporters from *The Guardian* that an international feminist collective is important and necessary in order to successfully target larger patriarchal structures that she believes affect all women. Moreover, a global sisterhood of *naked* female protesters, she argues, is even more necessary for instilling that message in the minds of others. In an article from *The Guardian* entitled, “Rise of the Naked Female Warriors,” Shevchenko is quoted, claiming:

A woman’s naked body has always been the instrument of the patriarchy, ... ‘They use it in the sex industry, the fashion industry, advertising, always in men’s hands. We realized the key was to give the naked body back to its rightful owner, to women, and give a new interpretation of nudity ... I’m proud of the fact that today naked women are not just posing on the cover of Playboy, but it can be an action, angry, and can irritate people.’” (Shevchenko qtd. in Cochrane)

Shevchenko's references to a woman's naked body as an "instrument"—a visual tool—and as a kind of "action" that gets people angry and irritated speaks to the ways in which she and others see the body as a kind of embodied rhetoric; a public, agentive performance. Here, the notion of agency plays an important role, because as in the sections on bodily objectification and bodily hysteria, agency gets repositioned as something desirable. Here, we see the belief that the naked body is agency itself. Once again, though, this kind of rhetoric espouses a Western feminist ideology premised on the belief that agency is only ever realized through the complete control of one's own body.

In a continued amplification of the body-as-protest theme, other web users responded similarly, calling on others to join in the "fight for Amina." For example, writer Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett from *The New Statesman*, a London-based online magazine dedicated to commentary on global politics and culture, wrote a piece on both Tyler's and FEMEN's rhetorical acts. In her article entitled, "If Women Have to Get Their Tits Out to Make a Point, So Be It," Cosslett urges others to strip down in the name of feminism. "Fuck your morals, indeed," she writes, "I may even get my own out in solidarity" (Cosslett). Again, we can see how quickly Tyler's text becomes repositioned as a global symbol of bodily protest and agency regarding women's rights and bodily autonomy. Amplified in this moment of circulation—and the literal repetition of Tyler's phrase, "Fuck your morals"—is the belief that the act of naked protest is analogous to the "fight for women's rights," and that the physical female body should be used as a canvas for protest and a tool for global female solidarity—a "body" of feminists, as seen in the image on FEMEN's Facebook page. Cosslett's reference to getting her breasts out "in solidarity" points to the way in which amplification functions as a kind of world-making,

to use Warner's term once again: the ways in which texts become the basis for further representations, creating and foreclosing certain subject positions in order to create a world in which one wants to live. On the one hand, we can see how the rhetoric of FEMEN and FEMEN supporters proposes solutions to shared matters of concern—gender inequities, for example. Many of these activists and feminists participate in amplifying Tyler's text because they feel they are furthering the cause for women's rights. On the other hand, amplifying the body-as-protest also moves Tyler's local goal to the background, making the local case of Tunisia only a side note. Allying with Tyler, then, becomes a way of allying with her means of protest rather than with its goal (or more accurately, allying with Tyler, and by extension FEMEN, makes the means more important than the cause for which she is protesting).

An important point to note about these rhetorical engagements is the way in which the process of amplification relies heavily on the act of "knowing" and "believing" in something already familiar. In other words, what gets amplified in these examples are older discourses, prevailing discourses that form the social relations of which we are a part. For example, much of the amplification of the body-as-protest theme is related to the discourses of feminism from the sixties and seventies (e.g. the women's liberation movement, the porn wars, etc.). These kinds of discourses sought to critique and revise the ways in which women's bodies were viewed as property and symbols of morality and innocence. We can think of this kind of critique and revision in relation to Shevchenko's earlier statement—"A woman's naked body has always been the instrument of the patriarchy... We realized the key was to give the naked body back to its rightful owner, to women" (Shevchenko qtd. in Cochrane). We see this kind of discourse again, and

more explicitly, in another statement from Shevchenko: “Religious dictatorship begins by enslaving women, but a woman’s act of self-liberation is the first step toward destroying the sharia regime. Topless protests are the battle flags of women’s resistance, a symbol of a woman’s acquisition of rights over her own body!” (Shevchenko, “Topless Jihad”). The direct correlation between topless protests and women’s rights speaks to the kind of feminist rhetorical arguments made decades earlier, particularly around sexuality and reproductive rights. Rooted in Shevchenko’s statement, as well as the earlier examples involving the body-as-protest theme, is a popularized sentiment from the women’s liberation movement: the belief that “the personal is always political.”<sup>8</sup>

This same kind of sentiment appears in several other venues, reinforcing the idea that amplification is very much about participating in pre-existing discourses. For example, in a comment thread on a post from feminist activist Maryam Namazie’s blog, *Nothing is Sacred*, we see the “personal is political” belief used to justify FEMEN’s topless protests, and also to connect FEMEN’s contemporary protests with the history of women’s liberation movements. In response to and in defense of Namazie’s post entitled, “Let’s Breast Them,” a post in which she calls on her readers to join in the topless demonstrations on behalf of Tyler, commenter “Sara” writes:

I don’t know if you remember, but the Suffragettes in Britain went on hunger strike and one of them even threw herself under a horse in order to get the vote. Similarly, women libbers in the 60s went on huge marches and burned their bras in order to receive equality. Shock tactics can work very nicely. [...] Also, breasts are a natural part of the body and something that women should NOT be ashamed of. [...] I like the idea of subverting ideas of what is hidden and taboo and reclaiming one’s body in order to use it for protest. I especially like the idea of showing solidarity with these

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<sup>8</sup> See Carol Hanisch’s piece, “The Personal is Political” in the anthology, *Notes From the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (1970).

Tunisian women, for whom showing their breasts is an even more daring and dangerous move. I don't see why anyone should be offended or freaked out just because I'm not doing it merely for titillation and if they are, perhaps they should think about why that is. You don't get anywhere by keeping your head down and playing nice. You have to be a gadfly in order to effect change. I know feminists irritate people and I DON'T CARE. I'll stop being annoying when people change their attitudes. (Namazie, "Let's Breast Them," Comments)

Sara's reference to the "Britain Suffragettes" as well as "women libbers in the 60s" reflects a kind of discursive engagement with older arguments, and thus older beliefs. Amplified through Sara's statements about "reclaiming the body," "showing solidarity" and "effecting change" by engaging in topless protests is, once again, a Western feminist ideology that sees the female body as a contested site, and thus a site of powerful recovery. Here, once again, we completely lose sight of the original context of Tyler's text. The local situation in Tunisia falls from view, and we are left with a generalized argument about women's agency and liberation.

In another instance of amplification, the body-as-protest theme gets highlighted within the context of ethics and values. In a move to identify directly with FEMEN, and by extension, Tyler, writer Jessica Klein, from the Montreal-based online magazine, *Forget the Box*, constructs an ideological correlation between naked protest and liberation. She writes, "As a burlesque dancer and strip karaoke aficionado, it both baffles and deeply saddens me that there are places in the world where the simple act of baring your breasts is enough to get you killed" (Klein). In this moment, we can see how amplification involves aligning one's self with a particular ideology and belief system: the idea that the naked body is and should be a liberated entity. And while making explicit this belief, in the same vein, Klein repositions Tyler's text—Tyler's breasts that might "get her killed"—in opposition to her own free-moving, strip-working body. In

other words, the choice to introduce an ethics narrative (ethics in terms of the supposed moral questions surrounding nudity) with regard to Tyler's body as a form of protest, even though ethics may have played a large role in the Tunisian government's response to Tyler, negates the larger context and specificity of Tunisia in the first place. More importantly, it negates and decontextualizes Tyler's own body, which can arguably be read as performing a particular notion of "liberation," even if only to incite a larger discussion about the meaning of liberation itself (e.g. liberation as something beyond the body itself). Furthermore, the amplified focus on ethics in this particular case assumes certain ideas about Islam and the Middle East as places of continued, abhorrent oppression. Thus, Tyler's goal in addressing the current conditions of her country is tuned out, and what gets "turned up" is a larger narrative about geopolitical relations and differences between the West and the Middle East.

Interestingly enough, this ethics sentiment regarding the body-as-protest theme continues to circulate in various venues and becomes further pronounced in even more ironic ways. In describing the death threats Tyler received, *Huffington Post UK* reporter Sara Nelson writes, "We still didn't hear [the] voice of Amina and didn't see her face. Until the moment we hear word of Amina about her safety we are searching for her and continuing our international bare breasts support" (Nelson, "Topless Jihad Day"). Similarly, and yet on a very different kind site—namely the blog, *Women Under Siege*, which began as a journalism project addressing sexualized and gender-related violence—blog contributor Laura Bates writes of Tyler's situation, claiming, "Amina isn't alone. From Russia's Pussy Riot to Pakistan's Malala Yousafzai, young women across the world are being silenced, locked away, or are even facing attempts on their life for no

greater crime than attempting to stand up for what they believe in” (Bates). In these moments of amplification, Tyler’s text, as an amplified narrative about both the body-as-protest and also the ethical questions and consequences related to naked bodily protest, becomes repositioned as an illustration of a missing, silent, and victimized Muslim woman. This kind of Western feminist ideology not only elides the local and specific context from which Tyler’s text emerged, it also perpetuates a problematic perspective of Muslim women as an essentialized, oppressed group. Furthermore, this kind of ideological representation advances a story about feminism and feminist ethics that positions Western feminists as ethically responsible for the silent, “non-liberated” women.

In echoing the work of transnational feminist scholars Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak, I would argue that the amplification of “Third World” women by “First World” women, to use Mohanty’s descriptive terms, obscures the subjectivities and lived experiences of “Third World” women and instead, produces a monolithic, homogenized, composite “Third World Woman.” This “discursive colonialism,” as Mohanty calls it, is “a mode of appropriation and codification of ‘scholarship’ and ‘knowledge’ about women in the third world.” This mode of appropriation enables an implicit self-(re)presentation of the “First World Woman” as secular, liberated, and in control of her body as opposed to the “Third World Woman,” who is always represented as conservative, lacking control of her body, inferior, a victim, and an object of the “gaze” (Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes” 336-337). As we will see in the following section, this kind of problematic representation becomes further pronounced, particularly in the context of national allegiances and national divides.

## Body as Nation

As the body as object, madness, and protest themes circulated, another theme emerged and was subsequently amplified: the female body as an embodiment of the nation. In tracing this rhetorical sketch, the body-as-nation theme becomes utilized for various agendas: we see the body as representative of the hope for Tunisia, and in this case, Tyler as the hope for her nation, and then, in a contradictory move, we see the body resituated as the failure of Tunisia. This latter construction positions the body as lacking any national context; instead, it becomes indicative of an entire, essentialized region, and even more so, an essentialized culture. More specifically, the amplification of the body-as-nation theme shows us just how quickly Tyler's text moves in four phases: firstly, as a local conversation about the current context of Tunisia, secondly, as an ahistorical representation of Tunisia, thirdly as an ahistorical representation of the Middle East, and finally to support certain claims about globalism and geopolitical relations.

On several occasions, Tyler's text, and particularly her physical body, gets amplified as a representation of the ultimate *hope* for Tunisian women, and thus, by extension, the entire nation of Tunisia. For example, several days following Tyler's post, *The Daily Beast* published an article with the following headline: "Can Bare Breasts Save Tunisia?: A Tunisian Teen is in Hiding after Stripping Down for Feminism" (Giovanni). The headline depicts Tunisia as a destitute country, as well as a place of turbulence (note the verb "save"). In this same moment, women's physical bodies, particularly women's breasts, become represented as a national salve—the hope and fate of Tunisia. On her blog entitled *Maryam Namazie: Nothing is Sacred*, Maryam Namazie describes Tyler's act as a response to "the second class citizenship of women, the debased view of

women's bodies, the vile concept of honour and religious morality, misogyny, and Islamism and its Sharia law that are wrong" (Namazie, "Let's Breast Them"). Following this description, Namazie writes, "...Amina's is the voice of sanity, reason, protest and resistance. She represents us all." (Namazie, "Let's Breast Them"). Here, Tyler is portrayed as a national icon, a singular voice speaking on behalf of an entire nation. It is also important to note Namazie's reference to "sanity" and "reason" here—a direct move that articulates Tyler's text not as an act of female hysteria, as we saw one of the previous sections, but as an act of rationality and logic.

Alongside the amplification of the body as the hope of the nation-state, the amplification of Tyler's body as a *failure* of the nation-state also circulated widely. The French news outlet, *France 24*, for example, recirculates Tyler's text within the context of historical and geographical accounts, and more intentionally, a backward-forward paradigm: "Since the 1950s, Tunisian women have enjoyed more rights than in other Arab countries, including the right to file for divorce. But militants are worried that the ruling Islamist Ennahda party is trying to chip away at their freedom" ("Tunisian Topless Activist"). Here, Tunisia becomes historicized as a previously "progressive" country due to the women's rights that were in place prior to the shifts in political parties. We are left with the idea that Tunisia is now in jeopardy, and that Tunisian women, in particular, are in danger. Amplified in these moments is a discourse on human rights as it relates to nationalism. Such discourses, as Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol argue, have the potential to "negotiate the terrain of national, international, and transnational political and social contexts" (Hesford and Kozol 15). The amplification of Tyler's body as representation of Tunisia's instability reveals how gender, and

particularly women, get configured in these negotiations as representative of the fate of the nation. What also becomes clear in these instances of circulation is that the discourse of women's rights as human rights, particularly as it relates to women's agency (or lack thereof), as well as women's bodies, relies on the discursive production of a powerless subject in need of rights – i.e., women are powerless, and therefore Tunisia is powerless.

As feminist critic Wendy Brown contends:

In its very promise to protect the individual against suffering and permit choice for individuals, human rights discourse produces a certain kind of subject in need of a certain kind of protection... the point is that there is no such thing as mere reduction of suffering or protection from abuse—the nature of the reduction or protection is itself productive of political subjects and political possibilities” (Brown 459-460).

If we accept Brown's critique of human rights discourse—the idea that in its “promise” to empower individuals, human rights discourse produces a particular kind of subject in need of (and without) empowerment—then a rhetoric of empowerment operates paradoxically as a discursive mode of disempowerment.

This idea is echoed in the *Daily Beast* article referenced earlier. In a move to situate Tunisia historically, Janine Di Giovanni writes: “Before Sidi Bouzid became the cradle of the Arab Spring, before Zine el Abidine Ben Ali ran away from Tunis with his bars of gold and his greedy family, before a 19-year-old called Amina took off her blouse and wrote across her chest ‘My body is mine not somebody's honor’ there was feminism in Tunisia.” (Giovanni). Embedded in this claim is the amplification of Tunisia as a feminist nation *prior* to Tyler's protest, suggesting, not so subtly, the belief that Tyler's act of “taking off her blouse” repositioned the nation of Tunisia as anti-feminist. Further down in the article, Giovanni posits that the early “feminist” sentiment in Tunisia was directly related to its geographic location: in other words, feminism in Tunisia was a

result of the nation's close proximity to Western European countries, and thus Western values. Giovanni writes:

Partially this [Tunisia's "feminism"] is because of geographic location. Tunisia is close to Italy, France, and Spain and much of the educated population are polyglots who grew up watching global television. A series of grammar schools for über smart kids opened in the 1970s, meaning that an entire generation of bright Tunisians—men and women—was fostered. Even under the dictatorship of Ben Ali, education was promoted. Women rose to ranks that were unheard of in other Arab countries. (Giovanni)

In this excerpt, Giovanni makes explicitly clear that feminism in the nation of Tunisia, back when it existed, was fully dependent on education and the influence of Western belief systems. The move to suggest that "global television" enhanced Tunisia's national "progress" assumes that Tunisia relied on a larger global structure (read: Western structure) for its growth and national direction.

Giovanni, later in her article, resituates her discussion of Tyler, and thus Tunisia, in the present: "But in a country on the brink of losing its secular freedoms, the online protest could backfire," she writes. Here, Giovanni suggests that Tyler's text literally represents the downfall of Tunisia—the potential loss of "secular freedoms," or as she suggested earlier, Western values. We see a similar argument in the following excerpt from *Bounce Sin*, a "student lifestyle community" site dedicated to informing students about culture and politics. Writer Olivia James, in her story on Tyler and the "free Amina campaign" writes:

The black clouds of inequality rained hard last week in Tunisia, where it is reported that a 19 year old woman has been forcibly admitted into a psychiatric hospital. Her crime? Fraternizing with the concept of female liberation in a culture which still abhorrently belies the rights of women, prohibiting their equal existence alongside the men of their country and circumscribing them to rigidly defined codes of conduct. (James)

What is clear in this excerpt is the way in which Tyler's image becomes a catalyst for larger claims depicting Tunisia as an anti-progressive, "backward" country. The metaphor, "black clouds of inequality" immediately positions both Tyler's text and the nation of Tunisia as interchangeable, suggesting that Tyler's bodily represents a regressive nation, bounded by gender inequities.

Further down in this piece is a rhetorical maneuver that then repositions Tyler's text as the *cause* of the gender inequities and exploitation already in place: "Stoking the fires of discourse is important but is it worth it at the cost of igniting cultural and religious outcry in a country where the results are inevitably dangerous for its voiceless female population? Is one young woman's incarceration or even death going to aid the cause or just scare her fellow countrywomen into further submission?" (James). Here, too, we see James make a similar move to that of FEMEN: constructing Tunisian women as a "voiceless population." Once again, this Western feminist ideology advances a rescue-narrative that erases Tyler's actual voice—the voice and message of her text.

In yet another example, we see users not only recirculating Tyler's text as a representation of Tunisia's demise, but also citing mainstream news articles that employ this kind of representation again and again, thus reinforcing the same sort of amplification. For example, in a debate forum on foreign affairs, one commenter picks up on Giovanni's article (referenced above) and recontextualizes it in terms of Tunisia's "demise." Quoting directly from the article, a commenter writes: "I fear Amina has brought the cause of Tunisian women backward rather than forward. Why provoke a country that stands at the brink of losing rights that women in the past took for granted? [...] Other women tell me that while Tunisia has always been an advanced country in

terms of women's rights, they fear these rights will be threatened" ("Foreign Affairs"). In this particular paragraph, the first sentence—"I fear Amina has brought the cause of Tunisian women backward rather than forward"—is highlighted in a box on the page in order to stand out among the rest of the text, suggesting the belief that Tyler's text is indeed a symbol of a nation's downfall. In a similar rhetorical move, a commenter on the Richard Dawkins' Foundation Site, a group based in Washington DC whose stated goals are "teaching the value of science" and "advancing secularism," reacted to a post entitled, "Is This Photo Grounds for Death?" (Ford). The anonymously-named commenter writes:

What has she actually done for the women of Tunisia who risk losing hard won real freedoms? Really? Because I'm not really sure her hard working, genuinely brave, female activist peers in the country are thanking her as much as RD net. I'm not sure the female bloggers and protesters appreciate what she is doing for them and I'm sure they'd have preferred an approach more geared to them and their genuine rights rather than teenage boys. (Ford, Comments)

This writer then ends with a direct citation of the entire *Daily Beast* article mentioned earlier (part of the article is literally copied and pasted into the comment box). Here we see an example of how Tyler's text—an image of her naked body—becomes resituated as a risk to Tunisia's progress. She becomes, then, the ultimate fate of her nation.

In another instance, the kind of paradoxical move seen in the latter example results in another kind of amplification of the body-as-nation. However in this example, the nation gets depicted as representative of the entire region of the Middle East. Whereas many users focused on positioning Tyler's text as a symbol of the nation of Tunisia, others repositioned her text as transcending the nation, and standing in instead for the entire Middle East. A writer from the aforementioned blog, *Women Under Siege*, for example, writes of Tyler in the context of the Middle East, and by extension, "all"

Muslim women as an essentialized group: “These most basic rights and statements of equality—the right to object to being raped by your husband; the right for a woman to move freely from one place to another without asking permission—these are what the Brotherhood describes as ‘destructive tools meant to undermine the family as an important institution’; these are tools that they claim ‘would subvert the entire society.’” What is amplified and mobilized within this statement about human rights is not women’s agency within the nation of Tunisia, but rather certain beliefs about women and agency (or lack thereof) in the Middle East. In other words, the amplification of Tyler’s text reveals the ways in which sexual and bodily agency are deeply implicated in both national and international regulation.

We see this idea depicted once again in a post about Tyler’s text operating as a potential risk to the entire Middle East, and to Muslim women as a whole: “Women played a huge part in rallying alongside their fellow male citizens to bring down the dictators ruling their nations. The main political beneficiary of this change, as we are seeing, is the rise of Islamic movements. Many are now saying that as a result of this trend the rights of women are under threat.” (“March Woman Unveiled”). Other news outlets, such as the *Huffington Post*, circulated and repurposed Tyler and FEMEN’s actions as a human rights issue, employing a rescue narrative about oppressed women in the Middle East. In an article entitled, “Topless Tunisian Femen Protester Amina Tyler is Home and Well, Says Lawyer Bouchra Bel Haj Hmida,” Sara Nelson references an interview with FEMEN, reciting Shevchenko’s claim that Tyler represents the fate of the entire Middle East: “Amina’s example is the voice of Arab spring that turned as cold Sharia’s winter. [An] Arab spring that can come back. Amina represents those who are

going to break anti-human traditions that come from the Middle Ages but still are practiced today. For them it's easier to kill a woman than to agree that she has rights” (Nelson, “Topless Tunisian”). In advocating for Muslim women’s “voices” as a way of empowering women, as FEMEN and the mainstream media do, such a rhetoric puts forth an ahistorical paradigm, where women in the Middle East are positioned as a powerless population, in need of a voice to move beyond abjection. In defining and universalizing women from the Middle East as agentless—that is, subjects who are not active agents in decision-making about their own lives—the discourse of human rights perpetuates a stereotype of women in the Middle East as downtrodden subjects. Furthermore, this suggests an opposition between the Global South and the Global North, the imagined “West” and “non-West.”

In the same *Bounce Sin* blog post referenced earlier, James moves from classifying Tyler’s protest as directly related to Tunisia to a narrative about Middle Eastern culture and politics. She writes:

Don't get me wrong; I wholeheartedly support their fight; it's just difficult for me to understand why breasts are being used to desexualise women in Middle Eastern countries where such acts are far more dangerous than they are provocative. Of course one can argue that Amina's actions have indeed ignited world wide discourse on the subject of female subordination rife within the Middle East and of course, as with any societal/cultural struggle there must often be colossal human sacrifice in the name of progress (Emily Davidson anyone?), but in the battle against patriarchy, is the use of breasts simply counterproductive? (James)

These rhetorical moments represent examples of how circulating rhetorics, in their reflexive moments, interarticulate other kinds of national and transnational discourses about gender, geopolitical relations, and the global economy. As the image of Tyler circulates, we can see how the discourse of human rights becomes the primary focus,

detached from the context, history and body of Tyler herself. Instead, the entire “Middle East” and all Muslim women come to stand in for Tyler, positioning the Middle East as always in crisis, “always imagined as a ‘region of aberrant violence’” (Hesford and Kozol 16-17). This kind of discursive formation constructs a perceived need for feminist movements that address human rights issues (FEMEN, for example), movements that are then repositioned as advocacies for geopolitical agendas—agendas that ultimately conflict and obscure a movement’s original goals and purposes.

### **Conclusion**

As the bodily rhetoric of Tyler’s text gets taken up and pushed further into new arenas by various players, we can see how the process of amplification functions as a kind of world-making. The circulation of texts that emerged within the first two-week period prompted transnational engagements with a multitude of discourses, participation from writers from various parts of the world, and the production of various meanings. All of these meanings stood in relation to one text, produced by one person, from one particular place. In many ways, this kind of transnational engagement speaks to the various possibilities that texts can achieve through circulation. Tyler’s text got people talking—talking across borders, and at times across differences. And yet, we can see how the swift conflation of the female body with certain ideologies, and the further amplification of those ideologies, allowed Tyler’s body to become a symbol for various political, economic, and geopolitical purposes. We can also recognize how the discursive claims that arose from encounters and engagements with Tyler’s text constituted a narrative of “worlding,” to use Gayatri Spivak’s term, an ahistorical and atemporal process through which participants, ideas, and beliefs are brought into history through

modes of representation (Spivak 14). For example, as Tyler's text gets taken up and recirculated in various representations of the objectified body and female madness, these representations become evidence of the way in which the female body is constantly used for economic purposes, as well as political projects of regulation. Within the body-as-protest and the body-as-nation themes—particularly the amplified use of rights discourses in both themes—we see the ways in which Muslim women as a population come to stand in for the “developing” Middle East, the powerless “non-West.” Such representations echo what Grewal has argued is one of the implicit problematics in rights discourse: “Women outside the West, in human rights discourse, [are] represented as objects of charity and care by the West but [can] become subjects who [can] participate in the global economy and become global citizens; this [is] the ‘third world’ victim who [has] become a global subject” (Grewal 130, my emphasis). In other words, the circulation and amplification of Tyler's text as a narrative about rights in relation to women's bodies, and rights in relation to the fate of Tunisia, “mobilizes all kinds of knowledges and practices—disciplinary, sovereign, military, and governmental” (Hesford and Kozol, *Just Advocacy* viii).

In many ways, the themes discussed in this chapter reveal a trajectory of rhetorical production that begins with Tyler and ends with globalism—the “global subject,” to use Grewal's term. Perhaps this is a result of the way in which amplification, in many ways, works to distance a message from its original context, moving it further and further outside of that context, so that in the end, it is completely lost, or even erased. As is the case with Tyler's text, dominant discourses and universalized meanings associated with concepts of agency, liberation, and rights overpower and erase the actual

lived experience of Tyler, because those dominant discourses do not allow for departures from social, Western norms. Transnational feminist Alison Jagger speaks to this problem, noting that “The existing discourses or texts of [domination] do not provide such a language: even when they promise explicitly to liberate the subaltern, they obscure the distinctive nature of her oppression; indeed, by purporting to speak for her, they position her as mute” (Jagger 12). These obscurities of subjectivity, she suggests, arise out the tendency of Western feminists and activists to project a kind of global solidarity, where all experiences can be known and understood. And yet by attempting to create that global solidarity, as FEMEN tried to do, differences become both strategically obscured and emphasized, and experiences, agencies, and histories relevant and specific to local concerns become something universal and singular.

As I will discuss in the following chapter, these differences become even more obscured *and* emphasized, as certain themes gain a significant amount of velocity, and as various individuals and groups begin forming alliances over the symbolic use of Tyler’s text. In other words, we will see how the possibilities for further conversations about the kinds of themes discussed throughout this chapter become limited and less “possible” as we move forward in time. The velocity associated with Tyler’s text and its various iterations becomes, in large part, both a communal *and* divisive effort—a kind of cultural politic, and thus a kind of allying mechanism. For example, as FEMEN’s circulation of the phrase, “There will be a million Aminas,” predicts a homogeneity of response, that response fails to eventuate. Instead, the response, while actively intensified through the velocity of its circulation, becomes far more fractured and contentious, thus creating new

social relations where the goals and purposes undergirding those relations diverge greatly from the original context of Tyler's post.

## CHAPTER IV

### VELOCITIZED RHETORICS

The variety of amplifications in the last chapter leave us with many possibilities for thinking about how transnational feminist action occurs in the digital sphere, and how activists, in particular, engage in discussions of difference. In those amplified rhetorics, for example, we saw possibilities for productive conversations about the nature of protest, feminist solidarity, and coalition building. We saw both reinforcements and critiques of the female body's relationship to patriarchal discourses, entertainment media, historical movements, nationhood and nationalism, and geopolitical networks. And lastly, we saw how quickly certain body rhetorics became tied to older, pre-existing discourses, and how in those moments of circulation, those rhetorics could potentially fortify and frustrate the firmly held ideologies embedded in those discourses.

As this chapter indicates, however, those amplifications, when traced to the next layer of circulation—one month after the date of Tyler's original post—become less about the possibility for making connections and talking across differences, and rather more about the need to align with a particular “difference.” In other words, as certain amplified messages gain more exposure and speed in the digital sphere, users begin allying with specific rhetorical meanings and ideologies embedded in those amplifications, making those earlier messages more streamlined and funneled, and thus decreasing the original potential for a variety of responses to those messages. This funneling happens as the amplified rhetorics gain momentum and then ultimately blend together, resulting in new and yet fewer meanings and arguments. To put it another way,

the immediate responses to certain texts not only speed up the circulation of certain messages, ensuring they continue to be heard, but those responses and instances of circulation also perform a kind of rhetorical action, creating alliances and oppositions and establishing certain social relations that are even more polarizing than the ones we saw in the previous chapter. Recall *Daily Beast* writer Giovanni's statement (first referenced in chapter three): "Any protester knows that the only way activism works is to get the people on your side" (Giovanni). This is precisely what happens when amplified messages achieve a certain speed of dispersion: a production and circumscription of specific responses and reactions, resulting in the formation of "sides," oppositional parties and alliances. This intensified polarization, I argue, is what makes this layer of circulation so distinctive. Such a distinction can be understood in terms of *velocity*, the second step in the circulation process I have mapped out.

Like amplification, the term velocity has had a place in rhetorical studies for some time. Ridolfo and DeVoss, in particular, use the phrase "rhetorical velocity" when discussing "recomposition" (Ridolfo and Devoss). They argue that rhetorical velocity involves a "rhetorical concern for distance, travel, speed, and time," particularly in relation to the ways in which writers "strategically" compose texts for third parties. This definition, however, implies that the writer has a certain level of agency over the recomposition and appropriation of their text by third parties: this is where my use of velocity differs. Instead of focusing on the writer, I examine velocity with an attention to the circulation process. I deploy the term in order to describe the speed and scale of circulation a text can achieve and the various social alliances that form as a result. In this sense, we might think of velocity as having a snowball effect: the increased circulation of

a text pulls more and more responses and texts into the process, ultimately streamlining, intensifying, and reinforcing the various meanings at play. But here is where velocity functions differently than amplification: in its heightened movement, and in its more expansive exposure, velocity has a deeply polarizing effect. To use the scientific metaphor of magnetic polarization—“the partial or complete polar separation of the positive and negative electric charges in a nuclear, atomic, molecular, or chemical system” (“Polarity”)—velocitized rhetorics, as evidenced from this study, function similarly, in that they work to affect, persuade, and emotionally compel people to sides, demarcating the rhetorical terrain as something territorial, rather than coalescent, and thus producing factions instead of coalitions. Moreover, my data reveals that these polarized magnetisms—these velocitized rhetorics—are a result of the ways in which affect plays a role in digital circulation.

Affect, for my purposes, refers to the assemblage of emotion, ideology and place. Affect results from the projection of one’s emotion onto a text in response to a specific idea, and thus a specific ideology. The “affect” that follows is the emotional attachment or detachment to that idea—an idea that does not seem capable of being questioned, and thus an idea that becomes a belief and judgment deeply embodied in one’s personal experience. For example, when a feminist living in the US encounters an image of a veiled Muslim woman (regardless of the context from which that image emerged), that text may trigger an emotional response involving patronizing desires for solidarity in terms of women’s liberation (e.g. the belief that the veil signals oppression, and thus the need for liberation). That desire, though, is not just a result of her own subjective emotional feelings; it is a result of the cultural construction of liberation as a particular

ideology, one that is grounded in Western, US contexts. When emotion (e.g. righteous pity), ideology (e.g. liberation), and place (e.g. US) merge, one's response to a text becomes an affective projection, and thus what circulates is the affect—the piteous belief that veiled Muslim women are oppressed and thus in need of “saving.” That affect, as it increases in exposure and dissemination, has a polarizing effect, which ultimately results in the formation of exclusive groups comprised of those who relate and those who do not. In other words, other Western feminists may relate and respond similarly to the affective circulation of a righteous pitiful reading of the veiled Muslim woman, while other feminists might see that projection as a problematic, colonizing move, and thus one entirely unrelatable. As Sara Ahmed illustrates, the languages through which we model expression operate as forms of power, shaping “how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit” and aligning “some bodies with others, as well as stick[ing] different figures together” (Ahmed, *Cultural* 195). Words—signs—become collapsed into certain emotions and beliefs, obfuscating the materiality and contextual situation from which those words and signs emerged. Eventually, if the word/sign, along with its affective association, is repeated enough times, it fully detaches from its original histories and contexts, producing a disjuncture between signification and context/history.

We can think of this historical and contextual detachment in terms of the image of the veiled Muslim woman I referenced earlier. In mainstream media, the veil, as it is usually depicted on a brown woman's body, has become a symbol of Middle Eastern oppression (we can think of the images that circulated in the media after 9/11). Regardless of the context, or the goals and intentions undergirding the circulation of such an image (e.g. the image might have been posted as a celebration of Islamic customs,

etc.), the symbolic association of oppression is always already culturally tied to the figure of a veiled Muslim woman, and thus that association is what gets affectively circulated, rendering the image's underlying context and goals irrelevant. As a result of this continued disjuncture, Ahmed notes, "emotions, as signs, appear natural, personal, and ahistorical" (Ahmed, *Cultural* 196). Affective circulation, then—a phrase I use to describe the kind of circulation that occurs in this particular layer—describes the unstable process where words (images, memes, citations) operate as symbolic moments, engendering certain associations and social alliances, while also producing exclusions by "othering" certain bodies. A text detached from its original history and context via the speed of circulation *and* the emotional weight of repetition allows the political weight of a message to both be obfuscated and coopted. It also allows the message to become an agent for mobilization. As Ahmed suggests, "Emotions are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of 'towardness' or 'awayness' in relation to ... objects" (Ahmed, *Cultural* 8). Thus, affect is, in many ways, the attitude, evaluation, or "impression," to use another one of Ahmed's terms, of our bodily response, that prompts us to either connect to or distance from the sign or object that carries the affective weight.

As rhetoricians interested in feminist action, particularly within a transnational context, it is important for us to see how affect assists in reproducing, resisting, and/or reinforcing certain power relations, and marginalizing certain groups of people. What happens to rhetorical action and textual movement when emotions become the language of public expression? In her article, "The New 'New': Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies," Jenny Edbauer-Rice argues that, "expanding our understanding of public affect might help us understand why certain rhetorics retain powerful circulation" (Edbauer-

Rice, “The New ‘new’” 211). In a social space like the web, an environment comprised of user-generated content and participatory engagement, affect—the emotional, dogmatic attachment to an ideology and personal belief, whether conscious or unconscious—is always already intervening in and shaping the discursive practices of reading and writing, arguing and responding, protesting and rallying. On the web, this occurs at a more intensified velocity, magnitude, and scope, making it harder for web users to achieve any kind of critical distance. In other words, the speed of the digital—the instantaneous features of social media, such as “liking,” “sharing,” “retweeting”—speeds up emotion, as users can effortlessly circulate their most immediate impressions by utilizing the “emotional” buttons available to them. As indicated by this study, and particularly the texts that emerged in this second layer of circulation, affect plays a large role in the movement of texts—where they go, how they get picked up, which ideologies gain velocity and visibility and which do not, which voices are heard and taken seriously, and which ones are silenced. While Tyler’s text prompted an initial global discussion, that discussion then generated a multitude of emotions premised on lived experiences and personal beliefs. Moreover, the social and material space in which those texts circulated—the fast, widespread digital environment that is the web—played an intrinsic role in reinforcing those emotions, and thus reinforcing various kinds of affect. This example, as I will expand upon in the following pages, makes clear how circulation necessarily involves the act of circumscribing both oppositions and alliances when velocity enters the picture. Affective circulation, that is, literally builds and restructures social relations that allow for the action (or inaction) of digital rhetorics.

Out of the four themes that emerged in the first layer of circulation, the body-as-object, body-as-protest, and body-as-nation themes continue to move throughout the digital sphere in the second layer, but the body-as-madness theme seemingly disappears. One of the reasons for this lies in the fact that the subject of the texts in this layer moves increasingly from Tyler to FEMEN. As discussed in chapter three, the notion of madness and illness was only ever associated with Tyler, hence, in many ways, it becomes irrelevant in the next layer, as further circulation renders Tyler herself irrelevant. Perhaps, too, the disappearance of the madness theme has more to do with its lack of affective currency in this layer. In other words, as I will show in this study, the other themes have a polarizing effect because they hold more emotional, personal weight in the current political and social moment, whereas the madness argument is an old discursive claim from the mid-twentieth century. For this reason, it does not necessarily “impress” upon readers the same way that bodily protest, objectification, and nationhood do.

Interestingly enough, though, in this particular layer, the themes of protest, objectification, and nationhood become more amorphous due to the increased speed and scope of their circulation. Instead, these three themes collide and collapse into one another, creating new claims and arguments about relations *between* bodies instead of claims *about* bodies. This entanglement of rhetorics, then, ultimately changes the rhetorical landscape of circulation into a polarized field of rhetorical encounters. Put another way, as the body themes merge, conflict, and fuse together, producing new kinds of rhetorics, the velocity of those rhetorics results in a magnetic divergence, like the diffusion of negative and positive electric charges in a magnetic field. What I highlight in

this chapter are these rhetorical fusions and collisions and the consequent “awayness” or “towardness” of the bodily movement involved in those encounters.

### **Tyler vs. FEMEN: Affective Rhetorics of Oppression and Liberation**

As the assemblage of the body themes blended, the various rhetorics and ideologies associated with those themes—ideologies related to liberation, oppression, universalism, difference, nationhood and geopolitics—also overlapped, collided, and fused together, gaining more and more momentum, and thus more and more exposure to different online users and communities. In this particular section, I show how those moments—the affective collisions of ideology—result in certain assumptions and beliefs about Islam and feminism. The circulation of the body-as-protest and the body-as-object themes, for example, as they are used to contrast FEMEN and Tyler, ultimately suggest that protest, and thus FEMEN, corresponds to free-moving, liberated, independent bodies, and the object—Tyler—symbolizes the notion of fixed, detained, oppressed bodies. As users align themselves with these beliefs, they also align themselves with certain bodies and “sides,” such that the rhetorical landscape becomes increasingly bifurcated and polarized.

Many posts in this layer of circulation focus on how FEMEN’s protest supports and/or intensifies feelings and beliefs about the eradication of Islam. For example, another anonymous writer from the blog *Kafir Crusaders*, a site dedicated to standing up against “Islamization” (and mentioned in the last chapter), writes in the comment section on a post about FEMEN’s topless jihad day: “My opinion of feminists has gone right up now following them standing up to the Islamic religious bullies.” Further down in this post are several images of FEMEN members protesting with the following statements

beneath the photos: “Feminist babes getting their boobs out against militant Islam,” and “Not a body hair in sight on these sexy feminist nude protesters breaking the mental image of your excessively hairy razor shy traditional feminist” (“Topless Jihad Day”). Within these statements, the body rhetorics that emerged in the previous layer are used to make claims about the religious practices of Islam. For a writer like this, who is arguably against the religion of Islam (as we can assume from his participation in an anti-Islam website), seeing a topless “jihad” targeting the “bullying” religion triggers a congratulatory emotion, as FEMEN’s protest reflexively affirms and solidifies his own belief that Islam is oppressive and should be eradicated. And yet we also see in these complimentary statements how such projections get transferred onto beliefs about feminism and women’s bodies. In other words, the celebration of the hairless “sexy” feminists standing up against Islam as opposed to the “excessively hairy razor shy traditional feminist,” represents “progress” and a desired future for this writer. The affective slippage in the projection of this desired future, however, lies in the fact that this “future” is not only premised on the eradication of Islam, but also on the eradication of a particular kind of female body: “the razor shy traditional feminist.”

We see this kind of affective circulation of the idealized feminist (and thus the eradication of “other” female bodies) emerge in another example from a blog post entitled, “Nudity is a Dumb Argument, but at least the Femen Babes Get Naked for Justice – and They Have Waists” (Swann). Swann goes on to write: “The accompanying 31 photos show the Ukrainian women doing two things American feminists cannot do: 1. Stand up for the oppressed and not the oppressors [and] 2. Look good without clothes. I expect things will get worse before they get better for the women of Islam, but it’s nice to

have contemporary visual evidence that the feminine waist is not extinct” (Swann). Once again, the link between the “ideal,” waist-revealing feminist body and the fight for “justice” becomes foregrounded as the main message of this post. Similar to the latter example, this rhetorical construction is perhaps a result of Swann’s righteous anger regarding his ideological beliefs about women’s oppression and his desire for “progress,” as well as his own opinions regarding feminism and the female body. Once again, “progress” becomes associated with feminism, and feminism with a particular kind of feminist—one with a particular waistline and one who can “look good without clothes.” In addition, Swann’s particular claim about things getting “worse before they get better for the women of Islam” reveals a particular kind of elision in his text: that is, the construction of Muslim women, and by extension Tyler, as outside of that progress and thus removed—eradicating—from the feminist project.

Within the slippages between the idealized feminist and the idealized eradication of Islam, Tyler’s protest—the act that ignited these conversations—is completely transformed into a rallying celebration of FEMEN. In just one sentence, the context of Tyler’s protest, as well as the nation of Tunisia itself, becomes irrelevant, and the Ukraine and “Ukrainian feminists” become the subjects of circulation. In other words, FEMEN is positioned in opposition to Muslim feminists, and thus, by extension, in opposition to Tyler. Swann even goes so far as to position FEMEN members from the Ukraine in opposition to “American feminists.” These distinctions are premised on his objectification of the naked female body, and thus on a latent sexist discourse that Tyler’s original protest sought to resist. The body-as-protest, object, and nation themes, then—as they collide and combine—reinforce the exact kind of discourse Tyler opposed.

When Tyler is referenced in this layer of circulation (and those references are few and far between), many of the mentions are blatantly disappointed with her protest, implying that her rhetorical act actually hurts the “progression” of women’s rights in Tunisia. The following portion of Giovanni’s aforementioned article, for example, was re-quoted and retweeted on various social media platforms: “But why does she not hit the streets of Tunis like my other activist friends and protest, or blog, or try to highlight the plight of women in a more productive way?” (Giovanni). The emphasis on “productive” protest is important here and begs the question: what makes Tyler’s protest anti-productive? And conversely, what makes FEMEN’s method of protest more admirable? Giovanni’s statement (and others’ re-citation of it) suggests that Tyler’s body can only be seen, and thus represented as an object. Posting an image—a still picture of her naked body covered with provocative statements—becomes only a static physical body. The presumption here is that true protest involves literal “action” or movement (note Giovanni’s references to “hitting the streets” and blogging), which a static image obviously lacks. FEMEN, others argue, are “moving”: they are standing up for women’s rights by traveling to various places—protesting at mosques, embassies, etcetera. A similar critique of Tyler is evidenced in the following quote from the site *Roosh V* forum (a site dedicated to global politics): “She didn’t want to change shit. Her cause was herself. She wanted attention, and only attention, from the get go. If she was serious about advancing the cause of human rights for women in Tunisia or whatever, she wouldn’t go around parading her oddly shaped body on the internet” (“Topless Tunisian

Feminist”).<sup>9</sup> Again, Tyler’s literal body becomes objectified: one that is deemed “odd” and ultimately useless.

As this contrastive construction continued to circulate and gain more velocity, headlines like, “Boobs, not Barbarity: Women Across the World Urged to Bare Their Breasts Against Islam” (*Free Thinker*), for example, moved rapidly throughout Twitter and Facebook. On the *Kafir Crusaders* blog, many users responded to the idea of “titslamism,” making statements like, “A host of beauties from around the world are taking part in topless jihad day by showing their breasts in protest against the barbaric backward nature of Islam,” and “The killjoy sexist cleric thinks that a female getting her tits out deserves the punishment of a slow and painful death. Its amazing how these backward Islamic nut jobs take offence at something pretty much trivial like a pair of boobs as though they have some huge amount of morales. Then call for her to be killed in the next breath in a painful and barbaric manner like its nothing” (“Topless Jihad Day”). On the *Roosh V* forum, the user comments responding to the post about Tyler and her “oddly shaped body” reveal just how quickly the FEMEN vs. Tyler binary becomes repositioned as FEMEN versus Islam, and in many ways, “feminism” versus Islam.

Below are a few other comments that appeared in the *Roosh V* thread:

- “Below a reminder of the violent and sexist nature of Islam.”
- “Islam is actually a reaction to the female dominated snake worshipping lunar society that was prevalent in the middle east before Mohammed. The continued dichotomy of extreme gender tyranny between Islam and feminism exists to this day.
- “‘Common sense’ is not how repressive, ignorant elements of society get changed. Rosa Parks should have caved in and gotten off the bus? There's no

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly enough, the author and creator of the site, *Roosh V* is also the author of the book *Bang*, “a textbook for picking up girls and getting laid.” (Valizadeh).

progress without nonviolent civil disobedience. Why are you silent on the boobs who are advocating KILLING her for this?"

- "Do you really think the Arabs can keep the suffocating restrictions on women they have now? Seriously, do you think that can continue, and would you want it to?"
- "Even the Saudis with their repulsive morality police who go around bullying women physically (and I don't mean the bullshit like that Pycon cunt complained about) are liberalizing because they know it can't last."
- "If you don't like women (I often don't much) and think they're inferior, at least beat them in a fair fight of intellect and effort, not ignorant bullying."

("Topless Tunisian Feminist," *Roosh V Forum* Comments)

As we can see, these responses serve as useful examples of what happens when the velocity of messages leads to both fusions and conflicts of ideology. Bound up in these messages is an affect produced from the conflation of emotions (anger, antagonism, resentment), ideologies related to religious intolerance and beliefs about oppression (particularly men's perspectives on the oppression of Muslim women by Muslim men), as well as personal contexts in which oppression and gender roles signal different meanings and experiences. When these elements fuse together, affects involving misogyny and Islamophobia get circulated in the form of evaluations and judgments. As a result, the moments of rhetorical encounter here produce particular kinds of affect that result in exclusionary groups and "us vs. them" relationships. This is partly because the emotional expressions of anger and resentment in the texts, alongside the personal attachments to beliefs about women's oppression in Muslim countries, lead to an impassioned argument about why that oppression is wrong, and thus why Islam is wrong, resulting, then, in Islamophobic and misogynist rhetoric. The last *Roosh V* comment is perhaps one of the starkest representations of the kind of affective impact that results

from such heightened velocity. The blatant misogyny in his statement, alongside the harsh criticism of the “Islamic nutjobs,” reveals how the slippages in meaning, which result in a contemptuous affect directed at both Islam and women, contribute to the reinforcement of certain social relations designed to marginalize groups of people based on gender, race, and religious affiliations. This kind of relational construction becomes even more pronounced in the subsequent construction of alliances and enstrangements, as these rhetorics continue to circulate and move throughout the digital sphere.

### **FEMEN vs. MWAF: Affective Rhetorics of Universalism and Difference**

As we saw in the last chapter, the body rhetorics circulating within this public generate a question not amplified at all in the initial response, but rather one that emerges with their increased velocity: that is, whose body? Ironically, as these rhetorics collide, other Muslim women, who may have previously allied with the national context of Tyler’s protest, come to *protest against* her based on the amplification of certain messages regarding a raced body that purportedly speaks for all women. In this case, amplification obfuscates in such a manner that the velocitized message focuses on the mode of protest rather than what is being protested. The Facebook group, Muslim Women Against FEMEN (a group that formed in response to FEMEN’s call for a topless jihad day) points out that the “bodies” protesting are not the bodies of brown women, nor the bodies of Muslim women. Because of this, they resist FEMEN’s idea of a “global sisterhood” and critique FEMEN’s attempt to operate as a “collective mouth piece.” Central to these newly-created social relations is an analysis of the ways in which both FEMEN and MWAF’s messages contain rhetorics of the body that generate particular reactions based on the assemblage of emotion, ideology, and place in each text. As a

result of this affective circulation, FEMEN and MWAF become polarized, further resulting in the polarization of Western feminism and Islam, and finally, as the last section indicates, the West and the Middle East.

The start of this polarization can be seen in the texts produced by MWAF. Through the mediums of Twitter and Facebook, MWAF responds to and re-appropriates FEMEN's protest with a "#counterprotest," reshaping and recontextualizing the body-as-object and the body-as-protest themes within a more localized, context-specific framework. FEMEN's message—driven by an affect involving righteously angry expressions of Western feminist beliefs about global feminist solidarity—is interpreted by MWAF as an attempt to actually disenfranchise and marginalize a group of women. On its Facebook page, MWAF makes it known that FEMEN's invocation to form a "global sisterhood" through participation in a "topless jihad day" not only disregards the lived experiences of Muslim women, but also obfuscates the differences that make those lived experiences a reality. As a response to FEMEN, MWAF circulated a call for a "Muslimah Pride Day," responding to the Western feminist affect undergirding FEMEN's texts. The group used social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to organize and coalesce support. Below are a few examples of the tweets that arose from this counterprotest (#MuslimahPrideDay, Twitter):

- "Counterprotest against #toplessjihadday, Join muslim women in #muslimahpride day. Reclaiming agency."
- "Muslim women stand up for their rights without ripping off their clothes or exploiting other women."
- "We don't accept the stereotypes enforced on us by the west. Nor do we need #Femen to become our collective mouth piece."

MWAF's re-appropriation of FEMEN's protest as a "#counterprotest" and FEMEN's "topless jihad day" as a "#Muslimah Pride Day" speaks to the ways in which MWAF reshapes and re-characterizes FEMEN's texts within a more localized, context-specific rhetorical framework. In their response to FEMEN's affect (i.e., righteous anger at globalized oppression), they ultimately disrupt FEMEN's affective charge by overlaying a different ideological and geographical framework onto a similar emotion (i.e., righteous anger at Western feminism). Such a redirection of affective circulation is supported by an ideological critique of Western feminism premised in lived experiences involving racism and religious intolerance. This kind of move, then, contributes even further to the construction of both alliances and oppositions (note the use of "counter" in MWAF's hashtag).

A similar move takes place in MWAF's circulation of their "Open-Letter to FEMEN," which appeared on personal blog sites, Twitter and Facebook pages, and later, *The Huffington Post* and *The Atlantic*. Not only does this "open letter" advance the "social link" between FEMEN's rhetorical claims and those of MWAF's, it also attempts to mediate those rhetorics and move them into a different arena. In their letter, MWAF argues that FEMEN's rhetorical practices signify yet another kind of "First World attack against Third World peoples." They articulate this further by noting that, "The liberation pushed by privileged First World women is a cynical ploy to secure their own aristocratic position within global gender hierarchies" ("An Open Letter to FEMEN"). This same message becomes more apparent in the embodied texts circulated by MWAF. As another form of "counterprotest," Muslim and non-Muslim women posted photos of themselves to Facebook and Twitter in response to FEMEN's topless images ("Muslim Women

Against FEMEN,” Facebook). Some women took photos of themselves wearing hijabs, others with signs reading: “Nudity does not liberate me and I do not need saving!,” “Do I look oppressed to you?!” “Shame on you FEMEN. Hijab is my right!,” and “I am a Muslim and a Feminist.” (See figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 below.)



**Figure 4.1: MAAF (1)**



**Figure 4.2: MAAF (2)**



**Figure 4.3: MAAF (3)**

The re-appropriation of FEMEN’s rhetorical mediums (the open letter and the use of images and bodily messages), as well as the re-appropriation of the language and words used by FEMEN (words such as “feminist,” “liberation” and “oppression,”) increases the velocity of these texts. But this velocity is not merely an act of resistance; this circulation is also an act of revision, an act that challenges, changes, and destabilizes previous rhetorical meanings. Rather than “universal solidarity” among all women, MAAF implores FEMEN and the larger public to acknowledge difference, to take on a critical consciousness by recognizing that the universalizing rhetorics of Western feminism do not speak to/for *all* women. Furthermore, MAAF’s redistribution and revision of FEMEN’s rhetoric operates as a mode of resistance to the dominant discourses of globalization interarticulated in FEMEN’s rhetoric. By calling attention to FEMEN’s reinforcement of a “global gender hierarchy,” MAAF points to a larger, global

context in which ideas about power and gender are discussed using the problematic binaries of “First World” and “Third World.” In other words, they point out a blind spot in FEMEN’s rhetorical praxis—the ways in which the organization’s attempt to speak for “Third World” women serves as a kind of colonizing move, one that perpetuates damaging perspectives of women in the Global South. In re-characterizing FEMEN’s essentializing rhetoric—their idealistic notion of a “global sisterhood”—MWAF, in their open letter to FEMEN, take on FEMEN’s constant use of the third person plural to signify a different “we,” alluding to a solidarity among “Muslim women and women of colour from the Global South” (“An Open Letter to FEMEN”). In other words, the “we,” for MWAF encompasses not just similarities of gender, but also of race, religion, geographic location, and class. This kind of affective circulation showcases both FEMEN and MWAF’s efforts to redistribute *and* revise ideologies related to “liberation,” “freedom,” and “oppression”. These ideologies are premised on emotional and personal attachments, attachments that then help to construct connections and disconnections—“awayness” and “towardness”—between FEMEN, MWAF, and others. As was the case with FEMEN’s reaction to and circulation of Tyler’s image, MWAF’s circulation of their counter-texts demonstrates an affect with roots in different material and historical contexts and differing evaluations of collectivity and solidarity. In other words, MWAF’s moments of affective circulation—the fomenting anger regarding FEMEN’s silencing, universalizing moves—represent instances of critical confrontation regarding women’s lived experiences and differences.

This rhetorical encounter is crucial to my discussion of the affective charges undergirding both FEMEN and MWAF’s texts. Whereas FEMEN’s earlier emotional

connections to bodily protest (naked female bodies as symbols of liberation) obscured the Muslim context (Tyler and the context of Tunisia, for example), FEMEN's righteous anger regarding the "need" for women's bodily freedom results in a kind of colonizing affect when encountered, experienced, and evaluated by MAAF. This ideological clash thus fuels MAAF's angry emotional response to a perceived colonization by Western feminists, anger that is directly at odds with FEMEN's own use of righteous anger. As these circulating rhetorics continued to move outward, they prompted other kinds of rhetorical engagements, ones that brought some feminists together and some apart (the latter being much more prevalent). Ultimately what emerges from this affective circulation is the belief that the ideals of Western feminists and Muslim feminists are irreconcilable. This move creates and reinforces certain kinds of social relations, making certain collectivities possible while forestalling others.

The most notable of these moves for transnational feminist action is the potentially productive response of a Western feminist who acknowledges colonizing moves within FEMEN and the body-as-protest theme. For example, in an opinion piece entitled "Why I, As a Muslim Woman, Don't Support FEMEN," from the alternative political site, *PolicyMic*, the following is written of FEMEN and MAAF by self-identified "Muslim feminist," Areej Elahi-Siddiqui:

The FEMEN movement has been gaining momentum all across the globe, with April 4 being declared the official "International Topless Jihad Day." In response, however, Muslim women — both, those who wear hijabs and those who do not — launched an online campaign called "Muslimah Pride Day" to show that contrary to what many non-Muslim women are claiming, they aren't being oppressed by Islam, but instead are offended by FEMEN using them to propel their own Western-liberal agenda. And as a young Muslim woman growing up in the United States, I fully agree with the latter group. (Elahi-Siddiqui)

Elahi-Siddiqui not only highlights both campaigns, adding to their heightened velocity (she literally “links” to each campaign), she also aligns herself with the rhetorical practices of MAAF in her critique of FEMEN’s exclusionary tactics. Other sites, including various feminist blogs, make similar connections. For example, certain texts respond to MAAF’s call by circulating and linking to articles on Western feminism and Western liberalism. An article entitled “White Women and the Privilege of Solidarity” circulated on both Twitter and Facebook and was re-posted thirteen times on people’s personal blogs. Articles addressing the historical context of bodily aesthetics and religion, as well as articles on white privilege, colonialism and “decolonizing feminism,” moved throughout these digital spaces in an effort to “realize” and “characterize” specific rhetorical purposes. Such movements form a kind of affective circulation in that they emerge as a result of individual nexuses of emotion, ideology, and place. For example, in the following excerpt, we see how Hana Riaz, a writer who identifies as a “Black South Asian Muslim Feminist” living in the UK, reacts emotionally to the Western feminist ideologies of universalism embedded in FEMEN’s texts. Taking on a similar emotion to FEMEN—that of anger and critique—Riaz circulates an affect premised on difference.

She writes:

Reducing women to a homogenous category without sociohistorical embedding, risks losing indigenous meanings or alternative understandings of gender/sexuality based on location, or social and sexual destinies that differ from both Western male-centered and feminist visions. Furthermore, it leaves women with multiple identities, such as Muslim women, unable to ‘pick’ and ‘choose’ one. These identities are inextricably defined by one another and we cannot simply drop or alter what are core tenets of our experiences. (Riaz)

Through modes of affective movement there is an attempt to “realize” the world in a particular way, as these instances of circulation attempt to “re-situate” local contexts, as

well as certain cultural and political beliefs. This moment in particular includes emotional expressions of critique and anger regarding Western feminist ideologies (as seen throughout MAAF's texts) fused with Riaz's own experiences as a Black South Asian Muslim Feminist. Her reference to the multiple identities of women contradicts the universalizing ideologies embedded in FEMEN's texts, and also calls attention to the failure and problematic marginalization implicit in such ideologies. To illustrate these ideas, she uses herself—a body is that both gendered *and* raced. In many ways, Riaz's comment, like many of MAAF's texts, reveals how the various interactions that comprise a text's circulation involve efforts to understand, resist, and revise ideologies related to difference and lived experiences.

Although these responses prescribe ways of bringing feminists together across difference, it is important to note that this attempt at new social relations also sidelines other possible alliances. In these moments, MAAF, and others like Riaz, render the body rhetorics as generalizable to women across the globe, erasing again the specific Tunisian context of Tyler's original post. Although I cannot know for sure, MAAF's posts suggest that as a group, they may be sympathetic to Tyler's goals, if not the means by which she executed her protest. But due to the velocity of the amplified themes I discussed earlier, this original context gets lost and instead becomes re-contextualized by MAAF as a response to white Western feminism. Thus, the problematic slippage in these responses is always already invoking a "world" where differences become both strategically obscured and emphasized, and experiences, agencies, and histories become something universal and singular.

As this critique of white Western feminism gained more velocity in social media, particularly from other feminists, the focus on white liberal feminism became highlighted to such a degree that many supporting and responding to MAAF never reference Tyler at all. The second social relation associated with velocity, then, is not the formation of a new relation but the forestalling of one that was once possible. Potential allies for Tyler are preoccupied with their response to Western feminists, suggesting that the possibilities for alliance are either Muslim feminists or white feminists, or some combination (as we see above). In this case, the choice for many Muslims is with Muslim Feminists Against FEMEN, a move that results in the erasure of the Tunisian context of Tyler's protests. In allying *within* difference, the possibilities for alliances *across* difference are negated; thus, what is forestalled is an alliance with a feminism that does not erase race, ethnicity, colonialism, or religion, and/or a Muslim feminist alliance comprised of differing protest modes (i.e. the clothed body, the naked body, etc.). The choices quickly degenerate to "Muslim feminist" or "Western, white feminist." For example, on a blog entitled "Badass Muslimahs," an anonymous writer makes the following claim:

I've had enough of the sensationalist, exoticised, demeaning portrayals of Muslim women seen all throughout the media, and this is my way of countering all the nonsense. This is not an attempt at 'breaking stereotypes' or trying to enlighten people, if you're ignorant enough to believe that Muslim women are oppressed and subjugated by Islam then that's your own problem. ("Badass Muslimahs").

It's important to note here the reference to "countering." This writer puts forth the same kind of assertion as MAAF's counterprotest,: a critique of the white Western feminist discourse that problematically situates Muslim women as silent and oppressed. In yet another example, a post from the tumblr "Tashabilities" presents a similar rhetoric. Although this unidentified writer refers to the "topless jihad day" as a movement in

support of Tyler, there is no mention of Tyler's individual protest or the context from which her protest emerged:

I'm posting this because that Topless jihad really irked me. If few Muslim women want to be liberated or what not, that doesn't mean they speak for the rest of the millions and millions of us. As a Muslim woman, I really love my religion and whole heartedly accept to cover up. That does not make me oppressed!! I CHOSE to dress this way so did millions of others. Why cant that be respected? [...] We don't need such support, we can defend ourselves with our cloth on. We don't need to get naked to be heard. Somehow these people thinks, to be free is to be able to cover less, be almost naked. Not to mention no one is protesting other important issues that really needs attention in the world, but somehow getting Muslim women to not cover seams very important to them. [...]Have the bleachers, white women, have the bleachers ("Muslim Women Send Message to FEMEN").

Clearly we can see how quickly the focus on protest and the question "whose body?" becomes foregrounded as the main concern of these texts. This is because affect colors messages with particular kinds of emotion that ultimately alter the meanings embedded in these messages, creating an "us/them" relationship, and thus prompting more emotional responses that then reinforce that us/them relationship. The *Tashabilities* tumblr, for example, has the following statement in the "About" section: "Southern by birth. Black by the grace of G-d. NOTHING HERE IS ABOUT YOU OR FOR YOU, SO BEFORE YOU REBLOG, DON'T. If you're white and you're here to tell me your opinion on my belief that white people should be banned from transracial adoption, kill yourself first" ("Tashabilities"). The level of emotion here perhaps stems from certain beliefs and experiences related to race and white privilege. Hence, by reading the About section alongside the blog post, one can better understand the blog writers' position through their affective use of anger towards white liberalism, and specifically, white feminism.

In a different, and arguably problematic move, other “feminists” responded to MAAF, critiquing and discounting their rhetorical acts as misinformed and counterproductive. The idea of counterproductivity is important, as the focus of these texts is more about “sides” and solidifying the “us/them” relationship, rather than building coalitions and feminist solidarity (which, if we remember, was the original goal). The rhetorical construction of “us/them” further reinforces that construction—a kind of affective circulation—as it prompts more emotional than objective responses. Emotional reactions (quick, knee-jerk responses prompted by reading a text solely from one’s own context) result in an affective circulation that only bifurcates, preventing alliances across difference completely. For example, Maryam Namazi, on her personal website, put forth the following statement:

A group of women have set up a Facebook page called Muslim women against FEMEN.... Muslimah Pride Day.

They just don’t get it (or obviously choose not to).

On a day that has been set aside to defend a 19 year old woman who has been threatened by an Islamist with death by stoning, detained, drugged and restricted from communicating with her friends and FEMEN all for merely for expressing herself, they choose to mark the day by calling on women to oppose FEMEN and to veil.

As I have said before, nudity is the antithesis of veiling. Also it is clear that you cannot defend women’s rights and defend Islam and Islamism at the same time. You have to choose. FEMEN and we have chosen to side with women’s rights and equality; they have chose to side with the veil, Islam and Islamism no matter what it does to those who do not submit. (Namazi, “You Just Don’t Get It”)

Here we see the same kind of argument that emerged in the first layer: the belief that nudity is analogous to the fight for women’s rights, as well as the belief that feminism and Islam are paradoxical. However, as Namazi’s rhetoric comes into contact with

MWAF's, what ultimately develops is an "us/them" dichotomy—"sides"—that then becomes the main focus of the circulation that follows, due to differing ideas of nudity and "freedom." Namazi's claim that members of MWAF "don't get it" and "choose" not to "get it" perpetuates the kind of liberal feminist discourse that, in practice, actually marginalizes and excludes others. We see this exclusion and marginalization reinforced in the following comment (in response to Namazi's post):

I think they are mutually exclusive. You can be a Muslim or an atheist and defend women's right of course. That is one of my main points always. But you cannot defend Islam and Islamism and also defend women's rights because they are antithetical to each other. If you want to defend women's rights from an Islamic perspective it just doesn't work. Because women's rights go beyond that which is religiously sanctioned. Moreover religious sanctions violate plenty of rights and is fundamentally misogynist. Islamism is altogether another matter – it is misogyny and barbarity with political power; there is nothing pro-woman about it – quite the opposite.

Defending women's rights has to be done from a universal and secular perspective. I don't want rights Islam has "given me"; I want more than that. (Namazi, "You Just Don't Get It," Comments).

While we can see in both the latter comment and in Namazi's post a genuine concern for women's rights, the clashing rhetorics result in an indifference towards difference, and a complete disregard for what women's rights mean for women coming from different contexts and experiences. This rhetorical "clashing" is furthered by the affective element undergirding the circulation of these texts. All throughout FEMEN's texts we see, and perhaps even feel, an emotion of righteous anger in their call for feminist solidarity. That sentiment also appears in MWAF's texts and the texts in support of MWAF, yet the purpose differs. The same righteous anger emerges ultimately in the texts seen on Namazi's site—a righteous anger in favor of "universal" feminist practices and in

opposition to Islamic practices, ultimately resulting in feminist discord and estrangement; the antithesis of universal solidarity.

This discord becomes more apparent in the mainstream media's circulation of these texts. On the *International Business Times* site, for example, the following headline appeared: "Anti-Femen Topless Jihad Day: Muslim Women Slam 'Racist' Feminist Activists" (Bacchi). Aside from the contrastive description—"anti-Femen"—the quotations around the word "racist" next to the unquoted description, "feminist activists" imply insincerity and a lack of understanding towards MWAF's position. This stylistic choice also suggests that the idea of racism, and MWAF's experience of racism, can and should be called into question. Following MWAF's open letter to FEMEN, *Huffington Post UK* circulated a response from Inna Shevchenko, leader of FEMEN, entitled "Inna Shevchenko Responds To Muslim Women Against Femen's Open Letter In Wake Of Amina Tyler Topless Jihad." The response begins with a third person address to the larger public—not MWAF. In describing her opinion of MWAF's open letter, she writes, "The letter is obviously written not in feminist rhetoric at all, as they are making accusations of racism." A few sentences later, the distant third person "they" becomes represented as addressed "sisters" and then as "you": "So sisters... You say to us that you are against Femen but we are here for you and for all of us, as women are the modern slaves and it's never a question of colour of skin" (Shevchenko qtd. in Nelson, "Inna Shevchenko Responds to Muslim Women"). In terms of affective circulation, particularly Inna's attempt to circulate a text in response to the circulation of MWAF's open letter, it is important to note how the rhetorical meaning of "feminism" shifts and changes. Whereas in MWAF's letter, they attempt to point out the intersections between race and

gender (among other markers of identity), FEMEN's letter employs a rhetoric that distinguishes gender and race as separate experiences. In other words, FEMEN suggests that feminism does not include, or cannot allow for, discussions of race and racism, and that gender can and should be conceived of universally, regardless of other differences. Further down in the letter, Shevchenko attempts to characterize this idealistic, universal world, writing:

And do you know what I see? I see a world without Serbs, Croats and Muslims being massacred, without 9/11, without witchhunts, without 7/7, a world without suicide bombers and without the Taliban, without Israeli-Palestinian wars, without persecution of Jews as 'Christ-killers', without Northern Ireland troubles, without Crusades, a world where are no public beheadings of blasphemers and no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing an inch of it. See you on the battle lines! (Shevchenko qtd. in Nelson, "Inna Shevchenko Responds to Muslim Women")

In this excerpt, several affective moves take place. First, this letter attempts to affectively circulate and characterize a rhetorical imaginary—a “world” in which people are no longer subjected to violence. Yet it is performed without addressing MWAF, thus difference is immediately obscured; only “sisters” remain. Moreover, in this projection, we see slippages between rhetorics of solidarity and rhetorics of geopolitics, particularly in Shevchenko's own rhetorical incitement of violence (e.g. her references to war and “battles” in describing FEMEN and their activist pursuits). In short, within her assertions about violence, other rhetorics emerge that produce other kinds of affect involving terror, war, and the nation. By resituating, and in many ways dismissing, MWAF's rhetoric around race and difference, Shevchenko's response uses a “positive” concept of collectivity to suggest that the “negative” focus on difference originates from emotional responses orchestrated by others (men, religion, nationhood) rather than from FEMEN itself. The affective collision becomes one that suggests geopolitical solutions, something

the mass media then circulates in the form of fear-mongering rhetorics around terrorism and 9/11.

### **The West vs. the Middle East: Affective Rhetorics of War and Terror**

While the media played a large role in circulating the texts of both FEMEN and MWAF, more media attention was given to the former. News and entertainment sites such as *The Huffington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, *The National Post*, and *NY Daily News*, to name a few, reported on the protests and counterprotests, making note of the various circulating discourses. Most, if not all, of FEMEN's statements were published initially through *The Huffington Post* and *The Guardian* (whereas MWAF's statements were first posted on their Facebook and personal blogs and then reposted by news sites). Following FEMEN's references to "battle" and 9/11, warfare took on metaphorical significance in both the rhetoric of FEMEN, and the mainstream media. For example, the headline in one of FEMEN's published articles reads: "We are Femen, the naked shock troops of feminism. Femen is at war with the patriarchy that sees women as objects. What weapons do we have? Our bare breasts." (Shevchenko, "We are Femen"). Throughout the rest of the article, militant language is used to describe the goals of the organization and their rationale for organizing a "topless jihad day." The continuous use of words and phrases such as, "troops," "spearhead unit of militants," "attacks," "destroy" and "revolt" seem to suggest that war is a useful, thematic metaphor for the kind of resistance they hope to enact.

In other media texts, journalists circulate FEMEN's use of "battle" language to describe the group's protests, praising FEMEN's campaign for Tyler and claiming that FEMEN's "battle" is over the "persecution of women" (e.g. *The Atlantic*, *The New*

*Yorker*, *The Huffington Post*, *The National Post*). And yet what becomes clear in these distinctions is the way in which the media uses and (re)cites FEMEN's "warfare language" to talk about the "war on terror." This affective, and arguably more deliberate, move—the media's repurposing of FEMEN's claims about war— produces rhetorics of fear and anxiety surrounding race and religion, particularly in the contexts of Muslims and Islam. To put it another way, this language of war makes it easier for the mainstream media to shift their focus from women's rights to terrorism. In a *Huffington Post* report entitled, "Muslim Women vs. FEMEN" (note the oppositional construction of the headline), writer Paul Schemm offers the following interpretation of an interview with a FEMEN member from Tunisia about FEMEN's burning of Islamic flags:

She (FEMEN member from Tunisia) expressed no regret for burning the flag since it is closely associated with the jihadists and Salafis who have been the most vocal in the region about repressing women. 'For me this is not the Muslim flag,' she said by phone from Paris. 'It never hung in mosques, just in the hands of Bin Laden and his colleagues.' (Schemm)

The decision to end the article with this specific quote and its explicit reference to Bin Laden suggests a rather problematic affective link between women's rights, terrorism, and the fate of the nation-state. Such constructions arguably reflect certain anxieties about race, national relations, and geopolitical tensions. Similarly, in an article from the news source *Middle East Online*, a London-based media outlet, journalists argue that FEMEN's "Free Anima campaign" is spreading "like wildfire" due to the "Islamist crackdown on Arab women's rights" ("Femen's Topless Jihad Day"). The authors also contend that "Tunisia was once seen as one of the Arab world's most progressive countries on women's rights...but the Islamist party keeps 'seeking to roll back women's rights'" ("Femen's Topless Jihad Day"). Once again, we see implicit affective moments

relating to national and transnational discourses—both the metonymic connection between women’s rights and nation building, as well as a constructed dichotomy between Islam and national “progression.” In addition, we see the recirculation of the Tunisian connection, particularly that nation’s “affiliation” with the Middle East, in order to reinforce the opposition between national interests (although we don’t see many references to Tyler’s protest in these same articles).

The same kind of distinction is circulated by *The New Yorker* in an article entitled, “How to Provoke National Unrest with a Facebook Photo.” Writer Emily Greenhouse not only positions the nation of Tunisia as “ill-equipped to deal with the possibilities of public broadcasting afforded by the World Wide Web,” she goes on to strategically counter the Human Rights Watch belief that, “Tunisia has long been viewed as the most progressive Arab country with respect to women’s rights,” with the following claim: “Yet in the two years since the revolution, Islamism has been on the rise.” (Greenhouse). Here, Greenhouse’s text directly invokes an opposition and disjuncture between national development and Arab nations. In support of FEMEN, and arguably in support of Western modernity, Greenhouse ends the article with a re-characterization of FEMEN’s call: “Femen has issued a call for a new Arab Spring in a strongly worded statement against the ‘lethal hatred of Islamists—inhuman beasts for whom killing a woman is more natural than recognizing her right to do as she pleases with her own body.’ It pleads, ‘Long live the topless jihad against infidels!’ To borrow their vernacular, ‘sextremism’ in the name of ‘titlamism’”(Greenhouse).

In examining the ways in which affect permeates these circulating rhetorics, we can see how the media’s use of FEMEN’s texts—particularly FEMEN’s righteous anger

with regard to women's rights—constructs an “us-them” relationship, in which the powerhouses of the West (the U.S. and the U.K.) directly oppose the Middle East. This change in meaning—from a narrative on universal freedoms and rights (FEMEN) to a fear-mongering narrative about 9/11, terrorism, and national progression (mainstream media) illustrates the disjuncture between textual content and emotion. FEMEN's use of the emotional language of warfare in discussions surrounding universal women's rights (and their attempts to align with MWAF, even though their purported blindness to difference negates this) actually undermines FEMEN's call for universal rights—as that call is an affective circulation of war rhetoric that emotionally “sticks” to terror as much as it does universal women's rights. What gets re-circulated by the media, then, is this affective stickiness—the fear and moral outrage at the heart of FEMEN's message alongside discussions about terrorism and the Middle East. This affective circulation results in a fear-mongering narrative of blame, furthering already existing racial anxieties about Muslims, Islam and the Middle East.

This narrative of blame, and the “us/them” construction that is so central to the texts in this layer of circulation, can be seen in the following example from *The Atlantic*. The headline of the article reads: “Topless Jihad: Why FEMEN is Right.” In this piece, US-born journalist and Russian correspondent Jeffrey Tayler describes a conversation with FEMEN leader, Inna Shevchenko, writing: “‘We demand human rights for all women, for Arab women and American women,’ Shevchenko told me a few days after the emotional debate. ‘The idea of a Muslim feminist is oxymoronic.’ Her position could not be clearer—or more provocatively stated” (Tayler, “Why FEMEN is Right”). Tayler ends the article with the following statement:

Activists are charting a new route for public discourse about women and religion, and making it an unabashedly universal discourse, venturing into realms where they may be hated, and they may yet pay a high price for this. But that they have gotten people talking, even shouting and crying, is undeniable, and it is good. . . Far from discouraging the discourse they have initiated, we should welcome it. (Tayler, “Why FEMEN is Right”)

Tayler offers several interesting points in these statements. Firstly, he argues that FEMEN’s universal discourse got people talking (and yes, it did). And secondly, he argues that such a discourse is “good” and “right” because central to it is the fight for human rights “for all women.” And yet what Tayler does not acknowledge—what he completely ignores—are the consequences of this rhetoric. Although he calls attention to MAAF at the beginning of the article, he dismisses their rhetorical goals by categorizing their responses to FEMEN as “nothing less than ‘Sit down and shut up.’ Your skin color and European provenance disqualify you from expressing views on Islam and how Muslim women are treated in the Islamic world” (Tayler, “Why FEMEN is Right”).

In Tayler’s dismissal of MAAF, we not only see conflicting ideologies around difference, but also around the production of difference. What Tayler’s article tells us is that public rhetoric must have a particular affect to be transformative—it must be “universal.” It cannot be fragmented. It cannot be localized. It cannot be marked by differences. This rhetoric of universalism, which echoes FEMEN’s rhetoric, reflects a neoliberal ideology that asks us to strategically ignore difference in favor of the utopic notion of equality. Neoliberalism’s claim to universality is dependent on the belief that the economic policies involving free-markets and trades, as well as the securitization and militarization of our nation-states, have led us to a “color-blind,” gender-neutral world. This apolitical and ahistorical imaginary, then, purports the belief that feminist measures

and acts against racism are no longer needed due to neoliberalism's very promise to protect and ensure individual rights.

And yet what is clear, at least from this particular layer of circulation in this study, is that universality as an affective rhetoric—the kind of rhetoric Tyler and FEMEN argue for—actually perpetuates the dichotomy of what Ahmed calls “towardness” and “awayness,” an attempt to align bodies with certain communities, and other, “different” bodies, outside of those communities. As Brown argues, the promise of protection, collective acceptance, and the right to make choices within the rhetoric of universal human rights actually “produces a certain kind of subject in need of a certain kind of protection” (Brown 459-460). For rhetoricians and transnational feminist scholars, Brown's point illustrates the need to understand and examine how rhetorics, in their circulation and movement through spaces such as the web, have the potential to produce social relations that appropriate certain kinds of “political subjects and political possibilities.”

### **Conclusion: Affective Circulation**

As I have shown in this chapter, examining the velocity of textual movement and analyzing the elements of affect that undergird that movement enables us to see how rhetorics travel and how they bring about certain kinds of change as a result of their movements. Tyler, FEMEN and MWAF's rhetorical acts struck a particular affective nerve as they formed circulatory chains throughout social media and news venues. This second layer of circulation suggests that rhetorics shift and change in meaning due to certain affective charges running through their circulation. These affective charges propel certain messages, endowing them with a level of power necessary to the construction of

certain knowledges and social relations. The image of Tyler that circulated throughout Facebook and Twitter represented an individual message about control over women's bodies. That image was then repurposed by FEMEN as a rhetoric of collective resistance to global anxieties over women's roles and rights. Upon MWAF's encounter with FEMEN's rhetorical claims, rhetorical meanings shifted and moved into new contexts. In their efforts to repurpose FEMEN's rhetoric, MWAF circulated a feminist rhetoric aimed at "decolonizing" FEMEN's rhetorical practices, calling for a transnational feminist praxis in which differences rather than similarities are addressed. FEMEN's universalizing response employed the language of fear, leading to the conflation of women's rights/bodies with the nation state.

This chapter also points to the ways in which circulation is a porous process that cannot be described solely in terms of original intent. FEMEN's responses to MWAF's open letter use war rhetoric to describe FEMEN's desire to "go to battle" on behalf of women's rights. This war rhetoric was then coopted by the media for geopolitical purposes. These circulations produce many questions for the field of rhetoric and composition about affect and its relationship to rhetorical action. While this analysis reveals that velocity, as a kind of affective circulation, has the potential to transform meaning and produce different kinds of knowledge, it also reveals that the kind of knowledge production that takes place, and the kind of social relations that result from this process, have a lot to do with the neoliberal context of which we are a part.

For this reason, we must question the role affective circulation plays in the digital, and how that role may be connected to and implicit in neoliberal practices. In many ways, this case study seems to suggest that velocity works to undercut transnational

engagement. As we saw with FEMEN and MWAF, velocity—the speediness and haste of circulation that drives the digital—encourages emotional reactions that are always immediate and usually less about contemplative thought and critical interpretation. In this particular case, velocity polarizes the playing field, prompting web users to respond quickly—to immediately align themselves with a “side.” Such a process is inherently emotional because the aligning and distancing of one’s self with others is always already about bodies and embodiment. In this way, we can say that velocity contributes to a kind of rhetorical action, but one that results in consequences that seem more problematic than productive.

For transnational feminists and rhetoricians, these findings behoove us to ask questions about the relationship between velocity, emotion, and affective circulation. And this analysis also begs us to interrogate further the nature of the digital as kind of a neoliberal space, one that is powered by emotion. How, for example, might the structure of social media encourage certain emotions? How might the “like” button on Facebook, or the “sharing” and “retweeting” options available to Twitter users, prompt a specific kind of emotional reaction, and thus a specific kind of affect? How might our own experience, and desire to belong to certain communities and groups—“sides”—intervene in our moments of affective circulation? And how might we learn to leverage velocity and affective circulation in ways that might better serve our rhetorical goals?

As I will discuss in the following chapter, the kind of rhetorical repurposing that takes place within digital spaces is unique in that those processes are always already immediate, rapid, pervasive, and widespread. But more importantly, those processes have the potential to ensure that certain rhetorics “stick” and endure—that they become part of

a body of knowledge and social relations, but that also reinforce and maintain those relations. It is incumbent upon those of us interested in the transnational effects of rhetoric to pay attention to digital circulation in order to understand how rhetorics and the affect undergirding their movements lead to co-options of meaning and thus the endurance of particular knowledges and social relations.

## CHAPTER V

### ENDURING RHETORICS

In this case study, we can see how circulation moves individual rhetorical acts into collective expressions of affect, ultimately resulting in the polarization of bodies, and thus the structuring of particular social relations. Tyler's individual text was a moment of rhetorical action that then prompted the production of other texts, and thus the amplification and circulation of certain ideologies bound up in those texts. We saw, for example, how the female body became tied to amplified claims about protest, objectification, madness, and nationhood, and how those claims left us with a variety of possible points of departure for furthering transnational engagement. After the initial explosion of meaning, however, the intensified velocity of those amplified rhetorics led to their fusion, collision, and collapse, resulting in a consolidation of meaning, and thus a reduction of the possibilities proposed in chapter three. Moreover, the channeling of meaning, and the affective elements associated with that channeling, helped polarize the rhetorical landscape, and produce dualistic rhetorics of oppression-liberation, universalism-difference, terror-globalization. That same channeling positioned the players—rhetors—of that landscape in opposition to one another. But what is the end result of such a landscape? Is there any enduring change as a result of amplification and velocity? What happens to the amplified, velocitized rhetorics we saw in chapters three and four?

This chapter focuses on the results of these rhetorical movements over a longer period of time: specifically two years after Tyler's original post. Expanding my analysis

to a longer timeframe allows me to illustrate how certain rhetorics from earlier periods of circulation retain powerful and pervasive movement, and how, in the texts that continued to circulate, certain visual strategies and rhetorical appeals remain present and cogent, while others fall to the wayside. These rhetorics, in short, endure. They endure because velocity and its affective elements help emphasize certain rhetorics while quashing others, resulting in the accentuation *and* suppression of certain bodies. Endurance speaks to the affective power of rhetoric, to its ability to fit a vast expanse of meaning within a certain symbolic ecology. Endurance is the third step in the process of circulation. It describes the duration and continued repetition of rhetorical meanings and the reinforcement of social relations produced through those meanings.

Throughout this chapter, then, I use the term *endurance* to describe the ways in which rhetorics retain powerful movement, and how they solidify, or “stick,” to use Ahmed’s phrasing. Ahmed argues that stickiness is an action, as it “involves transference of affect [...] it is a relation of ‘doing’” (Ahmed, *Cultural* 91). To be more specific, stickiness is both the manifestation of an association and one’s emotional adherence to that association—associations with ideologies, beliefs, objects, figures, and groups. Those associations, as we both construct and reinforce them through processes of circulation, become part of our sociality—they become “felt.” For example, a liberal feminist ideology oftentimes sticks with beliefs about liberation and human rights. In Western media, the figure of a free-moving naked female protestor has a corresponding stickiness to the figure of a “feminist,” or a figure from “the West.” The image of a veiled Muslim woman is always already stuck to an ideology of oppression, or the figure of a terrorist. These kind of associations operate as metonymies. In other words, the image of

a veiled Muslim woman is no longer just an image of a Muslim woman: it becomes the platonic ideal of oppression itself. Such associations, as they become repeatedly “felt,” reinforce the emotions involved—emotions such as sympathy and compassion, for example, or righteous anger and vigor (as seen in the last chapter). Thus, “stickiness” is what binds together certain signs and solidifies certain reactions and beliefs, while also interpellating particular subjects and objects. And it is this stickiness that results from circulation over time, and enduring rhetorics.

Rhetorics “stick” to particular objects, groups, and figures: metonymies. And in this case, rhetorics stick to FEMEN. As we saw, many of the texts produced by FEMEN and the mainstream media during the height of FEMEN’s “topless jihad day,” rearticulate the idea of violence (over and over again), and that violence, in many instances, is always already associated with Islam, Muslims, and the Middle East due to FEMEN’s history with Tyler. After examining the affective velocity of certain messages in chapter four, we were left with a rhetorical terrain that in many instances marginalized raced bodies. Although this was not the only social relation possible, it becomes the one that “sticks.” As a result, this chapter points to the continued marginalization, and thus elision, of those same bodies, as certain rhetorics retain longevity in their circulation, such that they sustain prominent relevancy in the realm of “common knowledge,” or “truths.” This happens as the body themes, and the rhetorics tied to them, continue to promote the rhetorical binary of the West as the center of progress and agency, and the Middle East as a site of abhorrent violence and detainment. What is significant about this endurance is the lack of challenge and confrontation it receives; endurance occurs when rhetorics, and their meanings, seem static. Whereas in chapter four, we saw a polarization of groups

who identified with FEMEN and groups who did not (groups like Muslim Women Against FEMEN and other feminist activists alike who responded, critiqued, and revised FEMEN's claims), the rhetorical terrain in this particular layer of circulation involves aspects of FEMEN's ideologies and practices that seem more ubiquitous than before. Thus, FEMEN operates as a metonym, sticking to the body rhetorics that came before, particularly as they relate to universality and fear of the "other."

Throughout the circulation of Tyler's text, the body has been rendered thematically in various ways: as object, madness, protest, and nation (chapter three); as anti-protest, objectified, and raced (chapter four), and finally as a universal entity and a geopolitical reference point, one that circumscribes the insurmountable differences between the West and the Middle East and produces Islamophobic rhetoric (chapter five). What begins as a feminist protest ends up solidifying and reinforcing a firmly held ideology of fear directly at odds with the original protest. Such rhetorics, I argue, endure over time due to their emotional sociality and the political investments undergirding their circulation. The body, in this sense, takes on a global significance, and that significance differs based on whose body is being used as a unit of the affective currency of fear. As FEMEN becomes the figurative ambassador for women's rights, the potential endurance of the rhetorics of difference is forestalled and almost completely elided. What ultimately endures in this circular space is FEMEN's reinforcement of universality, and thus neoliberal ideologies that discount a consideration of race, religion, and any other markers of identity.

### **Sticky Rhetorics: FEMEN's Attachment to the Body Rhetorics**

In tracing the body themes two years after Tyler's original post, what becomes clear is the way in which those themes, and the rhetorics attached to them, become strongly bonded to FEMEN. In collecting the data for this layer of circulation, I used similar search terms to the ones I used in the previous layers—the main players/rhetors in this particular study: Tyler, FEMEN, and MAAF. Out of the first 100 texts that appeared within the specific timeframe of this layer—March 2015 through present day—less than a quarter of those texts mention Tyler (and when Tyler is mentioned, it is usually in the context of referencing FEMEN), and only three texts make references to MAAF (and only in the context of MAAF's founder and the work she did on her college campus). All of the texts, though, mention and highlight FEMEN. These details illustrate an interesting finding: that the endurance of certain body rhetorics is directly linked to the endurance of FEMEN as a focal point for the media. Arguably then, FEMEN becomes the moving sign for the amalgamation of the body themes that emerged and circulated throughout the first two layers of this study. By looking at another one of FEMEN's protest from fall of 2015—a protest in which a few FEMEN members interrupted a conference held in Paris to protest its theme—we can better see how these themes repeat within a context similar to Tyler's original protest: the conference itself focused on Islamic practices involving women and women's roles in Muslim communities. By examining the texts that circulated regarding this particular event, I show how the body-as-protest theme and the body-as-object theme continue to propagate the affective rhetorics of universality that we saw emerging in chapter four.

We first see the endurance of these rhetorics manifested through the constant repetition of FEMEN's association with Tyler, and their perceived bolstering of her message. In an article from *Shout Out UK*, an independent news source in England, the following headline appears: "FEMEN Activists Rock the Casbah But Suffer a Brutal Beating." Above the headline is a multi-colored image of a woman in a hijab, her eyes peering through the veil, looking upward. While the focus of the article is on FEMEN's conference disturbance, writer Alexander Plumb implores his readers to remember Tyler and the "topless jihad" that was organized by FEMEN on her behalf:

This is not the first time FEMEN have taken on Islamic authorities. On the 4th of April 2013, they proclaimed an 'International Day of Topless Jihad', in response to official threats to a Tunisian woman, Amina Tyler, who had posted naked pictures of herself online, having written on her chest, 'I own my body, it's not the source of anyone's honour'. A religious commission said she should be stoned to death to prevent her example becoming an epidemic. A month later Tyler was on trial for possessing a can of pepper spray and, though acquitted, was not released from detention until August, whereupon she left FEMEN saying their actions towards the Muslim world were disrespectful. (Plumb)

Implicit in this excerpt are the body-as-protest and body-as-object themes, which are used to purport a distinction between FEMEN and Tyler, and even more so a distinction between Western feminists and Muslim women. Here, FEMEN represents the notion of "protest," and thus free-moving, liberated bodies (i.e. Western feminists), and Tyler becomes a symbolic "object," standing in for detained, oppressed, threatened bodies (Muslim women), even though Tyler's *embodied protest* ignited this entire chain of events. Plumb's portrayal of Tyler as an object lacking agency recalls a specific memory of, and perhaps an attachment to, a particular feeling, and thus affect. The references to Tyler's death threats, and her arrest, invoke emotional responses of both righteous anger and righteous pity (emotions that we observed throughout the previous chapter), and thus

reinforce an affect premised on the belief that Muslim women are oppressed and in need of saving by Western feminists (we should consider this also in light of the image of the veiled woman at the beginning of Plumb’s article depicted below in figure 5.1). Once again, Tyler’s story is ultimately decontextualized, and thus altogether elided, as there is no explanation of the context from which Tyler’s protest emerged. In addition, Plumb’s brief mention of Tyler’s disavowal of FEMEN due to their disrespectful treatment of Muslims can be seen as another kind of elision, as the focus of Plumb’s article is a celebration of FEMEN’s intervention, yet again, in an event representing the “oppressive” nature of the “Muslim world.”



**Figure 5.1: Veiled Woman**

In the descriptions of FEMEN’s recent conference disturbance, we see how the body themes of protest and objectification—even when Tyler is not mentioned at all—always already call on the history of FEMEN’s engagement with Tyler, and the assumptions linking Muslim women with oppression. In other words, FEMEN *becomes*

the synecdoche for the body themes—for the historical and discursive threads that created this rhetorical circuit. For example, in an article from the UK-based news site

*Independent*, writer Olivia Blair claims:

The so-far unnamed women are believed to be aged 25 and 31. The slogans written across their chest translate to ‘I am my own prophet’ and ‘Nobody submits me.’ Footage shows a group of men running on stage to carry the women off stage. The clip then shows one man in a white t-shirt appearing to kick the protester while she is on the ground. (Blair)

Several moves are worth noting here. Firstly, regarding the protest described, we see specific details directly related to Tyler’s protest: e.g., slogans denouncing patriarchal discourses written across the protestors’ chests. If we recall from chapter three, the slogans written across Tyler’s chest were very similar in meaning to those of the FEMEN protesters: “My body belongs to me and not someone else’s honor” and “Fuck your morals.” In Blair’s description of the FEMEN members’ bare-breasted messages, Tyler, though absent, becomes a figurative presence - but only in *relation to* FEMEN, or more specifically, only in the implied positioning of Tyler as the “silent,” abject object, and FEMEN as the agentive, protesting subject. This rhetorical move, as it continues to be expressed through emotional modes of righteous anger and pity, allows the affective thread linking Muslim women with oppression and misery to continue and endure. Moreover, the reference to both implicit and explicit past associations (Tyler, for example) is important, as those kinds of references allow readers to affectively displace and/or link their reactions to current stories about FEMEN to earlier situations and histories, making them seem more real, and thus more felt.

We see this kind of affective thread enduring in other instances as well, particularly in the descriptions of the conference itself. Plumb, for example, writes: “How

ironic, and sad, that two female activists should face a potentially fatal beating at a Muslim conference supposedly discussing the need for non-violence towards women” (Plumb). Plumb’s characterization of this event as “sad” reproduces the emotions of righteous pity that we see in the earlier examples. In addition, we see here how the notion of oppression (in this example, violence) is not only regarded as prevalent mostly in Muslim contexts, but is also tied to a singular, generalizable (read: Western) kind of injustice—one that, as FEMEN suggests in all of their protests, “affects” *all* women in the same way.

In many of the headlines of articles describing the conference disturbance, several rhetorical constructions appear, pointing to the endurance of meanings associated with the body rhetorics that came before, and specifically, the link between naked protest and feminism, and thus between FEMEN and feminists. Such captions include:

- “Topless Femen protesters ‘kicked during scuffles’ at Muslim conference about women” (*Independent*)
- “Topless Protesters Disrupted a Muslim Conference on Women” (*BuzzFeed News*)
- TOPLESS WOMEN PUMMELED BY MUSLIM MEN: 'Dirty whores! Kill them!' (*WND Christian*)
- “Topless FEMEN Protesters Expose Radical Islam’s Real Boobs: Bare-breasted activists may have stormed the stage of a Muslim conference near Paris, but the true vulgarity is how too many of Islam’s leaders want women treated” (*The Daily Beast*)
- “Shocking moment: two topless feminist protestors storm Muslim conference - before they are dragged off and kicked on the floor” (*Daily Mail*)
- “Feminist Activists Dragged off the Stage at Islam Event: Two topless activists from the self-proclaimed ‘sextremist’ group Femen were violently dragged away after storming the stage at a conference on women and Islam near Paris” (*The Local Fr*).

The references to “topless FEMEN protesters,” “sextremist group FEMEN,” “topless activists,” “topless feminist protesters,” and “feminist activists” advance the idea that naked protest is analogous to feminism and the fight for women’s rights. In an ironic move, we also see how the protesting body (in this case, a FEMEN body) is used to mock the objectification of women’s bodies, as many of the captions sarcastically allude to naked protesters as “dirty whores,” and cite topless protest as something potentially “vulgar.” In those same moments, the body-as-object theme that would normally be associated with the naked, sexualized bodies—the said “dirty whores”—gets transferred onto Islam (i.e. “Topless FEMEN Protesters Expose Radical Islam’s Real Boobs”), and thus attributed to Muslim women (i.e. “[...] the true vulgarity is how too many of Islam’s leaders want women treated”).

This particular rhetorical move reveals the continuation of the kinds of affective rhetorics we saw in chapters three and four. In the previous layers of circulation, we saw how the themes of protest and object—particularly naked protest and bodily objectification—were affectively circulated to express righteous anger regarding Muslim women’s “lack” of agency, and to put forth an emotional call for solidarity in the hopes of liberating Muslim women. Within the slippages between the protest and object themes lies an affect premised on Western liberal beliefs about liberation and oppression, and thus the constructed dichotomy of feminism versus Islam via the literal disagreements between FEMEN and certain Muslims. In other words, at this point in time—two years since FEMEN’s “topless jihad day”—the circulation and constant repetition of the rhetorical associations between FEMEN, liberation, and feminism contribute to the

problematic associations between Muslim women, oppression, and anti-feminism, as well as the problematic associations between Muslim men, violence, and sexism/misogyny.

### **Universal Rhetorics: FEMEN as the Metonym**

The endurance of the affective rhetorics in this study showcases the ways in which certain rhetorical meanings can become so amplified and velocitized that they solidify and become part of prevailing knowledges and beliefs. What was once arguable becomes an accepted premise. Whereas in chapter four, the velocity of certain body rhetorics polarized and divided the rhetorical landscape into “sides,” this layer of circulation shows us how certain arguments—and the alliances and exclusions that were made possible by those arguments—endure to such a degree that they no longer seem debatable. In other words, certain meanings related to protest, object, and nationhood become attached *only* to FEMEN. As a result, the rhetorical playing field is altered to seem less divisive and rather more singular and universal. Difference (an ideology highlighted in chapter four, for example) becomes negated in favor of universalism. Because of this, FEMEN literally becomes the center of this rhetorical circuit: a metonym for feminism and a metonym for the universal woman. FEMEN as an entity comes to represent an affective assemblage of the original body themes and thus the competing rhetorics embedded in those themes.

The metonym of FEMEN as the “universal woman” appears in places where FEMEN is used interchangeably with the categorical term “women,” suggesting a disavowal of the varying lived experiences and personal contexts of actual women. Specifically in this context, Muslim women are dehumanized to allow FEMEN to stand in for all women of a certain type; those different from this metonym only serve to

support its universality rather than question it. We see this affective slippage appear in an article from *The Daily Beast*, in which writer Asra Nomani interviews Eshmael Darman, an Afghan mental health specialist, regarding his opinion on FEMEN's conference protest. In Nomani's account of their conversation, she includes a quote from Darman that is ultimately contradictory; in Darman's effort to align with FEMEN's goals, and thus "all women," he actually aligns himself with the rhetoric he seeks to debunk:

While I'm not supporting Femen and their tactics, I am strongly criticizing womanophobia in the mainstream religious communities. Those who criticize Femen entirely ignore that the mere fact that a conference is held about 'women' is misogynistic and simply means it is to explore, what: whether women are human or not? If they are, how much human? 10 percent or 80 percent? Maybe 85 percent? Now maybe we shouldn't beat them, but if we do, how? By stick? Perhaps by just slapping them? (Darman qtd. in Nomani)

Darman's discussion of FEMEN, along with his criticism of "womanophobia" and his criticism of the "misogynistic," "dehumanizing" conference "about women" is actually undermined by the unspoken association between FEMEN and the all-encompassing term "women." In Darman's effort to align himself with FEMEN's goals *and* distance himself from their mode of protest and "tactics," his direct association between women and FEMEN ultimately marks FEMEN as a symbol of that universal category. Such a move, then, results in the elision of women outside that symbolic category—women, who, through the endurance of the rhetorics we saw in the last section, have been placed in opposition to FEMEN, i.e. Muslim women. This slippage, once again, occurs through the endurance of the affective body rhetorics that are now attached to FEMEN, and thus attached to Western perspectives of the body and Western perspectives of women's oppression. Through the emotion of righteous anger, Darman's claims, while seeking to

debunk “womanphobia,” ultimately enact a kind of rhetoric supporting womenphobia *and* Islamophobia.

As the affective circulation of certain body rhetorics continue to reinforce the metonymic relationship between FEMEN, feminism, and the “universal woman,” other presumed associations arise and endure. The metonym of FEMEN as the universal woman, for example, becomes an unspoken premise, and that tacit assumption then leads to unspoken assumptions about women outside that universal logic: dehumanized, imprisoned bodies (i.e. those of Muslim women) that must be liberated and “saved.” That association, then, allows one to construct an “oppressor,” a “subject” to the “object”. In this assumed scenario, Muslim women are the oppressed and Muslim men are the oppressors. Finally, this association produces two other correlations that become even more generalized and thus even “stickier”: firstly, the correlation between violent Muslim men and the religion of Islam, which then allows one to associate geographically—i.e. “over there”—resulting in the second correlation, that of violence, Islam and the Middle East (i.e. terrorism). Visually, we can trace these associations as rhetorical, metonymic chains:

FEMEN/universal woman

|

universal woman/“othered,” oppressed Muslim women

|

“othered,” oppressed Muslim women/violent Muslim men

|

violent Muslim men/violent religion of Islam

|  
violent religion of Islam/abhorrent Middle East

|  
abhorrent Middle East/terrorism.

In Nomani's article the first four presumed linkages are evident in her thematic move from "women" as a generalized concept (universal woman) to oppressed Muslim women, to Muslim men's treatment of Muslim women, and thus Islam's treatment of women:

While there are some reports that the imams were arguing in defense of women's rights in Islam when they were interrupted by the activists, what many of us know is that too many religious leaders in Islam, like in other patriarchal religious communities, do a tap dance to make arguments like "equity" versus "equality," and men and women being "complementary" to each other, rather than the religion needing to be "complimentary," in giving women "equal" rights. Further, to justify gender segregation, they argue "separate and equal," and advocate for the full-face veil to "protect" women. [...] For some, the Femen activists are topless "angels." Despite all their controversy, they raise serious issues that we need to confront in our Muslim communities, in a way that kicking them while they are down will never resolve. (Nomani)

Embedded in this excerpt are particular beliefs about the relationship between women, Muslim men, and Islam—beliefs that, as we saw in previous chapters, still remain problematic and misinformed (we cannot forget the posts and images from MWAF depicting the veil as a symbol of one's own agency and personal context). Additionally, Nomani's move from a discussion on universal women's rights (which assumes a kind of agency), to claims about the "lack" of rights for Muslim women (which assumes that Muslim women have no agency), allows her to associate that lack of agency with violent Muslim men, and thus the violent religion of Islam. The implicit focus on these associations, then, blurs and ultimately obscures the context from which this text even

emerged, perpetuating instead already assumed, generalized beliefs about Muslims and Islam.

As with Nomani's article, the headlines referenced earlier help perpetuate this affective thread of associations as well. Within these captions, FEMEN, the symbolic figure of the "universal woman," or in this case all "women," is rhetorically constructed in opposition to Islam, and thus by extension, in opposition to Muslims, including Muslim women. The following headlines, for example, illustrate this construction: "Two topless activists from the self-proclaimed 'sextremist' group Femen were violently dragged away after storming the stage at a conference on women and Islam near Paris" (*The Local Fr*), "TOPLESS WOMEN PUMMELED BY MUSLIM MEN" (*WND Christian*), and "Bare-breasted activists may have stormed the stage of a Muslim conference near Paris, but the true vulgarity is how too many of Islam's leaders want women treated" (*The Daily Beast*). The reference to the violent attacks on FEMEN protesters at a conference about "women," along with the oppositional phrasing between "topless women" and "Muslim men," as well as the adversarial construction between Islam and "women", suggest an affective slippage in meaning that equates "women" with FEMEN, FEMEN with feminism, and feminism with liberation. What follows are further parallels between Muslim men and Islam, Islam and violent oppression, and violent oppression and Muslim women.

What becomes clear in all of these examples is how the endurance of certain body rhetorics, as they are affectively circulated, produce and reinforce associations and relations *between* bodies that ultimately undermine the original goals of feminist engagement and solidarity. In another article from *Independent*, reporter Geoffrey

Macnab interviews the leader of FEMEN, Inna Shevchenko. After asking Shevchenko to describe “Femen’s tactics of modern feminism” and the reasons behind their naked protests, she replies:

It's a dramaturgy of gender reality in the world. It's not us who are famous. It is the idea that is famous. We are changing the way we talk to the world and act even though you think we are naked feminists. Two years ago, we were just taking off tops. Then, we started to write on our bodies, using them as a poster. Then we made these bodies act. (Macnab)

Shevchenko’s reference to “gender reality” suggests another moment in which FEMEN uses body rhetorics to produce affective references to solidarity premised on universalism. These references ironically undermine FEMEN’s goal of attending to “gender reality,” as this goal completely elides difference, and thus the aspects of that “reality” that are always already tied to other facets of identity. In addition, Shevchenko’s description of their protest—the “action” of their bodies—points to the metonymic association between FEMEN’s “acts” and activism in supposed service of oppressed Muslim women. Implied in this association is the idea that Muslim women’s bodies cannot act, because they are always already censored and agentless. And here lies the contradiction: in FEMEN’s attempt at circulating an affect of solidarity, the ideology of universalism implicit in their texts and actions forestalls any kind of solidarity, as it obscures difference and assumes only a universalized woman. As I have shown throughout this section, FEMEN—and their brand of active feminist protest intended to “save” the suffering, agentless, non-Western women (“objects,” i.e. Tyler)—becomes a rhetoric in and of itself: an affective rhetoric of global feminism and universalism that perpetuates a fear of the “other,” in particular, of bodies outside the margins of that universal paradigm.

### **Global Rhetorics: FEMEN as a Geopolitical Actor**

In many ways, the enduring rhetorics in this study and the emotional responses and associations related to their circulation contribute to the creation of an affective economy of fear. The implicit links underlying the body rhetorics—the metonym of FEMEN/feminism/universal woman that then precipitates the chain of associations between Muslim women/oppression, Muslim men/Islam/violence, and finally Middle East/terrorism—are predicated upon and productive of fear. Thus, I highlight in this section how the rhetorics involving war, terror, globalization, and the nation-state that emerged at the end of chapter four remain cogent and forceful, as they continue to elicit emotional responses involving both anger and anxiety.

In several texts, for example, the use of militant language by both FEMEN and the mainstream media in their descriptions of FEMEN (as we saw in chapter four) persists, invoking emotionally charged allusions to 9/11 and the war on terror. Take the following sub-headline from *The Daily Beast*: “Gangs of attractive, topless women condemning religion, agitating against misogyny, and fighting dictatorship. And now the feminists of Femen are setting up shop in the United States. Their controversial leader tells us why” (Crocker). The descriptive references to “gangs,” “fighting,” “condemning,” “agitating,” and “controversial,” speak to the kinds of emotional expressions of anger and defense we saw circulating in chapter four. Above this headline, we see an image of topless Shevchenko with the word “FEMEN” written across her upper body. Beneath the image is the caption, “Femen's Topless Sextremists Invade the US” and the following statement further down: “American women expressed their support and impatience when fighting puritanism and conservatism using Femen tactics.

We got the call, so we're giving an answer and helping commit Femen revolution in the United States" (Crocker). The word "invade," here implicitly invokes past associations regarding war and military invasion. The reference to fighting puritanism and conservatism "using FEMEN tactics" also employs a similar kind of war affect, except here, we see a different kind of "relation" between FEMEN and "American women," one in which American women are not seen as objects (like Muslim women), but rather as active, free-moving, fighting bodies; bodies that FEMEN directly and rhetorically enlists as recruits in their "global battle" (note the use of "support" and "help" in their statement).

What is important to recognize here is the fact that FEMEN, as a metonym itself, always already invokes previous associations and assumptions about Islam and Muslims, particularly oppressed Muslim women (even when the Muslim context is never mentioned). Thus, the combination of FEMEN as metonym along with the tone of anger and defense within the texts, not to mention the content of the texts—warlike language used to describe protest against oppression—reinforces an affect related to anxieties and fear of the "other," i.e. Muslims and the Middle East. What this implied presence of the "other" reveals is the way in which enduring rhetorics create just these kinds of associations: that is, the fact that one would assume the "other" to be Muslims and the Middle East. Through the endurance of these rhetorics over time, some bodies become aligned and connected, and other bodies become othered and excluded. This rhetorical action is no longer overt; it is now implicit, carried by the affective economy of the metonym that is FEMEN.

We see within the texts that specifically reference FEMEN's conference protest this kind of unspoken affective "othering" that relies on premises about both Muslim men as oppressors and Muslim women as oppressed. This lays the groundwork for explicit references linking violence with Muslims and the Middle East. In the *The Local Fr* news story, "Feminist Activists Dragged off the Stage at Islam Event" (mentioned above), reporter Ben McPartland describes the event thusly:

Two topless activists from the self-proclaimed "sextremist" group Femen were violently dragged away after storming the stage at a conference on women and Islam near Paris.

While the two Imams were clearly taken aback and stood back from the women, a group of around 15 men, including security guards, ran onto the stage to bring an abrupt and violent end to the protest act.

Images show the two women disappearing under a sea of bodies, with some of the men appearing to launch kicks and slaps at the pair. The melee continued behind a screen out of sight of the cameras.

The site *Buzzfeed France* confirmed that one of the women had been punched several times in the aftermath of the incident.

Police quickly intervened to lead the two women away. (McPartland)

In each sentence, the narrative regarding the Muslim speakers' violence and terror toward the FEMEN protesters is prominent: two women were "violently dragged away;" Muslim men reportedly "[brought] an abrupt and violent end to the protest act;" the two women were "under a sea of bodies, with some of the men appearing to launch kicks and slaps at the pair;" and "the melee continued." Within these claims, and within the headlines mentioned above, we can trace the affective thread we saw emerging in the previous chapter involving women as the objects of violence, and Muslim men as the violent actors. The news stories' categorical use of "women" once again reminds us of both the mainstream media and Western hegemonic feminisms' sole interest in "gender," and

namely the violence inflicted on “women,” while ignoring the identity markers of race, class, and sexuality that are always already intersecting and affecting issues related to gender and violence.

In yet another example, the association between Muslim women as “the oppressed” and Muslim men as “the oppressor” becomes even more pronounced with regard to geographic location, revealing again how this chain of texts interacts with ideas regarding the geopolitical relations of the West and Middle East, and produces an affective economy of fear. In the comment section of the *Daily Mail* article, “Shocking moment: two topless feminist protestors storm Muslim conference - before they are dragged off and kicked on the floor,” most, if not all, of the responses in the comment thread react negatively and critically to Muslim men, and by extension, the Middle East and Muslims as an essentialized group of people. For example, one commenter writes, “Ahh so the feminists have finally realised who the most oppressive people are.. It's about time! Keep it up ladies.. Tell the ones in this country.. They're still having a go at men that give them compliments! Not quite as bad as people that would see a woman stoned to death for adultery etc.” (Commenter qtd. in Robinson). Here, Muslim men become the “thing” to fear, and thus the reason to justify a fear of the Middle East.

Another commenter writes:

You see the mob mentality, the minute a woman steps out of line the natural instinct of these men is to kick & attack her. That guy in the white Tshirt jumped anger filled out of the audience. This could be Europe 50 years from now, not feeling comfortable walking down your own streets if your not wearing the right clothes or behaving in the right way. I know most Muslims are peaceful people. But really our cultures are just so different, how can it work? (Commenter qtd. in Robinson)

Several concerns arise in this quote. Firstly, Islam is cast as the antithesis to progression, deploying the same kind of rhetoric we saw in chapters three and four. Secondly, the statement, “this could be Europe in 50 years” echoes the fear that Europe would eventually resemble the Middle East, and thus Muslim culture—a region and culture that, according to this commenter, polices its people’s dress and behavior to such a degree that one no longer feels comfortable “walking down the streets.” The same sentiment appears in Plumb’s description of the conference as its own kind of contradiction:

The majority of Muslims in the West are law-abiding but there are some who wield power and who loath their home country. This conference in Paris completely misses the point that the best way to beat extremism is not to find a rationale for it in the first place when seeking to obviate it. (Plumb)

Here we see the extension of the us/them relationship from earlier instances of circulation surrounding these same issues. Muslim women’s oppression becomes the reason for reactive moments of anger towards Muslim men, who then become read as the entire Middle East. The Middle East becomes both depicted and alluded to as a place of perilous coercion, in opposition to Europe, a place of perceived stability. Thus the Middle East becomes an object that one judges, evaluates, and thus distances oneself from—a thing to fear. These examples reveal how the enduring rhetorics in this study reinforce and solidify the kind of “towardness” and “awayness” that we saw occurring in the previous chapter, making the consequences of those solidifications—the elision of certain bodies—even more pronounced.

In this latter example, most prominently, the endurance of certain body rhetorics produce and reinforce the chain associations mentioned earlier—specifically, FEMEN/feminism/universal woman, Muslim women/Islam/oppression, and Muslim

men/Islam/violence, resulting in Middle East/Islam/terrorism. In the *Daily Mail* comment thread, one writer even responds to the description of FEMEN's disturbance at the conference by invoking other "similar" global events:

Hmmm...lets ask the women in saudi arabia what their opinion is...of course, you will have to somehow get them away from their 'male companion' as anything the women would want to say is likely going to be 'censored' for fear of reprisal... ..i dont suppose you remember the mecca school fire, do you...? (Commenter qtd. in Robinson)

This commenter's discussion of Muslim women involves essentially silent, imprisoned, and censored bodies, while Muslim men are rendered as violent, oppressive "companions." But it is his reference to the "Mecca Fire" that invokes the particular emotion, and thus particular affect, I would like to explore here.

The Mecca Fire refers to the tragic event that took place in Saudia Arabia in 2002, in which an all-girls school caught fire, killing 15 young girls and injuring 50. The fire took on a certain significance in reports from news media such as *BBC*, *Human Rights Watch*, and *Newsweek* because Saudi Arabian police were (allegedly) at fault for the deaths and injuries because they (allegedly) refused to let some of the girls out of the building. This alleged refusal stemmed from the report that the girls were not dressed in accordance with Islamic rules, and some girls were not escorted by men (a defiance of Islamic code). This historical association, alongside the depiction of Muslim women as imprisoned, censored bodies, affectively works to establish and perpetuate the already firmly held belief that Muslim men, and thus, Islam and the Middle East, represent the epitome of injustice, terror, and oppression. Once again, to reference Ahmed, we can understand this slippage in terms of metonymic slides:

The word terrorist sticks to some bodies as it reopens past histories of naming, just as it slides into other words in the accounts of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (such as fundamentalism, Islam, Arab, repressive, primitive... Indeed, the slide of metonymy can function as an implicit argument about the causal relations between terms (such as Islam and terrorism) within the making of truths and worlds, but in such a way that it does not require an explicit statement. (Ahmed, "Affective Economies" 131 -132)

In this way, then, we can see how FEMEN as a metonym for universal feminism and progression presupposes Muslim women as a metonym for oppression, which then presupposes Muslim men and Islam as metonyms for violence, and thus the Middle East as a site of abhorrent terror.

### **Conclusion: Questioning Endurance**

As I have shown in this chapter, what ultimately endures from this collection of body rhetorics is the belief that women's bodies operate as inscriptions for demarcating social and geopolitical relations. Through FEMEN's use of protest, and the media's reaction to and depiction of FEMEN's protests, we receive an ideal of global feminism that favors acts of war and geopolitical interventions based on the kinds of fear and anxieties their protests help generate. These fears and anxieties objectify the very women's bodies FEMEN (and the West) seeks to liberate, resulting finally in an affective rhetoric premised on racial anxieties and fear of Muslims and the Middle East—an Islamophobic rhetoric, to say the least. This forms a kind of rhetorical action involving material consequences that circulation studies must grapple with. Yet, in terms of transnational feminist action, how do we reconcile the results of this layer of circulation, the consequences of the rhetorics that actually endured? These results were arguably detrimental: they circumscribed communities and outsiders, inclusions and exclusions;

they shut down various individuals and groups of people (i.e. Tyler, MWAF), and highlighted others (FEMEN).

Consequently, examining affective circulation reveals structural impediments and challenges for feminist action. As we saw throughout this chapter, as well as in chapters three and four, the mainstream media's representation and circulation of the rhetorics that emerged in this study dominate and perhaps determine the rhetorical terrain in more ways than one. More specifically, the layer of circulation discussed in this chapter reveals how that same rhetorical terrain, years later, becomes even more streamlined than the layers that came before it. FEMEN becomes the nucleus of circulation. Rhetorical multiplicity and possibility arise from amplification: multiple meanings are possible. Such amplifications then affectively circulate around poles, creating binaries and dualisms. Such binaries still allow for possibility in that there are still at least two perspectives present and vying for attention. Yet, we subsequently see singular universals emerge in this chapter that do not seem to allow for much social change. For rhetoricians interested in transnational engagement and feminist action within the digital sphere, these findings—the consolidation, streamlining and funneling of rhetorical possibility that results from affective circulation—demand new frameworks and rhetorical strategies for both theorizing and engaging in transnational action on the web.

What I have described, however, is the predominant story of circulation surrounding Tyler's protest. There is another story underlying this one; that of other meanings circulating that we might take advantage of when we rethink circulation's possibilities for more transformative action. This is a topic I take up in the next chapter. While much of what I have concluded in this study leaves us with challenges and, in

many ways, disappointments in the ensuing rhetorics, I want to end this chapter on an optimistic note, one that offers a glimmer of hope about the potentialities for online transnational feminist engagement. Velocity and the endurance of affective rhetorics as described in this study seem to undercut the potential for transnational feminist engagement, but I would like to suggest that circulation need not work only in this way. A much less popular, yet still available, means of circulation involved posts looking at the conversation “metacritically.” That is, part of circulation *can be and is* a moment of reflection upon the nature of the circulation of meaning. While these moments of circulation never rose to the “trend” level of my analysis, without it, such an analysis would be incomplete.

If we reexamine circulation’s possibility for action, we can see that amplification might offer the most possibility. Ultimately, in this case, it offered too many possibilities for us to actually digest the full scope of potential meanings at play. Velocity, and the affective elements that accompany it, however, involve a kind of transparency that allows one to visibly and concretely see the rhetorical terrain. Velocity works to literally divide the rhetorical landscape into sides, making it more possible to see and examine those sectors, to acknowledge the ideologies undergirding them, and to inquire into the affect that continues to solidify those polarities. And endurance makes these channeled rhetorics even more streamlined and visible, as the longevity of circulation accelerates the velocity and affective elements of certain rhetorics such that certain ones ultimately “win.” In thinking about this case study from this kind of perspective—in taking a step back and noticing the shrinkage of possibility and the reduction in rhetorical arguments and meanings—one can perhaps view the rhetorical landscape with critical distance, as a

metacritical kind of reading. And we see such metacritical readings in the last two layers of circulation. Unfortunately, these readings appear less often and in more obscure, less visibly accessible spaces than those of the mainstream media's less critical messages.

In chapter four, for example, FEMEN and the mainstream media's messages are further complicated when an anonymous writer from the site *Patheos* (a site that addresses global conversations on religion) points out the problematic link between warfare rhetoric and rhetoric on women's rights. She writes, "FEMEN protesting in the name of 'oppressed Muslim women' resembles imperialist ideas which were invoked post-9/11 (who can forget that Bush was out to liberate women in Afghanistan?)" (*Patheos*). The article then links to a *Jezebel* article where Bush is quoted, stating:

'My concern of course is that the United States gets weary of being in Afghanistan and says 'It's not worth it, let's leave' and Laura and I believe that if that were to happen, women would suffer again,' [Bush] told van Susteren. 'And we don't believe that's in the interest of the United States or the world to create a safe haven for terrorists and stand by and watch women's rights be abused.' (*Jezebel* qtd. in *Patheos*)

In Bush's quote, we see how the fusion of rhetorics around women's oppression and rhetorics around terrorism and violence are persuasively appealing to some interests; particularly the West's (read: United States) desire to increase national security and thus control and maintain geopolitical infrastructures and relations (usually involving modes of violence). In Bush's words and in this anonymous writer's critique of his words lies a cogent example of how affective circulation can intervene in *and* forestall the potentialities for transitional feminist action. The slippage in the feeling and content of Bush's quote—the association between the concern for women's safety and the depiction of Afghanistan as a site of terror and violence—leads to racial anxieties about Muslims.

And yet in a more productive instance of circulation, Bush's same words add another layer of affect to the *Patheos* piece, as the author recharacterizes his quote as "imperial." In pairing this critique alongside the critique of FEMEN's mixing of war rhetorics with feminist rhetorics, the author's affective charges contribute a valuable argument about the use of women as subjects for neoliberal agendas. Moreover, this example shows us how affective circulation involves a historical accumulation of meaning—how over time, the circulation of women's rights rhetorics have become necessarily tied to (and understood as inherently related to) rhetorics of national security and war. The *Patheos* author's automatic associations between FEMEN's rhetorical appeals about Tyler and Bush's rhetorical claims about Afghanistan reveal the "stickiness" in language and meaning that emerges from affective circulation.

In many ways, this kind of metacritical focus—the circulation of body rhetorics premised on difference—endures, too. Even two years out—in enduring circulation—we see this kind of work occurring. In a post entitled "Femen: How Did Things Go So Wrong?," blogger Maeve Kelly says of FEMEN: "Their actions have divided opinion globally, inside and outside of Feminism (and even within this blog!)." She then asks, "How did Femen alienate so many? And how can we make sure we don't do the same thing?" I include here a long excerpt from Kelly's blog post because it demonstrates a critical, reflective response to what occurred in this particular series of events:

Now, I am loathe to criticise another woman for how she 'does' feminism. As we have explored before, it is not a rule book; casting other women out of the fold is not helpful or productive. [...]

Facing criticism of their actions as 'racist' and 'colonial' from prominent academics such as Chitra Nagarajan didn't provoke introspection from Femen. Instead, their position on Islam appeared to broaden to all Arabs.

Speaking about Ukraine's culture of traditional marriage and children, Femen's leader Inna Shevchenko said: "As a society we haven't been able to eradicate our Arab mentality towards women." Using the word 'Arab' is a pejorative is essentially racist, in the same way that saying 'that's so gay!' or 'stop being such a girl' perpetuates, rather than challenges, societal norms. Addressing the Muslim Women Against Femen counter-movement, she said: "Your fathers, brothers and husbands are raping and killing." Accusing non-white men of being more likely to be rapists is not exactly new or radical either – just read *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

If we can learn anything from Femen, it's that they should have attempted to open their ears to the voices of the women they were trying to help. A 'White Saviourist' mentality is only too easy to develop- listening and amplifying the voices of other women is the cure. Telling Muslim women that even though they say they wish to wear the hijab "in their eyes it's written 'help me,'" is the opposite of this – it patronises them and denies their autonomy. They are adult women making decisions, and while I do not wish to turn this article into a discussion of hijab, why do we find those decisions so hard to accept? Many feminists do things which are routed in patriarchal tradition – marriage, for one. Shaving their body hair, for another. And yet we don't claim that they are all victims, imprisoned within tradition. Why can't we give the same respect to hijab?

To jump into that discussion is to deviate from the point, but only slightly. The route of the problem here is that Femen are embracing some women's right to make choices, but not all women's. Instead of engaging with criticism in the spirit of mutual respect, they have gone on the defensive, claiming "sexism is a kind of racism," as if this exonerate them and make them incapable of committing it. This complacency to their own privilege is what has led Femen down this path, and the exact thing which we must always guard against in ourselves.

To say sexism is not a form of racism is not to say the oppressions are not intertwined; they must be fought at the same time! But we will not ever be able to do this if we dismiss and judge other women, regardless of their life choices. As long as feminists opt for a paternalistic approach to women of colour, they will be continuing to enact colonialism and alienating women who need support. (Kelly)

Kelly points to the universalizing rhetoric attached to FEMEN that I discuss throughout this chapter, and how the perpetuation of such a rhetoric perpetuates an affect premised on racist and colonialist ideologies. In addition, she enlists other feminists in a call to do what FEMEN and the mainstream media did not do: listen and respond, rather than

ignore and silence others (note her reference to MWAF). “If we can learn anything from Femen,” she writes “it’s that they should have attempted to open their ears to the voices of the women they were trying to help. A ‘White Saviourist’ mentality is only too easy to develop—listening and amplifying the voices of other women is the cure.” She then goes on to suggest that feminists interested in building coalitions reflect on the way they evaluate the varied meanings embedded in “life choices,” ultimately urging them to consider the kinds of emotions that prompt their engagement and the kinds of affect that result from that engagement: “But we will not ever be able to do this if we dismiss and judge other women, regardless of their life choices” (Kelly).

Although it does not receive the kind of attention that FEMEN’s texts received, this kind of text—Kelly’s metacritical reading of the social relations that arose from this particular site of analysis—perhaps assures us that not all hope is lost when we consider the potentialities for online transnational feminist engagement. As with any discourse, there are fissures and cracks in the narrowing rhetorics I have analyzed here. Questions remain, however. How might circulation work differently, so that such critical voices are not the minority? How might the multiplicity of meanings and possibilities for collective action offered by the circulating rhetorics analyzed lead to something other than the endurance of fear and the continual denial of agency to Muslim woman by Western feminists? And finally, what might we take from this case study in order to pursue the potential of transformative action rather than ideological reification?

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

I began this project by inquiring into whether or not the web could function as a viable site for transnational feminist action. I asked: what are the limitations and possibilities for transnational feminist engagement to occur in the digital sphere? In an effort to answer this question I turned to a study of digital circulation, a process that seemed inextricably linked to action itself—a kind of “world-making.” But what kind of world was actually made here? As the last chapter reveals, what endures in this “world” are rhetorics premised on racial anxieties and fears—Islamophobic rhetorics, to say the least. What also endures are rhetorics that position women’s bodies as inscriptions for geopolitical structuring, as “political subjects.” Thus, how might we understand this outcome in terms of transnational feminist action? Action occurred, but it was detrimental: it shut down various groups of people, while amplifying others. It circumscribed communities and outsiders, inclusions and exclusions. How, for example, do we understand FEMEN’s continued spotlight in mainstream media while MWAF and Tyler are no longer visible in those venues? MWAF clearly made a choice to stop posting on their Facebook wall (their last Facebook post occurred in the summer of 2014), but this leads me to wonder if their chosen silence had to do with FEMEN’s disregard and refusal to acknowledge their voices and experiences. (Recall that MWAF made efforts to appeal to FEMEN through an open letter, and FEMEN did not respond back to them, but rather responded to the entire public.) Regardless of MWAF’s reasoning, the results of the circulation in this study leave us with more questions and challenges rather than

answers and possibilities when considering transnational feminist engagement in digital spaces. Many of those questions, I believe, are ones that cannot be answered unless we reconsider our conceptions of digital circulation to include the affective and undertake more deliberate engagements with how texts circulate.

### **Implications for the Study of Digital Circulation**

In returning to chapter one, I first proposed the concept of reflexive circulation to help us theorize digital circulation because I suspected that such a process would operate as a kind of discursive interpellation of subjects. By looking at elements of citationality and characterization, I assumed that circulation was a process through which various, and often times conflicting, intentions and goals came into contact with each other, creating new meanings and new kinds of knowledge. I speculated that circulation would function as a form of rhetorical action—Warner’s notion of “world-making.” Such a theory seemed particularly amenable to the web where much participation is not necessarily inscription but rather circulation. The ultimate goal of reflexive circulation, I believed, was a kind of social transformation that involved the transformation of power, and thus the transformation of certain subject positions.

In taking a step back and considering the findings in this study, I still see circulation as operating as a form of rhetorical action. And while I also still see it as a kind of interpellative process, I want to suggest that there is more to circulation than what I had originally proposed. Reflexive circulation does not account for the ways in which affect permeates interactions on the web. Reflexive circulation, as Warner defines it, remains too focused on the relationship between discourse and individual subject-formation. In arguing that “all discourse or performance addressed to a public must

characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate and it must attempt to realize that world though address” (Warner 114), several important factors get overlooked. These factors, as evidenced in this study, demand a critical examination: the first being, the ways in which rhetorics—as they advance certain discourses—intersect, compete, and become co-opted for economic and political purposes, and the ways in which those rhetorics are always already being altered and undermined by affective charges. These fundamentals, as they manifest on the web, are even more unique in that the circulation of rhetorics in a space like the digital always involves the elements of amplification, velocity, and endurance. What amplification shows us, for example, is that texts do not always circulate in their entirety; oftentimes, they circulate in parts, amplifying a particular ideology that ultimately decontextualizes the original meaning from which that text emerged. Velocity allows us to see how some rhetorics achieve faster and farther travel than others due to the affective charges present in that travel. And endurance enables us to see how certain rhetorics retain powerful lengths of circulation such that they solidify as normative beliefs and knowledge.

In bringing together these three elements, then, I want to propose that we think about circulation as something affective, rather than reflexive. “Reflexive” implies a relation between a subject and an object—usually between one’s self and her audience/addressee (i.e. subject positions); “affective”: is certainly relational but does not always indicate a relation between separate entities, or separate subject positions. The “affective” implies more of an embodied relationality, a nexus of attachments where meaning moves outward and inward simultaneously. To give a succinct definition of how I see affective circulation working, I argue that it is a process comprised of intertextual

social and historical linkages that arise from the amalgamation of rhetorics and the mixing of the emotional and embodied charges undergirding those rhetorics. These rhetorical encounters—and the fusion of the various histories, contexts, and emotive elements that make up these rhetorics—(re)produce both connections and disjunctures that ultimately negotiate and change the rhetorical purpose of a text, making such affective circulation a form of action that can go beyond the intent of any individual rhetor.

For scholars interested in digital rhetoric and social action, the role affect plays in the digital demands new frameworks for thinking about action on the web. As a field, we have rarely considered digital rhetorical action in terms of emotion, and this is partly because we have theorized action on the web as something deliberative and linguistically tangible rather than embodied and sensorily complex. In other words, it is easier to critique *what* we think more so than *why* we think it. As we saw in this case study, affect can be dangerous because it reinforces what we feel, not necessarily what we might “reason.” What we feel is always already related to ideology, as our feelings and emotions become interdependent on our beliefs and ways of being. As I argued in chapter one, and as we saw in the data from this case study, participation on the web is very much implicit in neoliberal ideologies and practices. The web in and of itself operates as a neoliberal economy, where our participation online seems—perhaps even *feels*—agentive, and thus “liberating.” Yet, as we saw in the last chapter on endurance, rhetorics involving terror and fear held an incredibly strong affective currency over a long period of time, and this was due in part to the mainstream media’s pervasive monopoly on visibility in the digital sphere. Circulation followed the affective economy manipulated

by the mainstream media. Similarly, our social media platforms work affectively to circulate in particular ways. The posts we like on Facebook, for example—the minute we hit the “thumbs-up” icon—those posts become more valuable, and thus more visible. Moreover, in the last year, the “thumbs-up” icon has become part of a series of emotions that Facebook users can click on in response to a post: a heart indicating love and happiness, as well as emoji faces indicating laughter, surprise, sadness, and anger. What this suggests is that our reactions—our thoughts and feelings—necessarily play a role in what gains visibility and what does not. Thus, what the media makes visible to us is oftentimes the texts that we then make more visible (or not) by “liking,” “hearting,” reposting, etc.

### **Implications for Transnational Feminist Engagement in Digital Spaces**

For transnational feminists, the implications of this study are quite different. The cycles of amplification, velocity, and endurance point to a new form of rhetorical action in digital spaces that is powered by affect. These affective movements, as seen throughout this study, lead to co-options of meaning and thus the production of knowledge and social relations, bringing about certain associations and disassociations, forming social alliances while also producing exclusions by “othering” certain bodies. In going back to Ahmed’s notions of awayness and towardness, such movements are crucial when thinking about feminist action within the digital sphere. If the web does function as an affective economy, an economy dominated by the media’s circulation of texts, texts that engender global and geopolitical rhetorics, how can transnational feminists engage in these spaces in transformative ways? We saw in the case of Tyler, how pervasive the mainstream media was in circulating and highlighting specific texts that ultimately

reinforced a universal rhetoric of neoliberal perspectives, a rhetoric in which difference was negated in favor of global equality: the fight for universal human rights. Such a rhetoric circulated due to the affective charges of solidarity and unity that undergirded it. Those affective charges allowed users to strategically disregard the differences and lived experiences of others, which then enabled a widespread masking of the incongruities and imbalances that resulted from the disavowal of those differences.

Transnational feminism is premised on illuminating differences, illuminating the ways in which the “content” of experience within and across various contexts is always subjective, nonsynchronous, and unequal. Put more strongly, the “meaning and value” of experiences constantly change and shift, and thus cannot be reduced into a singular narrative of gender exploitation and oppression, as it does so often through the neoliberal, affective rhetorics of universality and solidarity. If we are to consider forming connections and coalitions within a transnational context, perhaps we need to be consciously aware of the fact that transnational engagement cannot be conceived as an effort to foster unified communities. Community implies shared understandings and knowledges, a localized sense of intimacy, which does not take into account difference.

In considering the implications I discussed for the digital—mainly my point about users taking more of an active role in affective circulation—what would have happened, for example, if certain rhetors in this study—Tyler, MWAF, or Kelly (meta-critical reading), for instance—followed where their texts went, and how those texts were picked up, recirculated, and ultimately altered for different purposes? Might have the rhetorical playing field been a different one? Perhaps it could have. Perhaps collectively the push for the texts focused on difference, texts that meta-critically acknowledged and reflected

on the problematics of circulation in that particular case, could have altered the rhetorical landscape such that certain rhetors whose voices were originally elided through circulation, leveraged it in a way that allowed their voices to be heard.

### **Affective Rhetorical Action: Questions of Agency in Circulation**

Ahmed asks: “Why are relations of power so intractable and enduring, even in the face of collective forms of resistance?” (Ahmed, *Cultural* 12). Her question is an important one. How are we to leverage affective circulation within the digital if the only means of doing so is through the very means that impedes us to do so? There were several moments of feminist action in this study that seemed particularly productive, moments in which differences were addressed and highlighted in ways that, if given the same kind of movement and visibility other texts received, might have altered the rhetorical landscape. But again, the question remains, how—in the face of global media and the affective charges of universality that permeate the media—can those texts achieve any kind of heightened velocity and endurance? Perhaps we need to turn our focus to the rhetor rather than just the rhetor’s text.

While there needs to be an acknowledgement of affective circulation as an agentive process in and of itself, there also needs to be a recognition of the problematics posed by that process, and the ways in which human intervention might be able to alter and leverage that process towards productive rhetorical efficacies. Perhaps we need to think of affective circulation as a kind of “affective currency.” The word “currency” implies exchange. Thus, if we think of our actions on the web in terms of circulation, if we consider ourselves affective circulators of both knowledge and emotion (because that is essentially what we do without even realizing it), then we might see our role as more

active, and thus more influential. We might be more apt to circulate texts beyond the moment of publication (beyond clicking “post” on Facebook and never returning to it again). As I discussed via LeCourt and Trimbur in chapter one, as rhetors interested in social action, we have the opportunity to take information generated by users—information that we, as free laborers on the web, produce—and give it a different kind of value by being more engaged in where that information goes and to whom that information ultimately reaches. Yes, the global media has a stronger voice and more visibility, but as mentioned earlier, our “consumption” as users matters just as much; thus what we circulate, what we “like” on Facebook, or retweet on Twitter, has the potential to make it into the “spotlight,” just as FEMEN’s texts did, if collectively we work towards that goal.

Feminists, like myself—those of us located in “the West,” and thus implicated in and continuously influenced by Western ideologies—might consider more closely what this idea of collectivity means for transnational feminist engagement in the digital sphere. As seen in this case study, the notion of collectivity never really transpired; instead individuals reacted quickly and immediately to prevailing arguments, aligning themselves with the most visible claims available to them (i.e., solidarity in the name of rescuing/saving Muslim women). Perhaps the kind of rhetorical work we need to begin to think about has less to do with instantly *consuming* texts and more to do with *critically engaging* them. As we saw at the end of the last chapter, there are ways to critically engage texts that, at times, can have powerful effects. In Kelly’s blog post, for example, she not only touched on FEMEN’s elision of difference and the various lived experiences that result from those differences, she also brought a transnational analysis to those

differences—pointing out how those differences are produced through geopolitical discourses and globalized powers, through affective rhetorics such as the rhetoric of universality. She engaged in a metacritical reading not only of the *content* circulating, but also the *kind of circulation* that made the movement of that content possible. Perhaps this kind of metacritical approach is what transnational feminists need to be turning to as a collective goal, rather than turning to goals premised on building transnational coalitions and unified alliances; as we saw with Tyler, FEMEN, and MWAF, the strive for solidarity had the exact opposite effect. I propose that we think of transnational feminist action online in terms of an analytical, critical approach to content and the movement of content. In this way, engaging in transnational feminist action on the web means putting forth transnational readings of texts, interrogating what and how globalized powers influence certain texts and textual production. One might ask: who is speaking in these texts? And who is being silenced simultaneously? Who is being represented in these texts? And for what purposes? What communities are forming around these texts and the ideologies undergirding them? What kinds of affective rhetorics are implicit in these texts? How do these texts link, associate, divide and/or bring together different bodies, different contexts, and different geographical locations and spaces? And lastly, how does the movement of these texts influence their meaning?

As Grewal and Caren Kaplan suggest, if we are to consider engaging in transnational feminist practices, we need to “rearticulate the histories of how people in different locations and circumstances are linked...If Western theorists...cannot allow for unequal, uneven, and nonsynchronous expressions of modernity in reading and interpreting cultural productions...any possibility for solidarity between feminists and

others who work within differences is obstructed” (Grewal & Kaplan, *Scattered* 5). As I have argued thus far, the web in and of itself is an unequal, uneven, and nonsynchronous place. Turning our attention to these imbalanced forms of power, and the ways in which those forms of power affectively reinforce the uneven lived experiences of people globally, seems necessary and imperative if we are to work towards exposing those relations and ultimately rupturing them. As with any institutional space, we are bound by structures of power in the digital sphere, but this is not to say that we are paralyzed by them.

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